

# **FAITH UNDER FIRE**

Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War

**EDWARD MADIGAN**



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*For Claudia*

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# Contents

<i>List of Illustrations, Tables, and Charts</i>	viii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	ix
<i>Abbreviations</i>	xi
Introduction: Anglican Army Chaplains and Post-War Literature	1
1 The Church of England, the European War, and the Great Opportunity	25
2 A Portrait of the Edwardian Clergy	58
3 The Anglican Clergy-in-Uniform	89
4 The Ministry of the Trenches	127
5 Combatant Faith on the Western Front	171
6 Veteran Padres and the Idealism of Fellowship in Post-War Britain	203
Conclusion: Why the Myth?	242
<i>Notes</i>	251
<i>Bibliography</i>	282
<i>Index</i>	292



# List of Illustrations, Tables, and Charts

## Illustrations

4.1	Photomontage from <i>The Times History of the War VIII</i>	147
5.1	<i>Punch</i> cartoon, September 1916	174
5.2	Paul Nash, <i>Void (or Néant)</i>	176
5.3	Bruce Bairnsfather's <i>Old Bill</i>	191

## Tables

1.1	Deployment of British Army Chaplains on the Western Front, 11 November 1918	56
2.1	Colleges attended by 410 Oxbridge graduates in Bishop Gwynne's files	73
4.1	Awards received by 199 Anglican army chaplains listed in Deputy Chaplain-General's files	139

## Charts

2.1	Educational background of 723 chaplains in Bishop Gwynne's files	67
2.2	Educational background of 662 chaplains in Bishop Gwynne's files ordained in Britain and Ireland	68
2.3	Sample age profile of 415 chaplains in Bishop Gwynne's files	68

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# Abbreviations

## Organisations, Institutions, Departments, Titles, and Awards

AChD	Army Chaplains' Department
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
CO	Commanding Officer
CMG	Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George
CSU	Christian Social Union
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
FoR	Fellowship of Reconciliation
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
ICF	Industrial Christian Fellowship
KCL	King's College London
LCD	London College of Divinity
MC	Military Cross
PPU	Peace Pledge Union
RA	Royal Artillery
RAMC	Royal Army Medical Corps
TCD	Trinity College, Dublin
TCF	Temporary Chaplain to the Forces
UL	University of London
VC	Victoria Cross

## Archives

CMS	Church Mission Society
IWM	Imperial War Museum
LCL	Liddle Collection, Leeds University
LPL	Lambeth Palace Library
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography

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# Introduction: Anglican Army Chaplains and Post-War Literature

Robert Graves's *Goodbye to All That* was first published in 1929, a vintage year for war books that also saw the publication of *A Farewell to Arms* and the first English translations of Ernst Jünger's *Storm of Steel* and Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*. The memoir does not begin and end with Graves's war experience; events from the author's childhood, adolescence, and post-war adulthood are also included in the narrative, but his time spent in the Royal Welch Fusiliers emerges as the defining formative experience of his young life.<sup>1</sup> Graves's encounter with war was clearly traumatic, and indeed the writing of *Goodbye to All That* was a conscious attempt to deal with this trauma by putting it behind him, by saying goodbye to it.<sup>2</sup> In view of this, it is perhaps understandable that the tone of the narrative is often bitterly ironic, and that those individuals or groups who are deemed to have made a bad episode worse are exposed. The civilian clergy, the Northcliffe press, war-profiteers, and belligerent British mothers all come in for harsh criticism. Yet the author saved his most biting invective for the Anglican army chaplains he encountered on the Western Front.

In the original edition of the book, army chaplains are castigated for possessing a mere fraction of the courage and endurance of that other prominent group of non-combatant officers, regimental doctors. To support this, Graves insists that padres hardly ever appeared in the front-line, being under orders – he does not say from whom – to stay out of harm's way:

For the regimental chaplains as a body we had no respect. If the regimental chaplains had shown one tenth the courage, endurance, and other human qualities that the regimental doctors showed, we agreed, the British Expeditionary Force might well have started a revival.

But they had not. The fact is that they were under orders not to get mixed up with the fighting, to stay behind with the transport and not to risk their lives. Soldiers could hardly respect a chaplain who obeyed these orders, and yet not one in fifty seemed sorry to obey them.<sup>3</sup>

Referring to the chaplain attached to his own battalion, Graves remarks, 'Occasionally, on a quiet day in a quiet sector, the chaplain would make a daring afternoon visit to the support line and distribute a few cigarettes, and that was all.'<sup>4</sup> Significantly, Graves makes a clear denominational distinction and singles out Anglican chaplains for special reprimand, insisting that they were 'remarkably out of touch with the troops'. In the revised 1957 edition of the book, on which most subsequent editions have been based, he went as far as changing the formulation of the above lines to read, 'for Anglican army chaplains we had little respect'. In both the revised and original editions, he reinforces this highly negative picture by heaping praise on Roman Catholic padres who never failed 'to do all that was expected of [them] and more', and suggests that they were braver, generally more competent and certainly more popular than their Anglican counterparts.<sup>5</sup>

The tone of the memoir is consistently, and wilfully, provocative and it seems clear that Graves intended to create a sensation in order to secure the sort of sales that would allow him escape the chaotic circumstances of his personal life in Britain. He certainly succeeded in writing an iconoclastic bestseller and a book that would go on to be acknowledged as a classic of Great War literature. The enduring popularity and influence of *Goodbye to All That* have led to frequent scholarly evaluations of the text that have emphasised its fallibility as a historical source. Jay Winter, for example, has drawn attention to the heavy use of irony and gallows humour in the work of British memoirists and argued that Graves's narrative mocks those that would use it to get at the reality of the war experience.<sup>6</sup> Brian Bond has highlighted several questionable vignettes in the book and suggested that historical accuracy was less than a priority for the author.<sup>7</sup> Michael Snape, one of the few historians to have considered Graves specifically in terms of what he wrote about army chaplains, has denounced his scathing criticism of Anglican padres as 'downright dishonest'.<sup>8</sup> Even Paul Fussell, author of the influential *The Great War and Modern Memory*, a book that takes much of the output of the disenchanting authors at face value, recognised *Goodbye to All That* as a work of dramatised invention.<sup>9</sup>

There is much truth in all of this. Graves may well have been exaggerating for dramatic effect and, as with any memoir, his book should

not be taken to represent the views and impressions of more than one man. He also plainly admitted that he had spiced up the text with all the elements he thought would make the book more saleable.<sup>10</sup> His later writing indicates, moreover, that although he was quite well versed in theology and had a cultural interest in Christianity, he had no time for organised religion and considered the Church of England an irrelevance in the modern world.<sup>11</sup> This being the case, he can hardly be viewed as a fair, impartial judge of army chaplains. Indeed, were Graves the only author to have criticised chaplains so harshly, it would be easy to dismiss his remarks as the unrepresentative musings of an anti-clerical malcontent. Yet he was by no means alone in his disdain for the war-time efforts of British padres. Nor was he the only writer to single out Anglican chaplains for specific criticism. Although most war memoirs and novels offer no comment whatever on army chaplaincy, the work of at least ten veteran authors, who had served both in the officer corps and in the ranks, presents a body of testimony that is simply too compelling to ignore.

## The officers

Guy Chapman's *A Passionate Prodigality* was first published in 1933. This candid and often wonderfully written memoir focuses solely on Chapman's war experience, opening with his arrival in France in 1915 and closing with his cruelly anti-climactic arrival in Germany as part of the Army of Occupation four years later. In common with Graves, Chapman singles out Anglican chaplains for special attention, contrasting them unfavourably with Roman Catholics. He also refers to orders that specifically prohibited Anglican chaplains from accompanying combat troops to the front-line although, unlike Graves, he accepts that many Anglicans ignored these orders and went anyway: 'The Church of Rome, experienced in propaganda, sent its priests into the line. The Church of England forbade theirs forward of Brigade Headquarters, and though many, realising the fatal blunder of such an order, came just the same, the publication of that injunction had its effect.'<sup>12</sup> What really condemned Anglican padres in Chapman's eyes, however, was their bluff, guileless demeanour, which he saw as a reflection of an absence of spiritual serenity, such as he felt was possessed by the Catholic clergy-in-uniform:

These Catholic priests impressed one. Leeson never dropped a word of religion in my hearing; but one felt a serenity and certitude



streaming from him such as was not possessed by our bluff Anglicans. Already there was a growing dislike of this latter. They had nothing to offer but the consolation the next man could give you, and a less fortifying one. The Church of Rome sent a man into action mentally and spiritually cleaned. The Church of England could only offer you a cigarette.<sup>13</sup>

Like Graves, then, Chapman insists that Catholic chaplains were superior to their Anglican counterparts, but where Graves's criticism focuses on their lack of courage, Chapman highlights their 'bluff' manner and their inability to console the officers and men in their charge. Moreover, by maintaining that Anglican chaplains 'had nothing to offer but the consolation the next man could give you', he is suggesting that they had no special expertise or vocation that set them apart from combatant officers and equipped them to offer comfort and support. Chapman viewed this lack of professional purpose as a very grave flaw and as an extension of the generally unprofessional culture of the Kitchener Armies, which disturbed him so much when he volunteered in 1915. Another veteran, Charles Edward Montague, discussed this very inadequacy at length.

C. E. Montague's *Disenchantment* was first published in 1922 and brought together a series of articles that had appeared in the *Manchester Guardian* over the previous two years. Montague was later linked by contemporary commentators such as Cyril Falls,<sup>14</sup> F. J. Harvey-Darton,<sup>15</sup> and Charles Carrington<sup>16</sup> with a school of writers that included not only Graves and Chapman but also Edmund Blunden and Siegfried Sassoon, whose output has become known as the literature of 'Disenchantment'. This link is somewhat misleading; when war broke out in 1914 most of the writers of this so-called school were in their late teens or twenties, while Montague was an established middle-aged writer. When he volunteered in 1915 he was 47 years old, he had published several books, and had been on the staff of the *Manchester Guardian* for over 20 years. As a result, *Disenchantment* reads like the work of a man who came to maturity in late Victorian England and was subsequently very much engaged with Edwardian life. So while the war had a profound effect on Montague, it cannot be said to have been a *formative* event in his life. Also, as an experienced journalist with an inquisitive, analytical mind, Montague was equipped to try to make sense of events as they occurred. On being demobilised in 1919, he returned to the *Manchester Guardian* and immediately began publishing controversial articles on the war and its consequences. His interpretation

of the European war thus appeared in print almost a decade before the memoirs of Graves and Chapman.

Despite the generation gap, however, Montague's book shares a number of obvious similarities with the work of these authors. In common with them, Montague was a veteran who underwent a profoundly disillusioning encounter with the realities of war. Like them again his writing reflects this sense of disenchantment and is, in parts, highly critical of certain individuals and groups that he feels behaved less than honourably during the course of the conflict, including the army chaplains attached to the British Expeditionary Force.

Montague's lofty, slightly pompous, belles-lettres style may jar with modern readers but, possibly because of his maturity and his journalistic skill, his portrayal of the BEF chaplains is subtler and more nuanced than those of his literary successors, and, as a result, all the more damning. He is careful to concede that the Army Chaplains Department was made up of a very diverse group of personalities and that a great variety of different clerical 'types' were represented in their number. He gives a vivid sketch of these 'types', contrasting the 'saintly' Anglican padre, T. B. Hardy, whom he knew, with an anonymous chaplain who was visibly drunk in a fashionable restaurant in Amiens on 'one of the worst days of the Battle of the Somme'. But a paradigmatic type emerges. Montague describes him thus:

And there was, in great force, the large, healthy, pleasant young curate not severely importuned by a vocation, the ex-athlete, the prop and stay of village cricket clubs, the good fellow whom the desires of parents, the gaiety of his youth at the university, and the whole drift of things about him had shepherded unresistingly into the open door of the Church. Sudden, un hoped-for, the war had bought him the chance of escape back to an almost solely physical life, like his own happy youth of rude health, only better.<sup>17</sup>

Although Montague does not state this overtly, the representative padre he describes here, with his background of village cricket clubs, university, and 'the Church', appears to belong to the Church of England. He later points out, however, that this chaplain 'had his counterpart in all the churches',<sup>18</sup> making it clear that his caustic commentary applies to padres of all denominations, not just the Anglicans. Montague's narrative, then, unlike those of Graves and Chapman, avoids idealising Roman Catholics. In common with Chapman, however, he views an absence of serenity as a major flaw. In the above quote he depicts the

typical young curate at the front as being 'not severely importuned by a vocation'. He goes on to suggest that such curates had drifted into the Church without much reflection and that when the war came they saw it as an adventure that would free them from their mundane lives in unchallenging parishes. He takes this characterisation further when he outlines what he views as the chaplains' most critical shortcomings:

He seemed to be only too much afraid of having it thought that he was anything more than one of themselves. He had, with a vengeance, 'no clerical nonsense about him'. The vigour with which he threw off the parson and put on the man and brother did not always strike the original men and brothers as it was intended. Your virilist chaplain was apt to overdo, to their mind, his jolly implied disclaimers of any compromising connection with kingdoms not of this world. For one thing, he was, for the taste of people versed in carnage, a shade too fussily bloodthirsty. Nobody made such a point of aping your little trench affectations of callousness; nobody else was so anxious to keep you assured that the blood of the enemy smelt as good to his nose as it could to any of yours.<sup>19</sup>

As far as Montague was concerned, the chaplains were too bellicose, too worldly, and too anxious to downplay their role as clergymen, to command the genuine respect of officers and men. This absence of respect meant that the chaplains were unable to seize what Montague viewed as a real opportunity for bringing about a spiritual revival. The chapter in which the above commentary appears is entitled 'The Sheep That Were Not Fed', a title that suggests a missed opportunity, and Montague ended it by writing: 'in his own way, the army chaplain, too, became a tributary brook feeding the general reservoir of disappointment and mistrust that was steadily filled by the surface drainage of all the higher ground of our British social landscape under the dirty weather of the war'.<sup>20</sup> By maintaining that chaplains contributed to the disenchantment of others, Montague implies that the chaplains experienced little disenchantment themselves, that they were somehow outside the war, which was really only properly experienced by combatants.

Siegfried Sassoon's trilogy of memoirs was published between 1928 and 1936. Sassoon, or his alter-ego George Sherston, was clearly more well-disposed towards the Church and clergy than Montague, Chapman, or Graves, and the Church of England seems to have been very much a part of the pre-war rural landscape that he occasionally idealised at the Front. Sassoon's father was Jewish but he had been given a

conventionally Anglican upbringing by his mother and before the war he had moved in circles in which the Church retained a degree of influence. In *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, he writes affectionately of the Rector of Hoadley, whom he refers to as an 'old friend' and in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* he quotes from a letter he received from his battalion quartermaster, Joe Cottrill, while convalescing in Sussex. The letter tells of the death of a chaplain who is described as 'absolutely indifferent to danger'.<sup>21</sup> Elsewhere in *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, however, chaplains are portrayed as ineffectual. While waiting for attention in a dressing station after being wounded at Arras, Sherston recalls listening to 'an emotional padre who was painfully aware that he could do nothing except stand about and feel sympathetic. The consolations of the Church of England weren't much in demand at an Advanced Dressing Station'.<sup>22</sup> Curiously, the one Roman Catholic padre to whom Sassoon refers is an alcoholic who is incapable of organising the officers' mess, a man who would presumably have fallen short of the idealised Catholic padre of Graves and Chapman.

Some of Sassoon's poetry and prose contain definite criticism of the civilian clergy and Church hierarchy. In 'They', Sassoon offers a brief but cutting picture of a bishop who, viewing the war as a crusade, believed combat would be an ennobling experience that would change men for the better. When the 'boys' return from the front, they have changed, but not in the ways the bishop had hoped. In *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Sassoon recalls the local clergyman who, preaching before a congregation of soldiers, concluded his sermon with the words, 'And now God go with you. I will go with you as far as the station.'<sup>23</sup> The implied criticism, in both cases, is that the clergy were prepared to encourage men to go to a war to which they had little intention of going themselves. Yet both of these examples apply not to army chaplains but to civilian clergymen. This is an important distinction, yet at least one historian has cited the second example as a criticism of chaplains.<sup>24</sup> Thus although Sassoon did not write about chaplains in the same scathing manner as some of his contemporaries, his work, in its ambivalence towards the Church of England and the civilian clergy, arguably supports the padre-stereotypes presented in the other more derisive material.

## The rankers

For Anglican army chaplains, rank-and-file soldiers could be frustratingly elusive. John Bourne has stressed that 'the British soldier of

the Great War was essentially the British working man in uniform'.<sup>25</sup> Yet although Church of England clergymen had become increasingly interested in working class issues in the years before the war, many of them remained remarkably unfamiliar with ordinary working class men. Even clergy that had lived in working class parishes often had more contact with women and male adolescents than adult men. On the outbreak of war, some commentators thus interpreted service in the Army Chaplains' Department as a golden opportunity to bring the more junior clergy into contact with the working manhood of the nation. As will be seen in Chapter 4, some Anglican padres succeeded in establishing good, mutually respectful relations with the ranking soldiers of their units, while a smaller number were revered by officers and men alike. Yet for many chaplains, even the most conscientious and successful of them, the private soldier was an unfathomable, mysterious figure. Padres often deeply admired the 'Christian' virtues of ordinary soldiers but were hard pushed to work out what made them tick, and quickly discovered that there was no magic formula for arousing piety in men who had never been pious.

For the historian, the rank-and-file soldier is less elusive. There exists a remarkable range of archival sources, including personal correspondence, diaries, and unpublished memoirs, which can be used to piece together a picture of the hopes and fears of ordinary soldiers. The field of published war books, on the other hand, is completely dominated by authors who served in the officer corps, and only a handful of ranker's memoirs have ever appeared in print.<sup>26</sup> Two of these, both written by men who served on the Western Front, contain direct references to army chaplains and are worth considering.

Frank Richards's *Old Soldiers Never Die* was first published in 1933 and has since been hailed as a classic account of the private soldier's war. Richards, originally from Monmouthshire in South Wales, was working in a coalmine in Blaenau when the war broke out. As a former regular and reservist, he instantly rejoined his old battalion, the 2nd Royal Welch Fusiliers, and served for over four years on the Western Front, miraculously surviving virtually every major battle fought by the British forces. Robert Graves also served in the 2/RWF and Graves and Richards seem to have known each other vaguely during the war. The two veterans corresponded when *Goodbye to All That* was first published and Richards sent Graves his completed manuscript. In fact, it is unlikely that the book would ever have seen the light of day without Graves's editorial skills and contacts in the publishing world.<sup>27</sup>

*Old Soldiers Never Die* offers a fascinating insight into the quotidian experiences, preoccupations, and prejudices of the rank-and-file of the British Expeditionary Force, and although Richards injected his prose with a good deal of wry humour, there is a palpable anger in the passages that comment on the injustices suffered by ordinary soldiers. He seems to have relished the opportunity to openly criticise those individuals and institutions that irritated him during the war. Staff officers, rear echelon personnel, French civilians, British civilians, Indian troops, and medical boards all come under fire. Army chaplains do not escape Richards's acerbic wit and one chaplain in particular is sketched quite vividly. The tone of the passage is quite tongue-in-cheek and it seems clear that the author viewed the padre as a ridiculous, comic figure:

We had some grand parsons with us during the War. One who was with us a considerable time had a wonderful reputation: he could drink the Quartermaster-Sergeant blind, and he had to be a great man to do that. Parsons always stayed with the transport when we were in the line, but on two occasions when we were in a quiet part of the front line this one paid us visits. The first time he called on each company commander at company headquarters and did not shift until they had each in turn run out of whiskey. Yes, he drunk them out of house and home and walked down the communication trench sober as a judge. The second time he visited the front line he didn't get a drink anywhere: each company commander said how sorry they were when they told him that they had completely run out of whiskey. So he didn't stay long that time and never visited the front line again. The old hands of the Battalion admired him very much, and often used to say that when he went west he would be put in charge of the largest and finest drinking bar in Hell. We had another parson just before him who never came up at all.<sup>28</sup>

Richards admits that he was fond of a certain Wesleyan padre who was killed while going forward during an attack in October 1918, but insists that this chaplain's willingness to expose himself to danger was unusual and recalls being distinctly unimpressed by the unchristian conduct of a Church of England chaplain during the same engagement.<sup>29</sup> Graves overhauled Richards's manuscript completely to make it suitable for publication and accepted one third of the profits of the book for his efforts, and while it is difficult to say precisely how much influence the editor had on the text, he would certainly have concurred with the author's dim view of army chaplains.<sup>30</sup>

One of the very few memoirs written by an English ranker to have appeared in print is George Coppard's *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai*, first published by the Imperial War Museum in 1969. Coppard, who grew up in Croydon, later described his 1914 self as 'an ordinary boy of elementary education and slender prospects'.<sup>31</sup> Although he was then just 16 years old, he succeeded in enlisting in the Royal West Surrey Regiment. He saw extensive service as a machine gunner on the Western Front, fighting in the Loos and Somme offensives and the Third Battle of Arras before being seriously injured at Cambrai in October 1917. Coppard had clearly read *Goodbye to All That* but, unlike Richards, he does not seem to have been unduly influenced by it. Indeed, in one passage he exposes the inaccuracy of Graves's picturesque anecdote about the practice of using water heated in a machine gun's cooling jacket to make cups of tea.<sup>32</sup> In common with Richards, his Welsh counterpart, he gives the reader a vivid insight into the environment and mentality of the most harassed and beleaguered soldier in the military chain of command, the infantry private. Despite his pre-war experience as a choirboy Coppard, much like Richards, was dismissive of the whole notion of religion in wartime and seems to have viewed the clergy-in-uniform as something of a joke:

My identity disk and paybook said my religion was 'C of E'. To me and most Tommies this meant compulsory church parades on Sundays if the company happened to be well out of the fighting zone. I had a glimpse of an army chaplain now and then, but never anywhere near the trenches. In fact one chaplain had a reputation for being hot stuff at cards and having a strong liking for the bottle.<sup>33</sup>

The memoirs of Richards and Coppard both sold well when they were published and remain in print. Part of the appeal of these books lies in the public's desire to read accounts of the ordinary soldier's experience that were actually written by ordinary soldiers. One of the few books that even attempted to present a picture of the war from the rankers' viewpoint before *Old Soldiers Never Die* was published was not a memoir but a lexicon compiled by two former infantry privates, John Brophy and Eric Partridge. John Brophy came from a lower middle-class Liverpool background and was a 14-year-old schoolboy when war broke out. In a quixotic act of rebellion he ran away from home in November 1914 and lied about his age in order to enlist in the King's Liverpool Regiment. His deception was never detected and he served throughout the war on the Western Front. When he was demobilised in 1919 he was

not yet 18 and suffered from a limp brought on by trench foot.<sup>34</sup> Eric Partridge was born on New Zealand's North Island in 1894. His family moved to Australia and settled in Brisbane when he was 13. In 1914 he interrupted his studies at the University of Queensland to enlist in the Australian infantry and saw service as a private both at Gallipoli and on the Western Front. The paths of the two authors crossed in London in the 1920s while Partridge was running a small publishing house. Brophy had written a number of articles on soldiers' songs and Partridge was becoming a keen lexicographer. They agreed to collaborate on a lexicon of soldiers' songs and speech and the resulting book, *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier (1914–1918)*, was published in 1930. It was printed in two further editions over the next 18 months and an enlarged and ultimately very popular edition was published under the title *The Long Trail* in 1965. The book provides an exhaustive and often fascinating account of soldiers' slang and contains a wealth of etymological material. The entry for the term 'padre' not only reinforces the view of chaplains expressed in the memoirs but also gives an informative explanation of the origins of the word and its usage in the British Army:

*PADRE*: Chaplain – An accredited priest or minister wearing military uniform. From the Portuguese and Spanish *Padre* – Father, priest. Perhaps a survival from the Peninsular War, more probably originated in Gibraltar. A chaplain had few definite duties: he could make himself useful or he could be slack. In general it may be said that all Roman Catholic *padres* were respected because they came into the line and because they lacked the haw-haw voice. Church of England and Nonconformist *padres* could be roughly divided into three classes: (1) The man-of-the-world who swore and over drank; despised and disliked; (2) The earnest but ineffectual; despised but tolerated; (3) The spiritual but determined who made himself useful as a first-aid man and distributor of cigarettes; this sort was respected as a person, but not as a parson. Men would even say, 'A pity old So-and-so's a padre; he's not a bad sort'.<sup>35</sup>

As with Graves and Chapman, Roman Catholic *padres* are portrayed as more willing to experience danger than their Protestant counterparts, and Anglican and Nonconformist *padres* are divided between the despised and the useful. No indication is given as to what proportion of chaplains fell into the first two negative categories but the tone of the paragraph is generally critical and the impression given is that, as a group, *padres* were not particularly popular. Significantly, it is the only



published post-war narrative to make a very clear reference to the class background of chaplains. Roman Catholics are deemed to be superior to Protestants not simply because they were prepared to enter the front-line but also because they 'lacked the haw-haw voice'. Roman Catholic padres, in other words, were more popular because they were less overtly upper class than other chaplains. As will be seen in Chapter 4, social class was an important factor in the sometimes difficult relationships padres had with the men to whom they were trying to minister.

These four ranker veterans represent a minute fraction of the total number of British soldiers mobilised during the war and there were certainly some rank-and-file soldiers who held their padres in great esteem. The views of Richards, Coppard, Brophy, and Partridge do carry a certain weight, however, as the war they experienced, the rankers' war, was the war experienced by the overwhelming majority of men that served in the British Army.

## The novelists

The authors of the texts thus far mentioned all claimed to have played a direct or peripheral role in the events they describe and to have been writing from memory, their books being marketed as memoirs or, in the case of Brophy and Partridge, an authentic lexicon. Yet what is perhaps the most overtly negative portrayal of an Anglican army chaplain by a post-war writer is to be found, not in the pages of a memoir but in those of a novel. Charles Richard Benstead's *Retreat, A Story of 1918* was first published in 1930. Benstead served as a subaltern with the Royal Garrison Artillery on the Western Front, was awarded the Military Cross in 1917, and played cricket for England in the early 1920s before gaining a commission in the Royal Navy.<sup>36</sup> He was a serving Lieutenant Commander when he wrote his controversial war novel. On its publication, the book was praised for its 'vivid impressions of the victorious retreat of the 5th Army'.<sup>37</sup> Yet the historic retreat merely acts as a background to the central event of the book – the humiliating downfall of the Reverend Elliot Pethwick Warne.

Warne is a narrow-minded, introspective, and overly sensitive Anglican army chaplain attached to a brigade of the Royal Artillery. He arrives at Brigade Headquarters at the worst conceivable time: 1.00 am on the morning of 21 March 1918, just five hours before Ludendorff launched his massive spring offensive. The opening chapters of the book record Warne's horror at the indifference of officers and men to his position as a chaplain and to religion in general. He is treated by

turns with amusement, resentment, and outright contempt. The officers feel uncomfortable in his presence, while the other ranks see him as something of a joke. As the narrative unfolds the padre's feelings of inadequacy, disillusionment, and self-loathing increase as he finds it impossible to get to grips with his new environment, even after the offensive has ground to a halt. By the end of the book a mere month has passed but Rev. Warne has suffered a complete nervous breakdown and died of an unspecified nervous illness, which is aggravated by a dose of Spanish flu.

The text is essentially composed of a series of humiliating defeats, each passage exposing some fundamental flaw in the chaplain's character. The most prominent of these flaws are snobbery, cowardice, and a growing mental instability. In addition, unlike Montague's chaplains, who were too worldly, Benstead's fictional chaplain is portrayed as not being worldly enough. Having come from a sheltered country parish in rural Cambridgeshire, he is wholly unsuited to work with a front-line brigade. He is disgusted by the ignorance and coarse manners of the working-class troops he encounters but is envious of them as they at least have definite tasks to perform. While idly observing a truck driver he reflects, 'That man is probably a motor mechanic by trade, a man of little or no education. Yet he has a definite job. He is serving his King, and indirectly his God. I, on the other hand, with all my education can do neither.'<sup>38</sup> This and other passages paint a picture of a man who feels useless and unwanted – someone who has no clear role in the army. The theme of the uselessness of clergymen at the front is central to the narrative. Rather than accepting their padre as an integral part of their unit, the junior officers of the Brigade see him as an awkward burden. On learning that a new chaplain has been posted to the Brigade, the adjutant, Captain Cheyne, remarks angrily 'Oh hell! Here's another bloody parson!'<sup>39</sup> Much later, after Warne has suffered his final humiliation, the brigade doctor, O'Reilly, expounds on the absolute futility, as he sees it, of posting chaplains to units in the field:

I used to think that nobody was indispensable in this world: some merely did the job better than others. But I'm not sure that it applies to parsons with the B.E.F. – unless you invert it and say that no parson is really necessary out here; some merely less unnecessary than others.<sup>40</sup>

Rev. Warne appears especially pathetic because the other characters in the book are portrayed as competent, stoical, and brave, and his weaknesses

are magnified by their strengths. This recalls the way Graves and Chapman highlighted the faults of Anglican chaplains by contrasting them with figures that were, in their view, far more worthy of praise, such as regimental doctors and Catholic padres. In brief, if one were to take Elliot Warne as an accurate fictional representation of an Anglican army chaplain attached to the BEF, one would have to accept that many of them were ineffectual, cowardly, and unwanted. Certain elements of the book's narrative – Warne's macabre demise, for example – are quite far-fetched, but the characters are skilfully drawn and Benstead's prose is, for the most part, restrained but vivid and strangely moving.

Of all the so-called war books published during the 1920s and 1930s *Retreat* was by far the most damaging to the reputation and image of army chaplains in the short term. *Goodbye to All That*, which first appeared in print less than a year before Benstead's novel, offended so many different parties that, to begin with, criticism of the book tended to focus on controversial passages in the text other than those that dealt with chaplains. Scottish veterans, for example, were particularly offended by Graves's suggestion that Highland troops were dirty in the trenches and 'inclined to run like hell both ways'.<sup>41</sup> The text of *Retreat*, on the other hand, focused almost entirely on the hopeless ministry of a fictional Anglican padre and pointedly questioned the utility, and even the morality, of army chaplaincy. As such it presented an open challenge to serving and former chaplains and caused a good deal of public controversy. The writer and literary critic, F. J. Harvey-Darton noted that *Retreat* divided readers into two camps – pro- and anti-chaplain – and throughout the opening months of 1930 the authenticity of Benstead's clerical protagonist was contested in the national and regional press.

The *Church Times* printed a sharply worded editorial defending the war record of chaplains and denouncing Benstead's 'caricature'.<sup>42</sup> The other major Anglican paper of the period, the *Guardian*, gave the novel a surprisingly rave review,<sup>43</sup> while the reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement* praised Benstead's 'epic' rendering of the retreat of the Fifth Army but criticised his 'exaggerated' portrayal of an Anglican army chaplain.<sup>44</sup> Philip Byard Clayton, one of the most well-known Anglican chaplains of the war and founder of the Toc H movement, is mentioned in passing in the text and seems to have taken the book's negative portrayal of the clergy at the front quite personally.<sup>45</sup> In a series of letters and articles printed in the *Daily Herald*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Evening Standard*, which was then serialising the novel, Clayton indignantly criticised Benstead's book and mounted a staunch defence of the war record of BEF padres.<sup>46</sup> In an article published in the *Daily Telegraph*

on 7 February he directly addressed the authenticity of the novel's protagonist and insisted that 'those whom I have consulted are agreed with me that the wretched man, if ever selected as a chaplain, would have been sent home within two weeks'.

By early March Clayton had gone so far as to obtain signed statements from officers who had served in Benstead's brigade (14th Bde, Heavy Artillery) in which they fiercely repudiated 'the veracity of some of the pictures drawn of personalities and incidents' in the novel.<sup>47</sup> The publication of these statements prompted at least one regional newspaper, the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle*, to discontinue its serialisation of *Retreat*.<sup>48</sup> Other former chaplains, including the celebrated war hero Noel Mellish, joined Clayton in his campaign and a number of combatant veterans expressed their support and admiration for padres, of all denominations, in the correspondence pages of various dailies.<sup>49</sup> Some veterans were not so sympathetic in their recollections of army chaplains, however, and several ex-officers and other ranks openly ridiculed the very idea of the clergy-in-uniform.<sup>50</sup> Benstead himself felt compelled to join the debate and in a statement printed in the *Evening Standard* on 5 March he offered a robust and articulate defence of his characterisation of Rev. Warne. He also explained that he had been inspired to write the novel because he wanted 'to vindicate the grossly maligned 5th Army' and, importantly, because he 'wished to question the place of the religion in war'. He went on to confront Clayton and his other detractors with their failure to engage with the challenge to the clergy inherent in the text:

[My] story asks the question, "Has a minister whose life is dedicated to preaching Christ's gospel of peace a place on the battlefield?" Not once have my ecclesiastical critics attempted to answer it.<sup>51</sup>

Hugh Cecil has demonstrated how closely the events of the novel are based on Benstead's own experience of the retreat of the Fifth Army but has also argued that the author was 'far from contemptuous of religion, only convinced that it did not mix with war'.<sup>52</sup> Benstead's public utterances during the controversy bear this out. Indeed, he closed the article in the *Evening Standard* by praising his most virulent critic, asserting that 'Mr Clayton reveals himself magnificently as an Apostle of Peace. If he will only face the challenge of "Retreat" he cannot fail to see how identical are our ideals'. His admiration for genuine Christian faith and endeavour may explain the author's apparently perverse decision to dedicate the book to a naval chaplain. Yet whatever Benstead's

personal feelings may have been, the book certainly came at a bad time for army chaplains. The valuable wartime service of the Army Chaplains' Department was officially recognised in 1920 when the Department was granted the right to use the 'Royal' prefix. By the end of the decade, however, the Christian element of the growing British pacifist movement had begun to criticise the whole concept of army chaplaincy as contrary to Christian teaching.<sup>53</sup> In the year that followed the publication of *Retreat* this criticism intensified and in March 1931 three evangelical MPs launched an ultimately unsuccessful parliamentary campaign to abolish funding for army chaplains.<sup>54</sup>

Two other novels, both written by former Anglican padres, appeared in print not long after the Armistice and presented Anglican army chaplains in a more complex and sympathetic light than *Retreat*. The first of these, *Simon Called Peter*, was written by Robert Keable and published in 1921. A graduate of Magdalene College, Cambridge, Keable was ordained in 1911. Despite the strongly evangelical outlook of his father, Keable was very much a high Anglican who was drawn, throughout his life, to Roman Catholicism. In 1912 he joined the University Mission to Central-Africa. He worked for some time in Zanzibar but was based much further south in Basutoland when he was granted a commission as an army chaplain in May 1917.

The hero of Keable's book, Peter Graham, is a conscientious, ambitious, and very capable London curate who, after several years of war, finally manages to gain a temporary commission as a chaplain. He is posted to Rouen where he encounters a succession of cheerfully debauched but friendly and essentially decent combatant officers. The young padre is heartened, and indeed surprised, by the welcome he receives but quickly becomes disillusioned by the sleaze and licentiousness that seem to be widespread among the British officers and men stationed in the city. He is also disappointed by the apparent indifference to formal religious worship in the BEF and finds himself wondering what exactly he is supposed to be doing in the army. Two things allow Graham to come to terms with his environment and experience a genuine spiritual reawakening. The first is the realisation that although most of the soldiers he meets are outwardly irreligious and even immoral, they possess profoundly admirable qualities that seem closer to true Christianity than more conventional virtues. The second is the affair he has with Julie, a South African nurse.

The book's frank treatment of religious and sexual themes caused some controversy upon its release. The review in the *Times Literary Supplement* praised its realism and 'unmistakeable' authenticity, but

the *Church Times* berated Keable for suggesting that redemption could be achieved through sexual fulfilment.<sup>55</sup> Outraged reviews no doubt helped the sales of the book, which became an instant success both in Britain and the US, where it caused even more controversy. It ran into six editions in its first year, it made Keable a minor celebrity, and by the time of his premature death at sea in 1929 over 30,000 copies had been sold.<sup>56</sup> Hugh Cecil has perceptively outlined some of the reasons for the book's enormous popularity:

What made the book so popular? First, it was vividly written and fast moving. Secondly, albeit moral in its own way, it took a tilt at Victorian sexual hypocrisy and conventional English religion, both contemporary targets for attack; but it also stressed hope and self-realisation, and so cannot be compared with the later, classic type of 'disenchanted' war novel. For this reason it met with the English public's wish at that time to believe that though the war had been terrible, it had been worth fighting. Thirdly, despite Keable's carelessness about the historical order of wartime events, it was nevertheless an absolutely authentic account of a padre's wartime experience, as is confirmed in many other writings by his clerical contemporaries.<sup>57</sup>

This last point on the question of authenticity is worth considering. Few clergymen would have openly identified with the protagonist's moral odyssey or his sexual adventures with an unattached woman. Indeed, the very incongruity of religion and sex in the book explain a large part of its appeal. Nonetheless, Peter Graham's meditations on the complexities of soldiers' faith and virtue in wartime, which were doubtlessly based on Keable's own experiences as a padre, would have struck a chord with many of the Anglican chaplains who saw service in the various theatres of war. The common belief in a latent or 'unconscious' Christianity among British soldiers that belied their outward immorality, evidenced by a rough but coherent value system, will be examined at length in Chapter 5. Keable's novel asked some very searching questions about the utility of clergy in the armed forces. But it also gave an honest, unflinching account of one padre's experiences and presented the public with an army chaplain who was conflicted but conscientious, sympathetic, and very human.

Less than a year after *Simon Called Peter* was published another novel penned by a former Church of England chaplain became a runaway bestseller. Ernest Raymond's *Tell England* chronicles the journey of three privileged young Englishmen from the classrooms of their public

school to the trenches of Gallipoli and the Western Front. The novel is divided into two books. The first, set at Kensington, the fictional school attended by the young protagonists, is full of cricket matches, canings, and torrid schoolboy yearnings. The boys hero-worship Radley, the handsome young athletics master, and the narrative is, at times, intensely homoerotic. In the second book, which opens aboard a troop ship bound for Gallipoli, the homoeroticism is replaced with religious symbolism and Padre Monty, a charismatic Anglican chaplain, replaces Radley in the boys' affections. The narrator of the text describes the chaplain's strong and timely influence on the young officers thus:

In these moments, when every turn of the ship's screw brought us nearer Gibraltar, the gate of the Great Sea, and God alone knew what awaited us in the Gallipoli corner of that Mediterranean arena, came Padre Monty, crashing up to us with his Gospel of the saints. It was the ideal moment for a priest to do his priestly work, and bring our Mother Church to our side. And Monty failed neither her nor us.<sup>58</sup>

The author clearly drew on his own experiences of public school and army chaplaincy to write the book. The illegitimate son of a retired Major General, Ernest Raymond was brought up in west London where he attended St Paul's school. While working as a teacher in his early twenties he, much like Keable, caught 'the splendid fever of Anglo-Catholicity' and enrolled at Chichester Theological College. He was ordained in 1915 and immediately offered his services as a chaplain. He was particularly taken with the ancient romance of the Aegean and was quite glad to be sent to the Dardanelles. Like many Edwardian public schoolboys Raymond was familiar with classical history and mythology and, like the young officers in his book, he seems to have understood the war as a Greek tragedy – a harrowing but epic and occasionally beautiful experience. The very romantic title of the novel, which Raymond's publisher described as a 'selling title', was inspired by Simonide's epithet to the courageous Spartan warriors who fell at Thermopylae.<sup>59</sup>

Writing many years after the war, Raymond recalled being influenced, like others of his generation, by a group of talented old Etonians and Balliol men that included the aristocratic scholar and socialist Charles Lister, the composer Patrick Shaw-Stewart, and the celebrated poet Rupert Brooke.<sup>60</sup> Each of these men gained commissions in the Hood Battalion of the Royal Naval Division, which was to form part of the invasion force at the Dardanelles. Brooke was destined never to see Gallipoli, but both Lister and Shaw-Stewart were killed there. Indeed,

one of Raymond's first official tasks as a padre was Lister's burial on Lemnos Island. Raymond later claimed to have been inspired by Brooke's war sonnets and *Tell England* can be read as an elegy to the idealism, selflessness, and beauty of youth that the author believed was personified by young English officers like Brooke and Lister. Indeed, in a rather obvious homage, the main character and narrator of the book is called Rupert.

The novel got decidedly mixed reviews on its release; the *Evening Standard* slammed it as 'laughable – when it is not revolting', while the critic for the *Daily News* insisted that the book had 'no beauty, and its silliness and bad taste are not the work of a writer'.<sup>61</sup> More recently Hugh Cecil has written that the apparently unconscious homoeroticism of the book 'seems now absurd' while Jenny Macleod has described the text as 'chauvinistic and bombastic'.<sup>62</sup> Much of this criticism is entirely valid; the novel is extremely sentimental and it is difficult to take the deliriously impressionable protagonists seriously. Nonetheless, in 1922, and for many years afterwards, the British public loved the book. It was an instant bestseller that sold over 300,000 copies by 1939 and remained popular until into the 1970s. By 1973 no fewer than 40 editions had been printed, and the dynamic and brave Padre Monty had become known to huge numbers of British readers.

## The image of the army chaplain

Taken together the work of the authors outlined above presents a mixed but largely negative picture of the war record of army chaplains in general, and Anglican chaplains in particular. The books produced by the veteran memoirists, all of which fared reasonably well commercially and were widely read, portray chaplains in different ways but their commentaries are alike in that they give the unambiguous impression that chaplains had a poor war record and were not generally respected by either officers or men. In Graves's view Anglican chaplains were cowardly, out-of-touch, and quite inferior to their Roman Catholic counterparts. Chapman's criticism of Anglican padres focuses on their 'bluffness' and general lack of serenity and professionalism. Like Graves, he claims that Roman Catholics made superior chaplain material. Montague's lengthy discourse on chaplains grants that they had some value and that there were good men among them but, ultimately, he condemns padres of all denominations for being too worldly and too anxious to act like combatants. Sassoon does not discuss chaplains in any great depth but when they do appear in his work they are



portrayed, with one exception, as being mediocre and inadequate. In addition, as far as Montague and Graves were concerned, Anglican chaplains failed to seize the opportunity for a spiritual revival brought about by the circumstances of war.

The relatively small number of war books written by veteran rankers largely reinforces the negative image presented by the ex-officers. Brophy and Partridge concede that chaplains were respected if they were courageous under fire but imply that only Roman Catholic padres were prepared to enter the line. Crucially, the brief entry in *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier* raises the issue of class and the clergy-in-uniform, and suggests that the social background of some Protestant chaplains was a distinct disadvantage in their ministry. In terms of their upbringing, education, and civilian occupations, Frank Richards and George Coppard were more representative of the average infantry private than either Brophy or Partridge, but their remarks on the chaplains they encountered during the war echo those of the lexicographers. Both authors suggest that rank-and-file soldiers did not take chaplains seriously and both are quite clear in their assertion that chaplains were unwilling to expose themselves to the dangers of the front-line trenches. Indeed, there is a strong suggestion in all of the memoirs, and in *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier* and *Retreat*, that chaplains were somehow detached from the grim realities of the conflict and experienced a very different war to the one experienced by combatants. In *Goodbye to All That* and *Disenchantment*, moreover, padres are identified with forces that antagonised, rather than supported, combatant officers and men.

The post-war novelists offer a more complex picture. Charles Benstead's padre is a deeply unattractive figure whose ministry is roundly rejected by both officers and men. He is vain, ineffectual, out-of-touch, and completely at odds with his surroundings. He clearly has no business being at the front, and the author's implication is that no clergyman does. In stark contrast to this, the novels of Robert Keable and Ernest Raymond feature padres who are flawed but sincere, charismatic, popular, and committed men who are determined to learn from their experience of war. Keable's Peter Graham may be a poor role model for a clergyman, but he is nonetheless a likeable protagonist who is admired and even loved by those around him. Raymond's Padre Monty has a jarringly bumptious personality but his sincerity, bravery, and dedication are never in question and the young officers he meets en route to Gallipoli revere him. Both of these novels outsold most of the war memoirs and an adaptation of *Tell England* was made into a feature film in 1931, thereby reaching an even wider and more diverse

audience. *Tell England*, and to a lesser extent *Simon Called Peter*, thus provided a compelling counter not just to *Retreat* but also to *Goodbye to All That* and the work of the other critics.

Yet while the very negative image put forward by combatant veterans was tempered by the fictional work of former chaplains during the inter-war period, it is the memoir material that has survived. With the notable exception of Hugh Cecil, no modern historian has properly examined Keable and Raymond's contributions to the canon of Great War literature and their work is now generally forgotten. The memoirs produced by former padres in the decades since the war ended, which naturally give quite a sympathetic account of their war record, were not particularly popular when they were published and are also largely forgotten today.<sup>63</sup> The memoirs of Graves and Sassoon, on the other hand, have long been accorded classic status and continue to be widely read. *Goodbye to All That* is still in print and until recently was one of the more popular books on the A-Level English curriculum in the UK. Crucially, with some notable exceptions, historians who have looked at the question of army chaplaincy during the Great War have repeatedly taken the work of Graves and the other post-war critics at face value.<sup>64</sup> The image of the army chaplain that has persisted, therefore, is the negative one. Yet how accurate is this image? Does it constitute a complete picture of the war record of Anglican army chaplains? Did Anglican chaplains really avoid the sort of exposure to shot and shell that combatant officers and men regularly endured? Are there elements of truth amid all the criticism and caricature? How did other army personnel, from the lowliest private soldiers to the High Command, perceive padres during the war? And would all relevant sources concur with the judgements of the literary commentators? The chapters that follow will give a fuller, more nuanced picture of the wartime experience of Anglican army chaplains than has previously been available and, in so doing, will go some way towards answering these questions.

It should be stressed that the historiographical fields of army chaplaincy in the Great War and combatant faith in the British Army are by no means untilled. Two major studies of the Church of England during the First World War were published in the 1970s. Albert Marrin's *The Last Crusade*, published in 1974, focused on the role of the Church in the pre-war period and the conduct of Church leaders during the course of the war. The issues of Church support for the war, clerical bellicosity, and public opinion regarding Church policy are all tackled in some detail. Yet while Marrin offers some interesting insights into the dynamics of the pre-war Church, the book ends abruptly in 1918, with the

result that the long-term impact of the war on the Church and clergy remains unconsidered. Alan Wilkinson's *The Church of England and the First World War* was first published in 1978 and fills in some of the gaps in Marrin's work. While Wilkinson does not appear to have consulted any unpublished archival sources, his research of the relevant published primary material – the religious press, clerical memoirs etc. – is exhaustive, and his treatment of the key themes of the period is generally insightful. As a history of the Church during the war years, Wilkinson's book is both comprehensive and compelling and is still considered the seminal work on the subject.<sup>65</sup> Due perhaps to an absence of archival research, however, Wilkinson accepts the views of the post-war literary commentators as representative of the opinions of officers and men in the army. Thus, while both authors touch on the issue of army chaplaincy and draw on chaplains' published memoirs, neither book attempts to critically interpret the wartime experiences of Anglican padres or to consider the long-term implications of army service for large numbers of clergymen.

The past decade or so has seen the publication of a number of important studies that have expanded the historiography not just of the Anglican Church during the period in question but also of army chaplaincy and the complex issue of combatant faith. Stephen Loudon's *Chaplains in Conflict* was published in 1996. In this short study Loudon, who was able to draw on his own experience as a padre, covers the period from 1914 to the first Gulf War and charts the evolution of the role of the chaplain through two world wars and a host of minor imperial conflicts. Yet although Loudon does offer some interesting insights into the inherent role-tension that army chaplains have traditionally experienced, the book is more of an overview than a comprehensive interrogation of the sources. Also, while Loudon usefully incorporates a sociological approach to chaplains as a group he overlooks the fact that padres themselves were often acutely aware of the conflicting emphases of their ministry. Richard Schweitzer's *The Cross and the Trenches*, published in 2003, looks at both British and American soldiers during the First World War and examines instances of religious faith and doubt. Schweitzer is thus chiefly concerned with the nature of combatant faith. His survey of primary narrative material is wide-ranging and his treatment of the very complex issue of the soldiers' religious outlook is both subtle and convincing. Yet while he naturally engages with chaplains as a group, his analysis of them overlooks their capacity to change and learn over the period of the conflict.

More recently, books by Alan Robinson and Linda Parker have added to the literature relating specifically to British army chaplaincy. Robinson's *Chaplains at War*, published in 2008, tells the story of the British clergy-in-uniform during the Second World War. The book focuses, for the most part, on the institutional dimension to the chaplains' story and opens with a chapter on padres, of all denominations, during the Great War that includes a lucid account of the evolution of the Chaplains Department during the first two years of the conflict. Linda Parker's *The Whole Armour of God*, published in 2009, focuses specifically on Anglican chaplains during the Great War and touches on the question of the post-war reputations of Church of England padres. As such it overlaps to a degree with my own work. Yet while Parker's book provides a valuable and insightful introduction to the subject of Anglican army chaplaincy during the period, it is a short, mostly descriptive work that cannot be considered an in-depth survey.

The most prolific writer on the issue of army chaplaincy and the religiosity, or otherwise, of British soldiers in the modern period is Michael Snape. The thesis presented in Snape's *God and the British Soldier*, published in 2005, is that religion, in both the conventional and the more abstract sense, played more of a role in the lives of British soldiers during the First and Second World Wars than has hitherto been acknowledged by either religious or military historians. Focusing for the most part on the First World War, Snape examines the influence of 'diffusive Christianity' in the army and places army chaplains, of all denominations, firmly in their military context. His treatment of the link between chaplains and morale, and the manner in which this link was increasingly recognised by the High Command, is both compelling and persuasive and his work makes a considerable contribution to the historiography of war and the military relationship with religious faith. His chapter on 'Command and the Clergy' is highly relevant to my own research and his findings corroborate some of mine. Dr Snape followed *God and the British Soldier* with an illuminating and exhaustively researched survey of the evolution of the Army Chaplains' Department from its small beginnings in 1796 to the Second World War and beyond. Much of the narrative is concerned with the period of the Great War, which, as the author rightly argues, was a crucial milestone in the development of the Department. Snape's commentary on army chaplains both here and in *God and the British Soldier* has done much to challenge and contextualise the very subjective post-war image of the clergy-in-uniform.

In each of these books, Snape has been determined to get away from the denominational perspectives of other studies and to consider padres in their 'proper, i.e. military context'.<sup>66</sup> In the chapters that follow, by contrast, the army chaplains of one denomination are considered less as military personnel and more as civilian clergy-in-uniform. During the Great War, and especially from 1916 onwards, the British Army contained a hardcore of regular officers and men but was composed overwhelmingly of citizen soldiers; men who would not have joined the army in peacetime, who came from civilian society and brought much of that society with them. If we want to consider the culture of the wartime army, religious and otherwise, we must therefore consider the civilian world that informed that culture. By the war's end as many as 3060 Anglican clergymen had seen some degree of service as chaplains in the British Army.<sup>67</sup> The majority of these men were ordinary civilian clerics who volunteered under the unique circumstances of a major European war. Thus, while acknowledging their status as adjuncts to the military machine and their increasingly recognised and valued role in the army, much of the narrative that follows focuses on chaplains' views and experiences as vicars and curates who, for the most part, occupied only very temporary positions as British army officers. I have also chosen to concentrate primarily on the Western Front because in terms of its strategic position, the number of divisions deployed, the number of casualties suffered, and its centrality in the political, military, and popular imagination, it was the most important theatre of war from the British perspective.<sup>68</sup> It was also the theatre to which the vast majority of Anglican chaplains who served overseas were posted. *Faith Under Fire* should not therefore be viewed as a comprehensive history of the Anglican army chaplaincy during the Great War. Nor should it be taken simply as a response to the post-war commentary on army chaplains. Rather it is an examination of the Anglican chaplain's experience of what was, in human terms, the most destructive war in British history.

# 1

## The Church of England, the European War, and the Great Opportunity

There has been a great deal of talk since the war began of 'the Church's opportunity'. It is one of those vague phrases, which is the delight of the man who has no responsibility in the matter and the despair of those who have. It suggests that 'somebody ought to do something' and in this case the 'somebody' darkly hinted at is obviously the unfortunate chaplain.

Donald Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, 1916

The month of August 1914 was a frightening and exciting time for British people. War between the continental powers erupted on 3 August, a bank-holiday Monday, and in London crowds of citizens, many of whom had been prevented from taking trips to coastal resorts due to suspended rail services, thronged the streets of Whitehall hoping to catch a glimpse of the government ministers who were deciding the fate of the nation. Later in the day, and again the following evening when Britain's entry into the war had become certain, crowds of tens of thousands gathered outside Buckingham Palace to serenade King George V with choruses of the national anthem.<sup>1</sup> The presence of such animated and apparently cheerful crowds in the capital was interpreted both during the conflict and much later as a sign of mass enthusiasm for the war. Niall Ferguson, Adrian Gregory and others have challenged this interpretation and argued that the behaviour of the London crowds does not in itself indicate an eagerness to go to war, and, even if it did, the atmosphere on the streets of one district of the capital city by no means accurately reflects the contemporary mood across the United Kingdom.<sup>2</sup> The myth of a naive popular enthusiasm for war has tended to obscure the complexity of emotions people felt in

the earliest days of the conflict. Newspaper correspondence and other contemporary sources give quite a varied picture of individual responses to the outbreak of war, but declarations of patriotic determination were often tempered by a sense of uncertainty and a real appreciation for the gravity of the situation. One of the ways these mixed emotions found expression was in the greatly increased numbers of people that flocked to the nation's churches.

On 9 August, the first Sunday of the war, hundreds of thousands of Londoners turned out to pack their local places of worship. St Paul's Cathedral was busy all day and the Bishop of London preached at the evening service to an estimated ten thousand people. 'Church Full' signs had to be posted outside long before the service was due to start at 7.00 pm and crowds of people gathered around the entrance.<sup>3</sup> Similar scenes were witnessed at Westminster Abbey and, indeed, all over the country, and not just on Sunday. The following optimistic report appeared in the *Church Times* on Friday 14:

The first effect of the war has been a great rush of people to the Churches. Everywhere throughout Lancashire big congregations assembled on Sunday both morning and evening. At the special intercession service last Friday during the dinner-hour, at the Cathedral the congregation was bigger than the average Sunday evening one. The people were deeply moved, and when at the close of the service after the National Anthem, the organ struck up 'Rule Britannia' (a real inspiration on the part of the organist) tears could be seen on many faces.<sup>4</sup>

The writer went on to list the extra daily prayer and communion services being offered in Blackburn, Lancaster, Burnley and other Lancashire towns and concluded, 'The Church is rising to its opportunity here'.

In the context of Anglican chaplains and their experience of the Great War two aspects of this report are worth considering. To begin with, the fact that the organist closed the service with a rendition of 'Rule Britannia' did not seem incongruous to the clerical journalist. On the contrary, he thought it was 'a real inspiration'. In the opening stages of the war patriotic fervour – as represented by the National Anthem, Rule Britannia, and the teary-eyed congregation – and religious sentiment, as represented by the church setting, were closely linked and Anglican clergy were keen to promote and maintain this link by strongly identifying themselves with the war effort.

The concluding reference to the Church's 'opportunity' is also significant. It suggests that the Church of England was wisely taking

advantage of the situation and responding to the spiritual needs of the people, which were apparently more urgent at a time of national crisis. Britain had witnessed a steady decline in religious observance throughout the Edwardian period and, as we shall see, there was at this early stage a widely held but misguided belief that the act of waging a war would make people more amenable, perhaps than ever before, to religious guidance and that the war, while in itself inherently negative, would have the positive side effect of causing a religious revival. In their role as clergy-in-uniform, army chaplains were identified as the group who could most effectively spearhead this revival.

### **Perceived decline in religious observance**

Churchgoing and general involvement with the churches, including the cycle of the sacraments of baptism, communion, and confirmation, and burial in a Christian graveyard were very much a part of the routine of village life in Britain for most of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> And while clergy and laity sometimes held quite different views on the meaning of these rituals, the village church played a central role in the communal life of rural parishes.<sup>6</sup> Large-scale urbanisation, an almost direct result of the industrial revolution, had a decidedly adverse effect on this.<sup>7</sup> It became clear as early as the 1860s that rural migration to the cities and the emergence of huge urban populations was steadily dissolving the communal role of the church, and that, as a general rule, the more dense a given population the fewer church-goers it contained. This was not simply because the different churches found it hard to keep up with their rapidly expanding flocks by supplying them with new houses of worship and more clergy, but also because the complex make-up of urban society prevented the churches from taking a central role. In the larger British cities and their suburbs the church had to compete for the loyalty of the population with the rival attractions of the local pub, football team, or place of work.<sup>8</sup> Licensed establishments of various kinds seem to have been particularly popular and, according to Jeffrey Cox, 'the pub was one Edwardian social institution which was indisputably more popular than church or chapel'.<sup>9</sup> The result of this toppling of the churches from dominance was that, by 1914, many working class people from the more densely populated industrial cities, the most obvious example being London but also Birmingham, Manchester, and the larger mining towns, were two generations removed from a close relationship with, and interest in, organised religion.<sup>10</sup>

Population movements and growth were not the only factors that contributed to pre-war religious indifference in the working classes.



New economic and political trends, and a more regimented relationship between work and leisure, also played a part. By the end of the nineteenth century many working people had Saturdays as well as Sundays off and the concept of the recreational weekend was born.<sup>11</sup> Families increasingly spent this away from home and church attendance suffered. Those who still worked six days a week, although they might well send their children to Sunday school, were often reluctant to devote the best part of their only free day to worship when church services could last as long as three hours. In the two decades before the war there was a strong emphasis placed on enjoying one's leisure time in recreation. To this end museums and galleries were opened on Sundays from 1896. This probably concerned the middle classes more than the workers but music halls, which were a key element of working class culture, really came into their own during this period. Saturday afternoon football also became a major spectator sport that attracted a huge following in British cities from the late 1880s.<sup>12</sup> The existence of such diversions meant that for young single men of both the lower middle and working classes, Sunday became a day to recover not from the exhaustion of the working week but from the excesses of Saturday night. Referring to the perceived shift towards the material among the working classes the Rev. Samuel Barnett wrote in 1906, 'this generation has within its reach delights for the senses which may well seem enough for satisfaction, and working men naturally imagine that nothing can be better than to have a share in those delights. They go after things that are seen and have neither the time nor the will to go after the things which are unseen'.<sup>13</sup>

In terms of religious education, Sunday schools, by 1914, had been a significant part of working class life for over a century. The first schools were founded in the 1780s by middle class and gentry Evangelicals who, alarmed at the spread of radical social and political ideas among the lower classes, wanted to exercise a greater influence in shaping their outlook. Their popularity increased throughout the nineteenth century and peaked in 1911 with an estimated 6 million students, well over 80 per cent of the age group, attending weekly lessons. It was thus exceptional for the Edwardian child, whatever his or her social background, not to attend Sunday school.<sup>14</sup> It would be a mistake, however, to assume that these high attendance figures reflect national piety or loyalty to the churches that organised the schools during the period. The fact that a child attended Sunday school did not mean that he or she also attended church services. In reality, the practices were mutually exclusive. Sunday school classes were held at the same time as church services so while a great number of English children were being made

familiar with church teaching they were not necessarily going into churches very often, and a Sunday school student did not automatically become a churchgoer as soon as he or she came of age.<sup>15</sup> The schools had originally been founded to instil Christian values and a healthy respect for the establishment in working class children, yet by the end of the nineteenth century those schools attended by the sons and daughters of industrial workers were coming more and more under working class control.<sup>16</sup> They became centres of basic literacy where teachers, drawn increasingly from the same class as their students, taught children the 'respectable' values of orderliness, punctuality, industry, and cleanliness. This contributed to an increased sense of pride and confidence in industrial communities that helped the formation of a distinct and largely independent working class culture.<sup>17</sup> Ironically, then, the Sunday school movement, rather than ensuring that working class people adopted values and habits that their social 'betters' thought appropriate for them, played a role in widening the gap between the classes and, importantly in this context, between the industrial working classes and the established church.

The half-century before the war clearly witnessed an increase in general prosperity and leisure in Britain but it also saw grinding poverty and social inequality and the efforts of some to remedy these ills. It should be stressed that some clergymen were very energetic in this regard and, with the advent of Christian socialism in the 1870s, the Anglican clergy became gradually more interested in working-class problems. The popular perception of the State Church did not necessarily recognise this, however, and the actions of some of the less sympathetic clergy and laity tended to taint all Anglicans. Albert Marrin has argued that 'the most important cause by far of working class animosity stemmed from the feeling that the Church was unsympathetic toward its aspirations for an equitable social order'. The church press tended to reinforce this view and throughout the Edwardian period papers like the (*Church*) *Guardian* 'opposed the working man along every inch of his road to a better life', objecting to both the minimum wage for miners during the South Wales coal strike of 1899 and the reduction of the working week from 54 to 48 hours in the engineering industry.<sup>18</sup>

One particularly controversial, and highly publicised, incident of clerical insensitivity to working-class issues occurred in June 1905 when 450 unemployed men marched from Leicester to London and back led by the socialist clergyman, Frederic Lewis Donaldson. Donaldson had hoped that the Archbishop of Canterbury would grant the group an audience at Lambeth Palace, thereby giving the cause of the unemployed

some positive publicity. Archbishop Randall Davidson refused to see the men, offering the rather weak excuse that he was too busy. In an open response to the incident published in the *Labour Leader*, Keir Hardie, leader of the Independent Labour Party and the personification of working class protest, had the following to say:

The Archbishop of Canterbury ... said he had to devote 17 hours a day to his work and that he had no time left in which to form opinions on the unemployed question. The religion which demands 17 hours a day for organisation and leaves no time for a single thought about starving men, women and children has no message for this age.<sup>19</sup>

It would be a mistake to overstate antagonism between labour representatives and the clergy but the whole character and atmosphere of the traditional religious institutions, and the Church of England in particular, often seemed at odds with the ideals and aspirations of working class Britain. In an address to the Congregational Union of England given in 1892, Hardie attacked the modern churches, which he felt had lost the true message of Christ. 'Christianity today lay buried', he insisted, 'bound up in the cerements of a dead and lifeless theology. It awaited decent burial, and they in the labour movement had come to resuscitate the Christianity of Christ, to go back to the time when the poor should have the Gospel preached to them, and the Gospel should be good news of joy and happiness in life'.<sup>20</sup> Significantly, Hardie was not criticising Christianity *per se*, but rather the lofty and austere Christianity of the traditional institutions, and insisting that the original 'Christianity of Christ' be resurrected. Jesus Christ was a figure the worker could identify with. He was born in a stable, the son of a carpenter. The Archbishop of Canterbury, on the other hand, lived in a sprawling palace and earned £15,000 a year in 1914, no less than three times the annual salary of the Prime Minister.<sup>21</sup> For Labour leaders like Hardie, and for many others in the Labour movement, it was not a case of not believing in God or not having a personal sense of religion but rather of a feeling of resentment and suspicion towards the churches, which led to a lack of interest in any kind of 'religion'. As Marrin remarked, 'The working man was rarely an atheist or an agnostic, harbouring instead a vague belief in God and affection for His Son as "a down right good fellow". He had simply become indifferent to the claims of the Christian religion'.<sup>22</sup> With reference to working-class Londoners in the decades before the war, Jeffrey Cox and Sarah Williams have emphasised the persistence of a personal sense of piety, Christian idealism, and 'folk

religion', despite an outward indifference to the church, the clergy, and the practice of 'churchgoing'.<sup>23</sup> This vague but genuine belief in Christian ideals, concealed behind an almost complete disregard for organised religion, manifested itself quite strongly during the war and was noted with great interest by army chaplains.

The Edwardian middle and upper classes, from which the regular British officer corps was recruited, were, at least by comparison with the working classes, still quite attached to organised religion by 1914.<sup>24</sup> Although nothing like the vocational heyday of the 1880s, a career in the Church of England, along with the armed forces and imperial administration, was still considered a good option for an English public school boy. Many regular army officers had grown up in English vicarages and the Anglican clergyman was a familiar figure in bourgeois English society.<sup>25</sup> English public schools had originally been founded to train boys for a life in the Church and were steeped in religious tradition.<sup>26</sup> Irrespective of the personal religious views of its members, then, the English officer corps, which was overwhelmingly Anglican, was certainly familiar with the teachings of the established Church.

There is some evidence, however, to support the notion that this more privileged section of society – now steadily growing in size – was also beginning to gradually lose touch with organised religion.<sup>27</sup> A good way of examining the changing interests of the more educated classes is to take a look at the books they read. In 1870 the largest group of new books published that year was on religious subjects. Fiction was fifth on the list. In 1886 fiction was first, but with religion well ahead of all the rest. By the turn of the century books on subjects such as history, politics and science had caught up and religious books were far behind.<sup>28</sup> The three decades before the war saw great advances in scientific research and experimentation. Röntgen discovered X-rays, the Curies conducted pioneering research in the field of radioactivity, and in 1905 Einstein developed the theory of relativity, and later that year adapted and helped to prove Planck's quantum theory. By 1895 over 20,000 British students were attending institutes for higher education.<sup>29</sup> Many of them were studying scientific subjects and becoming familiar with compelling new theories that challenged traditional perceptions of the world and creation. While it would be wrong to assume a cultural incompatibility between science and religion, the idea that anything was absolute and not open to academic debate, a view that had long been contested both by religious and secular commentators, was finally dying out and educated people were becoming less willing to accept the dogma of the organised churches.

Contemporary church commentators were often confounded by this declining interest in formal religious observance and were hard pressed to pinpoint any overriding contributing factor. One thing they were sure of, although many of them would not realise its extent until the war began, was that decline had set in. It was not overwhelming and probably did not feel like a crisis, but there was a definite and perceptible drift away from the churches, and the Church of England in particular. In 1902, R. Mudie Smith began conducting a twelve-month survey of Church attendance in the inner London area. His findings were published in the *British Weekly*. In an area with a population of almost four and a half million people, it was discovered that only 832,000, a little over 20 per cent, attended church or chapel. Yet, perhaps more alarmingly, when his results were compared with those of Robertson Nicoll, who had surveyed the same area on a single Sunday 16 years earlier, a significant decline in attendance appeared to have occurred. In Nonconformist chapels attendances had only fallen 6000, from 369,000 to 363,000, but in Anglican churches the decline was far greater, dropping from 535,000 to 396,000.<sup>30</sup> Considering the population of the area had risen by half a million during the period in question and that consequently churchgoers represented an increasingly small percentage of the overall population, the picture for the Anglican Church in antebellum London looked bleak indeed. It should be stressed that the survey suggested that the London case was unique, that attendance in provincial towns was not necessarily declining at the same rate, and that small rural parishes had experienced comparatively little change during the period. Viewed in an international context, moreover, popular religiosity was more buoyant in Britain than in much of continental Europe.<sup>31</sup> Anti-clericalism, where it did exist, was also much less virulent than in France and even Italy, and 'religion', in the broadest sense of the term, remained a pervasive and undeniable part of British life.<sup>32</sup> British people, like most other Europeans, also readily identified themselves as Christians. These qualifications were of little comfort to religious leaders, however, particularly those who could remember, and idealise, an apparently more pious age. Writing in the wake of the Second World War, F. A. Iremonger, a Church of England priest and author who had been ordained in 1906, recalled the sense of fading influence felt by Anglicans in 1914:

When the First World War broke out, the best days of the Church of England – as a National Church with 'a resident gentleman in every

parish' were already behind it ... By August 1914, its influence had in most places waned, and questions began to be asked covering a wider field of enquiry than the parish, the club, and the church altar.<sup>33</sup>

In view of this perceived decline in organised religion in the decades before the war, we can imagine how badly Anglicans felt the need for a religious revival in the late Edwardian period. When apparent signs of this followed the outbreak of war, some commentators were understandably pleased by what they optimistically saw as a national return to the religious fold. They were greatly impressed by the spirit of self-sacrifice that was evident in the remarkable volunteerism of the first few months. By 15 September, a mere six weeks into the war, 500,000 men had joined up and a further two million would volunteer before conscription was introduced early in 1916.<sup>34</sup> For many clergymen, and indeed politicians, journalists, and other commentators, the opening months of the war brought a refreshing sense of unity and common cause to British public life. The increasingly serious conflicts between the various dissident groups within the UK – trade unionists, suffragettes, Irish nationalists and unionists – were over, or could at least be put on hold. For once, the Union was to be truly united in a common struggle against a common foe. And, what was more, the war would bring out the best in British people. Money-grubbing materialism was to be forgotten in favour of honour, duty, and, above all, sacrifice, that most noble and Christian of ideals. At a major public meeting held in London's Guildhall at the beginning of September 1914, Prime Minister Herbert Asquith declared, to much applause, that the war 'is not merely a material, it is also a spiritual conflict'.<sup>35</sup> In a rapturously received speech delivered some two weeks later, David Lloyd George painted the conflict as a noble and redemptive struggle between good and evil. In language that was strikingly similar to that being used by clergymen at the time, the nonconformist chancellor employed a heady mix of high-flown nationalism and biblical imagery to depict a Britain that had been elevated by the war to 'the great peaks of honour we had forgotten – Duty, Patriotism, and – clad in glittering white – the great pinnacle of Sacrifice, pointing like a rugged finger to heaven'.<sup>36</sup>

With the most senior politicians in the country publicly interpreting the conflict in religious terms, and with churches unable to house their swollen congregations, it is hardly surprising that Anglican observers felt that something extraordinary was happening in the spiritual life of the nation. In a pastoral letter written early in October and printed in

the religious press, the Bishop of Bristol encouraged his clergy to seize the opportunities presented by the war:

Nothing is more encouraging than the realisation by so many people that this war is spiritual in character. It is Christianity against a spirit which surely is akin to what is meant by Antichrist. We are coming back, too, to the essentials of our Faith. More than one clergyman in the diocese has told me that the effect of the war in his parish has been to produce something like a spiritual revival.

The opportunity is great. We must foster that spirit. The hearts of men and women are being strangely moved at this time of stress. They are looking not merely for encouraging war news, but for a strength greater than their own. The Church holds the answer. It is Christ. Brethren, preach him as you have never done before.<sup>37</sup>

People continued to flock to church services in record numbers and in mid-October the Vicar of Bradford wrote, 'I believe the church is about to have the chance of her life ... The churches are crowded with worshippers, and people seem to be up against realities in a way which three months ago would have seemed impossible'.<sup>38</sup> It was the clergy, as the Bishop of Bristol had made clear, who were expected to seize this opportunity. As one vicar put it, 'I am sure that our congregations are more than ready to respond at this crisis in our national history. But they want a lead; and that lead, which ought to be a very definite and strong one, can only come from the clergy'.<sup>39</sup> Yet what role did Anglican clergymen feel they ought to play in such momentous circumstances? And where did they feel they could best respond to the perceived spiritual needs of the people?

### **Church support for the War**

Before looking at the Church's views on the role of the clergy during the war, it is important to stress that the Church of England very much supported the government position in 1914 and was keen to assist, and appear to be assisting, the national war effort. This stance can partly be explained by the social make-up of the clergy, which will be looked at in greater depth in the next chapter, and by the close relationship between the established Church and the government and army. The Anglican ministry was not entirely socially exclusive, but the basic standards required for ordination meant that ordinands tended to come from relatively privileged backgrounds.<sup>40</sup> Their attitudes, and those of

the leadership, therefore very often reflected the outlook of influential figures in politics, the military, and the imperial administration.

Support for the government in time of war was by no means automatic and a number of very prominent Anglican figures, including the Bishop of Hereford and the future bishops of Oxford and Lincoln, had strongly opposed government policy during the South African War.<sup>41</sup> In 1914, however, the issues seemed more morally clear-cut. Germany had aggressively violated Belgian neutrality and had designs on France and, quite possibly, Britain, and 'Prussian' militarism simply had to be checked. Stories of German atrocities, widely and zealously reported in the national press in the first months of the war, contributed to the image of the German Army as a force of malevolent depravity and heightened the crusading atmosphere.<sup>42</sup> John Horne and Alan Kramer have highlighted the importance of German atrocity stories in providing further justification for British intervention in a continental war.<sup>43</sup> The burning of Louvain, the shelling of Rheims Cathedral, and the alleged abuse and murder of Belgian, French, and Russian clergymen were particularly offensive to Christian sensibilities.<sup>44</sup>

The German violation of Belgian neutrality gave the British government a legal pretext to declare war and provoked much moral indignation. But it was the atrocities committed by German soldiers in Belgium and France that allowed the clergy to interpret the war, and present it to the public, in robustly moral terms. When British civilians became the victims of German aggression in the U-boat campaigns and aerial bombing raids of 1915, there was a second wave of public outrage and the moral dimension to the allied cause was further reinforced.<sup>45</sup> Certain leading church figures, including Bishop Talbot of Winchester and Archbishop Lang of York saw war, in and of itself, as a great evil but were convinced that, under the circumstances, Britain's cause was a righteous one and publicly and passionately supported mobilisation.<sup>46</sup> Even Bishop Gore of Oxford, who had been a prominent member of the Church of England Anti-War League since its inception early in 1914, acquiesced in the general support for mobilisation. For men like Gore, no Christian country could stand idly by while Christian neighbours were violated; engaging in a war to resist German aggression on the continent was thus the lesser of two evils and the government's only honourable course of action.

One unambiguous example of Anglican Clergymen aligning themselves with government policy on the war is provided by the British response to a German document that was made public in August 1914 and entitled 'An appeal to Evangelical Christians Abroad'. The 'Appeal'



was composed and signed by 28 leading German theologians, including the well-known Lutheran scholars Adolf von Harnack, Wilhelm Herrmann, Rudolf Eucken, and Gustav Adolf Deissmann, all of whom had been involved in the pre-war Anglo-German friendship movement and the international Edinburgh Church Conference of 1910. The text is 1500 words long and consists of an aggressive but polite defence of German military policy in which the theologians portray Germany as an essentially peace-loving nation that went to war only under the most extreme circumstances and with no alternative. They present German individuality, culture, and honour as being under direct threat from her traditional enemies, Russia and France, and claim to feel betrayed by Britain's decision to join them. The British, and specifically the English, people are referred to as 'those who by blood and history and faith are our brothers, with whom we felt ourselves in the common task more closely bound than any other nation'.<sup>47</sup> Germany is a victim of a 'systematic network of lies' and Belgian neutrality was violated not by Germany but by her adversaries. The authors seem to have been eager to demonstrate the German clerical community's support for the actions of the government. This last objective was also a concern for the Anglican archbishops and the Oxford theologians who drafted the main replies to the German proclamation.

The Oxford statement, drafted by the leading Anglo-Catholic theologian Henry Scott Holland, is predictably measured and scholarly in tone. It makes no reference whatever to religion, theology, or the position of the Church of England (or indeed the Lutheran Church); rather it repudiates, one by one, each of the claims made by the German theologians on behalf of the German Government and Army. The other, more authoritative response, was drafted mainly by the Archbishop of Canterbury and signed by, among others, the Archbishops of York and Armagh and the Bishops of London and Winchester. It was translated into a number of different languages and, by the standards of 1914, had a large international circulation. In common with the Oxford statement, the archbishops' response avoids discourse on religious or ecclesiastical concerns and is diplomatic in tone and political in content. Archbishop Davidson and those who drafted the reply with him were clearly shocked by the extent to which, in their view, the German theologians had been duped by German diplomats. The authors endeavoured to make the position of the Anglican Church as clear as possible:

It has not been a light thing for us to give our assent to the action of the Government in this matter. But the facts of the case as we know

them have made it impossible for us to do otherwise. Of these facts we offer here a brief summary, derived from the official papers, the accuracy of which cannot be challenged. It is upon these facts that we rest our assured conviction that, for men who desire to maintain the paramount obligation of fidelity to the plighted word and the duty of defending weaker nations against violence and wrong, no possible course was open but that which our country has taken ... We have taken our stand for international good faith, for the safeguarding of smaller nationalities, and for the upholding of the essential conditions of brotherhood among the nations of the world.<sup>48</sup>

The language employed in all three statements is political and patriotic, rather than theological or spiritual, and the authors of the British responses were quite clear in their position of strong and unequivocal support for the war and the allied cause. In this sense the archbishops' reply and that of the Oxford theologians, published shortly afterwards, can be seen as contributing to the perception of many Anglicans, and of British people generally, of the war as a just war. In addition, as most senior Anglican clergy signed their names to the former document, it can be viewed as an *official* statement of Church support for the war.

Church leaders did occasionally feel moved to offer mild criticism of military policy, as in the case of Archbishop Davidson's public disapproval of reprisals for German zeppelin raids and the British use of poison gas,<sup>49</sup> but the basic support for British involvement in the European war, as outlined in these early statements, remained the Church's official stance for the duration of the conflict. In researching his 1974 book, *The Last Crusade*, Albert Marrin claimed that he had been unable to identify a single example of an Anglican clergyman publicly opposing the war. While open clerical criticism was rare, however, it was not unheard of, even in the very early stages of the conflict. One example is provided by the case of Henry Cecil, a London-born curate at Sheffield Cathedral who clashed with his parishioners, his vicar, and his bishop over his determination to hold public anti-war meetings.<sup>50</sup> Another conspicuously anti-war clergyman was Bernard Walke, the Anglo-Catholic vicar of St Hilary's in Cornwall. Rev. Walke made his unease about the war known to his parishioners from the outset and as the conflict wore on he began to hold 'peace meetings' throughout the Southwest. In 1917 one such meeting in Penzance was violently broken up by a group of Naval Reserve men.<sup>51</sup> Such clerical pacifism was exceptional, however, and Church support for the war remained both public and virtually unanimous.

At the level of the individual, clerical support for the war manifested itself in a variety of ways but the most obvious, and indeed controversial, means through which clergymen demonstrated their support for the war was by becoming actively and enthusiastically involved in recruitment for the armed forces. Of the five main belligerent powers Britain was the only one not to have a system of mandatory military service in place by 1914, which meant that as soon as the war was declared the campaign to promote and facilitate voluntary enlistment began in earnest.

Early in September 1914, Lord Kitchener stated that he would 'intensely dislike' to see an official recruiting campaign being carried out under the auspices of the Church but later made it clear that while he felt 'pulpit pronouncements' would be inappropriate he had no objection to Archbishops Davidson and Lang promoting recruitment in official propaganda.<sup>52</sup> Davidson appears to have followed Kitchener's instructions quite closely, and while he was often prepared to speak of the need for recruits in personal correspondence and in the national press, he stopped short of sanctioning anything that looked like official Church endorsement of the recruitment campaigns. In a letter to the clergy of his own diocese written in September 1914, he encouraged vicars and curates alike to cooperate in the matter of raising awareness of the need for volunteers.<sup>53</sup> By the end of the month, the *Church Family Newspaper* proudly proclaimed that 'some of the best "recruiting sergeants" have been found in the ranks of the clergy'.<sup>54</sup> A few days later the *Church Times*, the most widely read religious paper of the period, announced that 'during the last few weeks there have been no better recruiting sergeants than the clergy'.<sup>55</sup> Addressing a large congregation at Westminster Abbey in November 1914, Canon J. T. Mitchell of Liverpool painted the war as an event so great that the young men of Britain were fortunate to be given the opportunity to take part in it. 'What are we doing', he asked those present, 'to pay the price for the Nation's security? For the men who are young and strong, the way is plain. Surely they may thank God that they have been born here at this time. Their way is plain and they thank God that opportunity is given them'.<sup>56</sup> In the preface to a collection of war sermons published in 1915 the Bishop of London, A. F. Winnington-Ingram, wrote that '[T]he Church encouraged every young man under its influence to volunteer to God as well as to the country'.<sup>57</sup> After the war Winnington-Ingram claimed that through his indefatigable recruiting efforts he had personally added 10,000 men to the ranks of the army.<sup>58</sup> Other prominent clergymen were also keen to throw their weight behind the drive

for recruits. On the First Sunday of Advent 1914, the Archdeacon of Westminster and chaplain to the House of Commons, Basil Wilberforce, opened a sermon by declaring, 'I have tried to make it clear that recruiting appeals from the pulpit are intended to stimulate hearers to become eager amateur recruiting sergeants'.<sup>59</sup> Wilberforce was one of the more zealous of such amateurs in the Church of England; in another sermon he demanded, 'Women of England, do your duty! Send your men today to join our glorious Army'.<sup>60</sup>

Their eagerness to win recruits led some Anglican clergymen to resort to a rather heavy-handed sort of emotional blackmail when addressing the public. In an article that appeared in the *Standard* in early September 1914 the reactionary vicar of St Clement's in Fulham, Richard Free, reflected on what he viewed as an exaggerated fear of mortality, 'The modern fear of death, discernible in some quarters, is to my mind ludicrous. Any shift is deemed excusable if the possibility of death may be escaped. If I had ten sons they should all be on active service or I should like to know the reason why'.<sup>61</sup> Just over two weeks later the Rev Prescott Decie of St Paul's, Hull, reminded the middle-aged mothers in his congregation that forbidding their sons to enlist would ultimately be doing them more harm than good; 'Parents who find it hard to part with their sons must remember that if they keep them at home they are doing them a cruel injury, as they will go through life marked out as men who in the hour of need proved useless'.<sup>62</sup> By no means all Anglican clergy were involved in recruitment and the Church of England did stop short of lending its official support to the great recruitment drives, but at an individual and unofficial level many clergymen publicly and zealously encouraged the youth of Britain to volunteer for service in the armed forces.

Some clergymen, moreover, were not content with simply encouraging young men to volunteer and insisted on preaching what became known as 'war sermons', in which they shared their belligerent views on the war with their congregations. Bishop Winnington-Ingram provides an obvious but significant example of clerical bellicosity. In a pastoral letter published in the first month of the war, he warned readers against giving in to hatred and stressed that Britain's quarrel was not with the German people, but with their rulers.<sup>63</sup> As the war continued, however, the Bishop's attitude hardened to quite a marked degree. On 28 November 1915, the very day Lord Derby had proposed for a nationwide pulpit appeal, he preached perhaps the most inflammatory sermon of the war years. In this oft-quoted piece of clerical rhetoric, most of which actually focused on missionary work, Winnington-Ingram

outlined what he felt was Britain's only honourable response to German war crimes:

To save freedom of the world, to save Liberty's own self, to save the honour of men and women and the innocence of children, everything that is noblest in Europe, everyone that loves freedom and honour, everyone that puts principle above ease, and life itself beyond mere living, are banded in a great crusade – we cannot deny it – 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, who superintended the Armenian massacres, who sank the *Lusitania*, and who turned the machine-guns on the civilians of Aerschott and Louvain – and to kill them lest the civilisation of the world itself be killed.<sup>64</sup>

He went on to say that he looked 'on everyone who fights for this cause as a hero and everyone who dies in it as a martyr'.<sup>65</sup> Even under the extraordinary circumstances of war, these were strong words, and had they been uttered by a more junior clergyman they would not take on the same significance. Yet, as Bishop of London, Winnington-Ingram was the third most senior clergyman in the Church of England and a figure who exerted considerable influence in British public life. For Londoners, he had been the public face of the Church for over a decade. This particular sermon, preached on the first Sunday of Advent, was heard by as many as 2000 Anglicans. When it was published two years later it reached a much wider audience. In using such aggressive language the Bishop was going beyond merely offering support for the war effort by encouraging men to enlist, he was endorsing indiscriminate violence against the German people. By referring to the war dead as martyrs, moreover, he was suggesting that those who died in the conflict were fulfilling a Christian destiny. Nor was Winnington-Ingram the only senior Anglican clergyman who was prepared to use such bellicose rhetoric in the pulpit. Archdeacon Wilberforce was arguably even more belligerent. On the first Sunday of the war he preached a sermon to a battalion of the Queen's Westminster Volunteers in which he assured them that 'in such a struggle as that before us now you are positively obeying God by killing men'.<sup>66</sup> Early in 1916 he told another congregation that 'the killing of Germans is a Divine service in the fullest acceptance of the term'. Referring to Wilberforce's comments in the House

of Commons, the Liberal MP for Hanley, Robert Outhwaite, remarked that the British clergy were 'preaching not "Thou shalt not kill," but "Thou shalt kill"'.<sup>67</sup>

It should be stressed that ecclesiastical support for the war and clerical belligerence were by no means unique to the Church of England. In 1914 Archbishop John Baptist Crozier, the primate of the Church of Ireland, asserted that the 'war has been forced on us by well calculated greed and hate', denounced German 'butchery and brutality', and made passionate appeals for Irish recruits.<sup>68</sup> Irish Anglican clergy generally supported his stance on the war and, like their English counterparts, became actively involved in the recruitment drives of 1914 and 1915.<sup>69</sup> The leadership of the Anglican Church in Australia saw 'Prussianism' as a great threat to British imperialism which, in their view, was a global force for good, and took an accordingly pro-war line.<sup>70</sup> Canadian Anglicans also viewed the conflict as a just war and offered the Canadian government and army their support.<sup>71</sup> In South Africa, the Anglican Bishop of Pretoria, Michael Furse, was greatly troubled by the bereavement caused by the war but interpreted events in Europe and elsewhere as a manifestation of the universal struggle between good and evil. In 1915 Bishop Furse, whose brother was a staff officer in the BEF, visited the Western Front and became actively involved in recruitment.<sup>72</sup>

Back in Britain, the clergy of the Presbyterian, Methodist, and Roman Catholic churches joined Church of England clergymen in their often quite vocal support for the war effort. In common with their Anglican counterparts, the clergy of the Scottish Presbyterian churches played a prominent role in recruitment, gave the war their outspoken support, and often presented the conflict as a 'Holy War'.<sup>73</sup> British Methodists, although perhaps less inclined to embrace government policy than members of the Church of England were also generally supportive of the war effort.<sup>74</sup> The clergy of the British Roman Catholic Church, moreover, found themselves, for once, in broad agreement with their Protestant compatriots on the issue of the war.<sup>75</sup> The bishops of the Irish Catholic Church would later cause considerable controversy with their outspoken criticism of the British government, most notably on the issue of conscription, but in 1914 many of them were resolutely pro-war in their public statements.<sup>76</sup>

Nor was support for the war confined to Christian religious leaders. In September 1914, Rabbi Dayan Hillman of the Great Synagogue in Aldgate, East London, announced that 'the Jews of Great Britain have responded most gloriously to the call of arms. Our New Year is approaching, but the Jewish soldier will not hear the sound of SHOFAR

(the Ram's horn), but only the terrific sound of the cannon'.<sup>77</sup> An estimated 50,000 Jewish soldiers served in the British forces during the war.<sup>78</sup> The only major religious body that can be said to have adopted a clearly pacifist stance during the conflict was the British Society of Friends. Yet even Quakers found it difficult to avoid the pull of the battlefield. In 1914 an unofficial Friends Ambulance Unit, operated by conscientious objectors who were prepared to play a non-combatant role at the front, was formed and ultimately as many one third of the members of the Society fought in the war as combat troops.<sup>79</sup>

This pattern of churches supporting the war also emerged in the other main belligerent states. The clergy of the French Catholic Church responded energetically to the outbreak of war, viewing the crisis as an opportunity to unite the nation and restore the Church to the position of major influence it had once held by identifying Catholicism with popular patriotism. Members of the French Jewish and Protestant communities also actively supported the war effort and produced strongly anti-German propaganda.<sup>80</sup> In Germany, the leadership of the churches, and indeed many secular leaders, interpreted the war, in much the same way as allied religious leaders, as a titanic struggle between good and evil. Both the Lutheran and Roman Catholic churches gave the war their vocal support, although it has been suggested that the Lutheran clergy were more bellicose than their Catholic counterparts.<sup>81</sup> German evangelical theologians, as we have seen, were quick to display their loyalty to the German government in time of war and Patrick Porter has demonstrated the degree to which some Lutheran commentators interpreted the conflict in mystical and nationalistic terms.<sup>82</sup> This phenomenon of Christian leaders on opposing sides lending the conflict moral weight and implying that God supported them and opposed the enemy was to be noticed by soldiers during the war, and remarked upon with some distaste and cynicism.

In the fervently pro-war climate of 1914 and 1915, the views of any individual or institution that opposed the popular position tended to be received with incredulity and anger. In November 1914 Archbishop Lang of York became something close to a hate-figure when he publicly recalled the dignity and composure shown by Kaiser Wilhelm II at Queen Victoria's funeral.<sup>83</sup> Archbishop Davidson's aforementioned criticism of military policy during the 1915 debate on reprisals for German air raids was quite mild in tone and not in any way a criticism of the war itself, yet it invited 'a continuous shower of protest, denunciations, and often virulent abuse from every part of England'.<sup>84</sup> Such strong condemnation of the most senior clergymen in the Church of England underlines the

difficulty that leaders, religious and otherwise, faced in making statements on the war that fell short of full and uncritical support for the armed forces. Yet while the human experience of the war, with its attendant deprivation and bereavement, was undoubtedly painful for many Anglican clergy and laypeople, the moral issues raised by the conflict seem to have been less problematic, especially in 1914. The Church leadership supported government policy and, by implication, gave the war their blessing. Under such circumstances, junior Anglican clergymen were naturally anxious to play an active role in the war effort.

The sense of male duty to king and country, and the masculine ideal of glory and self-sacrifice in combat, were strongly inculcated among the middle and upper classes of pre-war Britain.<sup>85</sup> The ideal of self-sacrifice was a cornerstone of the public school ethos, which relied upon each pupil working for, while remaining subordinate to, the school community. Boys were not expected to be particularly pious but they were expected to make sacrifices, if necessary, for the good of the school.<sup>86</sup> Church services were an important part of public school life and a clergyman invariably held the position of headmaster. A lay headmaster was not appointed at Tonbridge School until 1907, at Wellington until 1910, and at Charterhouse until 1911, while three of England's most prestigious public schools, Repton, Eton, and Winchester, waited until the 1930s. Headmasterships often attracted talented and ambitious young clergymen and clerical headmasters were believed to be capable of having a 'profound effect' on their pupils.<sup>87</sup> Christ's example of the ultimate sacrifice was thus something with which young men from this background were familiar and the first few months of the war saw waves of former public school boys clamour to gain commissions in the army and navy.

This willingness to volunteer was by no means confined to the elites, but the pressure on the more comfortable classes who saw themselves as the country's leaders and future leaders was especially intense. But what of the Anglican clergy, many of whom came from such backgrounds? As we have seen, some quite prominent members of the Church leadership were actively and passionately involved in recruitment. What role did they envision for clergymen of military service age and fitness?

### **The wartime role of the clergy**

Technically, an Anglican clergyman had to obtain permission from his bishop to leave his living or curacy for any reason whatever and most bishops were clearly against giving their clergy leave to volunteer as combatants. Archbishop Davidson was particularly adamant that



Church of England clergy should not fight. His views on the issue of clergy and military service were very clearly outlined in a letter circulated to all diocesan bishops and printed in the religious and secular press at the beginning of September 1914:

By every line of thought which I have pursued I am led to the conclusion that I have been right in maintaining from the first that the position of an actual combatant in our Army is incompatible with the position of one who has sought and received Holy Orders. The whole idea which underlies and surrounds Ordination implies this.<sup>88</sup>

The Archbishop went on to stress that the clergyman's first obligation was to the ministry of the Church and that pastoral work at home should be considered an important contribution to the war effort. He referred to the work of army chaplains as a 'sacred opportunity' but insisted that 'the opportunities of helpful service open to an experienced parish priest may be greater than they have ever known'.

The idea of clergy serving as combatants was a very emotive and contentious one in 1914 and the issue was to remain controversial for the entire period of the war. There were calls for clerical enlistment in the press and a number of junior clergymen ignored Davidson's wishes and joined up. Those who argued for combatant service felt that the Church had to lead by example and could hardly support the war on one hand and ban her men from service on the other. It was also held that if the clergy shared the ordeal of combat with the common man that they could win him back for the Church. The case of the French clergy, who were conscripted like ordinary citizens, was often cited. Under the Military Law of 1889, French seminarians and virtually all junior clergy were compelled to undergo military service.<sup>89</sup> In total 32,699 French priests, monks, and seminarians were mobilised. Only 1500 of these served as non-combatant chaplains. Approximately half of the Catholic clergy who were mobilised served in the medical corps, but the rest fought as combat troops, some gaining commissions as officers.<sup>90</sup> To English commentators who witnessed French soldier-priests joining the colours in 1914 the opportunities for revival that might be brought about by soldier-priests in the British Army seemed too great to pass up. A typical letter representing this point of view was printed in the *Church Times* on 4 September; the writer had been in France and seen the clerical *poilus* of the French Army:

Those who witnessed, as I did, the whole-hearted enthusiasm and affection with which the Army and populace of France acclaimed

and welcomed these priests when travelling to join the colours in the early days of mobilization, must have felt that God in His mercy has given to this generation of priests in France an absolutely unique opportunity of winning back the men of the nation to their Church.

Here in England our political leaders are straining every nerve to arouse the nation to supply the need of men. We are told that the clergy should lend their aid. Undoubtedly they should. But of what value is precept without practice? I suggest that every deacon and priest who is of the right age, medically fit and unencumbered by family ties, should enlist as soon as possible ... not only would their characters be strengthened by the discipline of the life, and perhaps by 'active service', and their understanding be enlarged by contact with the realities of life, but also that they would have such opportunities of witnessing for Christ by their example amongst their fellow-soldiers that the final effect upon the Church of England might be incalculable.<sup>91</sup>

Again, there is the reference to 'opportunity', not just for the Church but also for the personal development of the priest himself. Yet judging by the responses to this letter and the general discourse in the religious press, it seems that many Anglicans were simply not comfortable with the idea of a priest taking life and agreed with the Church leadership. Those against the clerical bearing of arms repeatedly cited the obligation to the vows made in the sacrament of Holy Orders that Davidson had referred to.<sup>92</sup> Under Anglican Canon Law, any clergyman who sheds blood incurs the penalty of 'irregularity', and should be deemed incapable of administering the sacraments of the Church. As far the leadership was concerned a man could either be a soldier or a priest; he could not be both. This remained the hierarchical position for almost the entire duration of the war. Significantly, however, while Archbishop Davidson was very much against the idea of clergy bearing arms, he felt that penalising priests who insisted on enlisting against their bishops' wishes was unwise. Shortly after the outbreak of war the Bishop of Salisbury wrote to Lambeth to ask advice about a priest in his diocese who was intent on enlisting as a combatant. The Archbishop replied that while he should strongly advise the priest in question not to go through with the enlistment he warned Salisbury against calling for the priest's resignation, or any excessive punishment, if he went ahead and joined up anyway:

I am certain that to prohibit it in a formal sense with the consequence that he resigned his living and that you had in some way to set on

such resignation would not be in accord with public opinion, and what is more important, I think it would be unfair in itself ... Do not let it get in to the position of a romantic case in which a brave man is thwarted in his laudable desire by stupid ecclesiastical rules.<sup>93</sup>

Thus while he was strongly opposed to clergy serving as combatants, Davidson made it clear that in order to avoid negative publicity the leadership should not be too firm in their stance on the issue.

For the ordinary Church of England clergyman, the obvious compromise between remaining at his post as a civilian cleric and serving as a soldier was to apply for a military chaplaincy. Becoming a chaplain meant that a priest or minister could 'do his bit' in the armed forces without actually bearing arms and also gain the invaluable pastoral experience of working with men from all walks of life and social strata. The kind of work a chaplain did was viewed, at least by churchgoing Anglicans, as noble, challenging, and invigorating. Chaplains, of all denominations, had acquitted themselves reasonably well in the South African War and men like George Smith, the padre who distributed ammunition at Rorke's Drift, and Robert Brindle, the Catholic chaplain who was revered in the colonial expeditionary forces of the 1880s, were still remembered in 1914.<sup>94</sup> In addition, newspaper reports tended to give the impression that British soldiers were religiously motivated and in need of clergymen. In late September the *Times* declared, 'Never have British soldiers faced a sterner trial with more splendid courage and determination; rarely since the days of the Covenanters have our troops been so religious minded'.<sup>95</sup> Reports from regular army chaplains already at the front seemed to support this perception of religious devotion in the BEF. In mid-October the *Morning Post* printed a letter from a Church of England chaplain serving in France:

It is difficult to send letters as there is a rigid censorship, and, moreover it is not easy to write when one is with a quick moving unit. I have been able to do a fair amount of spiritual work. It is remarkable how at such times as this men look for it. If ever human nature showed that at bottom the consciousness of God is in it, it is at times like this when men cannot tell what the day will bring. I have been able to hold Communion, and wish you could see the officers and men in big circles, not such as one sees in time of peace, but in hundreds. And round the camp fires where they can be lighted, we hold evening service and sing hymns.<sup>96</sup>

Ernest Crosse, a graduate of Balliol College, Oxford, was ordained in 1913 and was working as assistant chaplain to Marlborough College when the war broke out. He received a temporary commission as an army chaplain in 1915 and served with distinction on the Western Front. Writing in 1919, he recalled the atmosphere in which so many junior Anglican clergymen had applied for commissions in the early stages of the war:

The war was begun by Great Britain in a spirit of idealism which was not surpassed even by the Americans in the last year of it, and in the autumn of 1914 many people thought there was a real possibility of a great spiritual revival among the manhood of the nation. Many thought that the place where this would first manifest itself would be the field of battle. The challenge laid down by Germany was interpreted as a definite call to decide between God and the Devil ... The various outrages reported to have been committed by the Germans in Belgium, particularly the use of gas in 1915, all served to enhance this spirit. We were to be an army of crusaders, and, as was only natural under the circumstances, clergy in hundreds vied with one another for the privilege of ministering to these knight-errants.<sup>97</sup>

In the opening months of the war the religious press fuelled the belief that the soldiers who would soon be in the firing line, or were already there, were particularly open to the forces of revival. In September and October 1914 the *Church Times* printed a series of letters and editorials under the heading 'The Spiritual Needs of the Army' that gave the impression that the thousands of new recruits that were then forming the new armies were crying out for religious ministrations but that it was not being adequately provided. During the same period editorials in *The Record*, a far more evangelical weekly, depicted the army as a great mission field and insisted that a bible revival was occurring among British troops.<sup>98</sup>

According to the *Official Report of the Army Council* of 1913, in the pre-war regular army an estimated 70 per cent of troops belonged to the Church of England, while 15 per cent were Roman Catholic, 7 per cent Presbyterians, 4 per cent Wesleyans, 2 per cent Baptists and Congregationalists and the remaining 4 per cent other Protestants and Jews.<sup>99</sup> It was predicted that the figures for the new armies would be about the same. Potentially, two out of every three new recruits would require the services of an Anglican clergyman and reports suggested that there was a particular demand for Anglican chaplains. In an editorial

printed on 5 October, under the heading 'New and Great Religious Opportunity', *The Standard* urged the Church to rise to the occasion and provide clergy to minister to the troops:

The Church needs rousing to the greatness of the religious opportunity which now confronts her under circumstances which may never recur. There is a crying need for Church ministrations to the immense number of men joining the Territorial Army and the New Army. When the Bishop of London went into camp he found 15,000 men with no chaplain, and his first church parade was of 5000 men. Even now in the London Division only two Church chaplains are provided for each camp of 5000 men, besides a Roman Catholic and a Wesleyan.<sup>100</sup>

The religious ministration of British soldiers was historically the responsibility of the Army Chaplains' Department. And while no branch of the British Army was adequately prepared for a major war in 1914, the Chaplains' Department found it particularly difficult to respond to the demands of a rapidly expanding citizen army. The Chaplain-General, John Taylor-Smith, was responsible for dealing with all new appointments and postings of chaplains and, in theory, ensuring that all recruits had their religious needs adequately provided for. At the outbreak of war there were 117 chaplains in the army, 89 of whom were Anglican. By 10 August, 600 Anglican clergymen had applied either to their bishops or directly to the War Office for temporary or permanent positions as chaplains. By the end of October the figure had doubled.<sup>101</sup> Yet only a very small percentage of these candidates actually succeeded in gaining a commission and the rejected clergymen often found it difficult to understand the attitudes of their superiors.

### **The evolution of the Army Chaplains' Department**

A major obstacle to gaining entry to the army for would-be chaplains was the fact that, to begin with, the army did not seem to want them. As noted above, the war, when it came, had caught the Army Chaplains' Department, like most other branches of the War Office, very much unawares. No chaplain featured on any mobilisation table except on the 3rd Echelon of GHQ where there appeared a Principal Chaplain and a clerk. There was no establishment of chaplains for divisions, nor for attachment to hospitals or to bases. No provision had been laid down for their rations, accommodation or any other

essential need.<sup>102</sup> When the BEF crossed over to France Dr J. M. Simms, an Irish Presbyterian chaplain, being the senior active service chaplain in the department, was appointed Principal Chaplain and placed in charge of all BEF padres while remaining subordinate to the Chaplain-General who was based at the War Office in Whitehall. Sixty-five regular chaplains went with Simms, including Ewen Macpherson, the senior Anglican chaplain on active service. These clergymen made up the bulk of a department that, in the summer of 1914, consisted of just 117 chaplains. Of these, 89 were Anglican, 17 Roman Catholic and 11 Presbyterian.<sup>103</sup> No other denomination was officially provided for. The hectic conditions that prevailed during the initial war of movement in France and Belgium meant that the Adjutant-General had little time to think about the circumstances of the smallest department in the army and the chaplains on active service had to cope as best they could.<sup>104</sup> For the most part, they met with very mixed success, the progress they made generally being directly related to the good will of divisional commanders.<sup>105</sup>

With the chaplains that were already attached to the BEF being so poorly provided for in the field, the Army Chaplains' Department was reluctant to take on many more new chaplains before conditions improved, even though there was clearly a demand for them. New chaplains were appointed from the outset, but in relatively small numbers considering the rapid expansion of the army in the first year of the war. There was also a perception, felt quite acutely in certain quarters, that the Department displayed a sectarian bias when granting temporary commissions. Some Anglo-Catholics were convinced that their clergy were being discriminated against. As Chaplain-General, Bishop John Taylor-Smith was responsible for all new appointments. He was a staunchly evangelical Anglican who had worked as a missionary and served as Bishop of Sierra Leone before joining the army, and the High-Church press insisted that he was deliberately appointing Low-Churchmen and that he had a particular bias in favour of Irish Evangelicals. Commentators in papers like the *Church Times* and the *Church Family Newspaper* indignantly criticised what they saw as a blatantly sectarian attitude at a time when it was felt that British people should be showing a united front. The Archbishop of Canterbury also received complaints about Taylor-Smith, most notably from the Bishop Talbot of Winchester, whose sons Neville and Edward were serving as chaplains at the front. Davidson at first felt quite sure that talk of a sectarian bias was exaggerated and unhelpful and that the Chaplain-General was making the best of bad situation. On 6 December, however,

he received a letter through his own resident chaplain, J. V. Macmillan, from Rev. Conybeare, Archdeacon of Nottingham:

My curate Maclean is just back from the front, wounded slightly. He got a commission at the outbreak of the war. The question of whether he should have gone is not what I want to write about. He has had probably a unique opportunity of judging what is going on in the firing line having been for ten weeks on end in the forefront of the battle. His experiences are amazing. But what saddened him is the absence of our Chaplains. None in the trenches – that may be unavoidable, but none in the dressing stations behind the firing line, and none in the receiving stations. Men are dying by hundreds there ... The base hospitals seem well cared for, but the Church is wanted at the Front, and is losing a wonderful opportunity. He says that the officers feel it very deeply.<sup>106</sup>

Davidson replied on the 9th expressing his distress at the inadequate provision of chaplains and giving his impressions on Taylor-Smith's handling of the situation:

I am really distressed by the account you give about the lack of adequate provision of Chaplains in some parts of our fighting line ... I shrink from bombarding the Chaplain-General again about it, for I write to him about one difficulty or another almost every day, and I am certain that he is doing his best. I believe the difficulty, where it does exist, is *due to the unwillingness of the War Office authorities to send non-combatants to the fighting line* with all the addition to the cost and trouble of transport and supply.<sup>107</sup>

The War Office, it seems, was at fault. This is probably a fair assessment. The pre-war Chaplains' Department was extremely small and Taylor-Smith's responsibilities were far less onerous. Yet in the autumn of 1914 the Chaplain-General was faced with the daunting task of adapting this small, traditional department to the needs of an army that was growing rapidly and would soon be dominated not by professional soldiers but by citizens-in-uniform. Under such circumstances it would be unsurprising if Taylor-Smith initially favoured the type of candidate the army was used to. He also frankly admitted that, in 1914 and 1915, he was more inclined to select men who were likely to remain in the army when hostilities ceased and thus sought permanent commissions.<sup>108</sup> Michael Snape and Alan Robinson have both argued quite persuasively that

Taylor-Smith had little sympathy for Anglo-Catholicism or the clergy who represented it.<sup>109</sup> The few contemporary accounts of interviews Anglican candidates for chaplaincies had with the Chaplain-General indicate, however, that he made no overt reference to sectional loyalties or displayed any obvious sense of bias.<sup>110</sup> While there may have been some partiality displayed in 1914, moreover, the statistical evidence for the entire period of the war reveals a strong presence of Anglo-Catholic chaplains in the BEF.<sup>111</sup> Writing on the occasion of Taylor-Smith's death in 1938, Rabbi Michael Adler, the first Jewish chaplain to gain a commission, insisted that the Chaplain-General had been most welcoming and kind to him when he joined the Department in 1914. 'All the Jewish Chaplains', he wrote 'retain a warm affection for his memory as a man of exalted spiritual character, who knew no difference of creed, but inspired all under his command with enthusiasm for their work'.<sup>112</sup> Yet despite his defence of Taylor-Smith, Davidson felt compelled to take him to task on the issue of the supply of chaplains when he wrote to him in February 1915. He referred to a recent bishops' meeting at which delegates had aired grave concerns about the management of religious ministrations in the BEF:

One Bishop after another was able to produce letters from men well known to themselves, writing of course quite unofficially and privately, but giving keen expression to their sense of lack and disappointment. There are officers who have been out for many weeks and have never been able to obtain religious ministration of any kind. Some of the young fellows are literally hungering for it ... Again, there is no anxiety on the part of those who have written to affix blame to anybody at home: they are simply lamenting the facts as they are, and as I heard these successive testimonials I could not help remembering how you have yourself told me that you feel that the supply of Church of England Chaplains is quite insufficient, not for lack of good men ready to serve, but for lack of sanction to their appointment.<sup>113</sup>

Davidson was quite obviously concerned about the shortage of chaplains and disturbed by the reports he was receiving from the front. He correctly identified the source of the problem as a reluctance on the part of the military authorities to sanction appointments. The War Office was initially slow to allow for an increase in the supply of non-combatant officers, each of whom had to be provided with a servant, a horse, a groom, and space for extra baggage, not to mention basic food and shelter, but none of whom would actually be doing any shooting. The



military authorities would later come to recognise the value of a padre's presence from the point of view of morale, but in the war of movement of August, September, and October of 1914 chaplains were seen as something of an unaffordable luxury whose numbers were best kept to a minimum. That their administration was not viewed as a priority at this stage in the conflict was something that chaplains were aware of as late as the early summer of 1915. Bishop Furse of Pretoria spent four weeks touring the area held by the BEF in June and found that 'the feeling amongst Army Chaplains ... is that they have no one to back them, that the organization of their Department is a by-word in the Army, that they have no one to give them a helping hand, and that nobody cares, and from what I myself have seen I believe there is a great deal to justify this feeling'.<sup>114</sup>

This somewhat neglectful attitude towards chaplains had already begun to change after the emergence of trench warfare in late autumn 1914 and in response to subtle, polite but unrelenting pressure for an increase in establishment, both from the Chaplain's Department itself and from the Anglican hierarchy. With the stagnation of the war of movement and the approach of winter in 1914 the Adjutant-General, Sir Nevil Macready, feeling that the long-term morale of British troops would now become a more pressing issue, decided that the time had come to make proper provision on a definite establishment for army chaplains. The Principal Chaplain, Dr Simms, and the senior Anglican and Roman Catholic chaplains were summoned to GHQ where Macready interviewed them and explained his plans. The Principal Chaplain was to have his headquarters, to begin with, at the Base at Rouen, though in May 1915 it was moved to GHQ 1st Echelon at St Omer. The Senior Chaplains of the other two main denominations, Ewen Macpherson (Anglican) and Fr William Keatinge (Roman Catholic), who came out with field ambulances, were to be stationed on the lines of communications and were to act in positions advisory to the Principal Chaplain.<sup>115</sup> By March 1915 Sir John French had set up a committee at GHQ to look into the chaplains question and by the start of the summer the Chaplain-General had been officially allowed to increase the numbers of commissions he granted to civilian clergymen.<sup>116</sup> The establishment was now increased to seven Anglican chaplains per Division.

An important conference on the issue of army chaplaincy was held at Lambeth Palace in mid-July. The delegates and speakers included the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, the Bishops of London, Southwark and Southwell, the Chaplain-General, and, representing the War Office, Sir Reginald Brade. When he spoke, Brade gave a clear statement of the

War Office's position and was quite candid about the original tendency to limit the numbers of non-combatants attached to the BEF. The minutes of the conference summarise his contribution as follows:

As to the numbers, the War Office really from the first contemplated an 'Army on the move', and the idea at the beginning was to cut down non-combatants to the lowest possible figure. When the Army was brought to a stand still, the situation became one of an army in a garrison. But still it is of the 'army on the move' that the War Office has to think. He thinks that probably now the numbers of chaplains agreed to at the Conference which the Bishop of London held at the front are really here, i.e. 7 chaplains to a Division. But there may be some confusion as to their placing, so that as many of them as might be are not actually near the firing line. The War Office would be quite willing to reconsider the question of one chaplain to a Battalion, only they will have to keep in view this question of not having too many non-combatants when the Army begins to move. However, he and the Chaplain-General would go over the ground again.<sup>117</sup>

The minutes of the conference give the impression that a genuinely cordial relationship existed between the War Office and the Anglican leadership. Both parties accepted that their interests would not always coincide but were still willing to co-operate as much as possible. It was thus decided at the conference that a special advisory committee should be set up to oversee matters relating to Anglican Chaplains at home and abroad and to advise the Chaplain-General on any difficulties that arose. For the sake of balance the five-man committee was to have two members nominated by Randall Davidson and three nominated by Lord Kitchener. When the committee began meeting in September its members were Lord Salisbury, Sir Reginald Brade and Bishop Talbot of Winchester (nominated by Kitchener), and Bishop Drury of Ripon and Lord Grenfell (nominated by Davidson).<sup>118</sup> In a letter written to Archbishop Lang of York shortly after the conference, Davidson outlined what function he hoped the men on the Committee would serve:

They are to be the means whereby we can press upon the War Office, even troublesomely if need be, what we outside in the Church's life feel as to requirements about Chaplains and other things. They are not an executive body on whom will rest the duty of practical or administrative action, but they are to be regarded as representing the Church and bringing home to the War Office the Church's wishes

and criticisms. The Chaplain General will I think honestly welcome this, and my own belief is that if they act with discretion they can do a great deal more than might theoretically seem possible.<sup>119</sup>

The other major issue discussed at the conference was the perceived need for a properly appointed Anglican bishop who could take charge of Anglican padres serving with the BEF. There was a strong insistence on the part of Anglican chaplains that because the British section of the front was as large and populous as a good-sized diocese it needed the equivalent of a diocesan bishop who could provide counsel and encouragement for chaplains and be on hand to perform Confirmation ceremonies. It was also felt that the figure responsible for the administration of the Anglican chaplains serving in France and Belgium should himself be Anglican, whereas the Principal Chaplain, and overall director of the BEF chaplains, remained a Presbyterian purely for reasons of seniority. The main complaints levelled at Simms by Anglican chaplains were that, as a northern Irish clergyman with a generally 'narrow minded outlook', he was unsuited to the job of directing and counselling several hundred Anglican chaplains. It was further claimed that he was unfamiliar with chaplains' work because he never visited the chaplains and that he was constantly moving padres from one brigade to another, or from front to rear, with little apparent regard for the work they were engaged in. Relations between himself and Macpherson, then the most senior Anglican chaplain in France, while 'outwardly polite' were said to be actually 'most difficult'.<sup>120</sup>

The most obviously qualified candidate for the position was the Bishop of Khartoum, Llewellyn Henry Gwynne, who was then serving as a 4th class chaplain near Rouen.<sup>121</sup> He was reasonably well-known, popular, and experienced both as a chaplain and with troops generally from his days in Khartoum. He was also closely associated with 'Kitchener of Khartoum' and this association did little to harm his prospects of promotion. His appointment as Deputy Chaplain-General was announced the day after the conference. This did not mean that he 'supplanted' Taylor-Smith as has been suggested elsewhere.<sup>122</sup> Rather it meant that he became the Chaplain-General's most senior representative in the BEF.<sup>123</sup> Dr Simms remained Principal Chaplain to the Forces and in charge of all non-Anglican chaplains on active service but he was now technically subordinate to Gwynne. This was despite his 30 years in the army, a significant period of service when compared with Gwynne's nine months. Gwynne's promotion over the more senior Simms caused some controversy in the Scottish Presbyterian press where accusations

of sectarianism were made against the War Office and the Church of England,<sup>124</sup> but for Anglican padres it was a vast improvement on the old system. They now had a sympathetic and competent chief-administrator who also acted as their diocesan bishop and pastoral guide, their numbers were steadily increasing, and an advisory committee had been set up to represent their cause at the highest levels of military power.

Alan Wilkinson has suggested that while the fact that John Taylor-Smith was Chaplain-General during the period of the war was 'tragic' from the Church's point of view, Gwynne's presence in France acted as a much-needed counter. Gwynne was also an evangelical missionary bishop but, unlike Taylor-Smith, he was a liberal Evangelical who, according to Wilkinson, had 'a large pastoral heart'.<sup>125</sup> He was certainly a man of considerable energy and charisma who appears to have been generally liked. Julian Bickersteth, a graduate of Christ Church, Oxford, was working as schoolmaster in Australia when war broke out. In 1915 he gained a temporary commission as a chaplain and spent the remainder of war on the Western Front. He was an intelligent and capable, if somewhat conservative, young clergyman who served with distinction. Shortly after his arrival in France he presented himself at the Headquarters of the Chaplains' Department at St Omer to receive instructions. He was clearly impressed by Bishop Gwynne:

The Bishop [he wrote] could not have been pleasanter. He explained a good deal about the work to be done and how he thought it best to attempt it, and obviously wished to be considered not just a superior officer, but a real Father-in-God; it will not be difficult to feel that he is indeed the latter. We had three or four minutes prayer together.<sup>126</sup>

Tom Pym, a young Anglican chaplain who volunteered in 1914 and was to become a prominent figure in Anglican circles during and immediately after the war, enjoyed a very close relationship with Gwynne and referred to him as that 'wise old saint'.<sup>127</sup> Frank Russell Barry, a senior chaplain attached to the BEF and author of one of the more readable and illuminating of the Anglican chaplains' memoirs, also referred to Gwynne in effusively glowing terms. He felt that, given the demands of the ministry, many BEF chaplains would have 'gone under' without the commanding spiritual guidance and care of 'the great and saintly Bishop Gwynne'.<sup>128</sup> Not the least of Gwynne's supporters was Randall Davidson. The Archbishop enjoyed a good working relationship with the Deputy Chaplain-General and their correspondence suggests that

*Table 1.1* Deployment of British Army Chaplains on the Western Front, 11 November 1918<sup>131</sup>

Denomination	Number
Anglican	878
Roman Catholic	389
Presbyterian	161
Wesleyan	127
United Board	126
Welsh Calvinist	5
Jewish	8
Salvation Army	4
Total	1698

they held each other in some esteem. Davidson certainly found it easier to communicate with Gwynne than with Taylor-Smith, who he viewed as 'a curious man'.<sup>129</sup> When he visited the front in 1916, the Archbishop was struck by the respect and admiration Gwynne commanded at the highest levels in the BEF 'Both Haig and Fowke' he wrote in his diary, 'spoke in terms of real affection about Bishop Gwynne, and the tact and vigour of his administrative work. It is remarkable how Gwynne's simple goodness has evidently been his passport to the affection of these people, while his efficiency wins their respect'.<sup>130</sup>

Over the course of the war the administrative organisation of the Army Chaplains' Department was skillfully adapted to the perceived needs of a vast citizen army and the number, and denomination, of chaplains increased correspondingly. By the Armistice, as Table 1.1 indicates, the confessional make-up and size of the BEF chaplaincy bore little relation to the group of just over five dozen Anglican, Catholic, and Presbyterian padres that had accompanied the force to France in the 1914. Four years of war had seen the Department transform into an organisation that genuinely reflected the colourful range of British faiths.

The United Board was comprised of padres representing the Baptist, Congregationalist, United Methodist, and Primitive Methodist churches.

## Conclusion

When the European war erupted in 1914, the leadership of the Church of England, the mother church of the worldwide Anglican Communion, strongly and publicly supported the government decision to intervene. Over the course of the following 16 months, civilian clergy across the

UK became widely, and often zealously, involved in military recruitment. In addition, a number of Anglican commentators, encouraged by early indications of a great return to the churches, interpreted the war in an opportunistic light. An opportunity, it was argued, was presented to the clergy to guide soldiers and civilians at a time when, due to the extraordinary circumstances of war, they would be especially open to spiritual guidance and religious ministrations.

Despite their vocal support for the war, however, Anglican bishops were officially united in their opposition to clergymen volunteering for combatant service, and while Archbishop Davidson clearly wanted younger clergy to gain commissions as chaplains, he also initially displayed a certain ambivalence regarding the value of clergy-in-uniform. In September 1914 he acknowledged the need for chaplains in an ever-expanding citizen army but also placed a strong emphasis on the value of pastoral work on the home front and warned civilian clergymen to resist the 'glamour' of the call to military chaplaincy and to focus instead on 'the more prosaic but not less vital work to which he has been solemnly accredited at home'.<sup>132</sup> By the autumn of 1915, after over a year of war, his attitude had clearly changed. In a letter to his close friend, the Bishop of Winchester, he emphasised the paramount importance of chaplains' work and referred to the 'opportunities' to be gained for clergy working and living with soldiers. This time there was no ambivalence or equivocation:

Personally I think that, short of leaving our really important parishes untended, we ought to be prepared to make almost any sacrifice in order to secure first rate Chaplains both in England and abroad. The opportunity is absolutely unique.<sup>133</sup>

# 2

## A Portrait of the Edwardian Clergy

A study conducted by David Morgan in 1963 revealed that while a public school education was common in the junior ministry of the pre-war Church of England, it was practically a requirement for ordination as a bishop. Of the 50 bishops consecrated between 1900 and 1919, 35 attended public schools and five were privately educated. Forty-one of these future church leaders went on to take degrees at either Oxford or Cambridge and, until the end of the 1950s, the proportion of Anglican diocesan bishops who graduated from an Oxbridge college never fell below 90 per cent. Morgan's study also highlights a significant link between Church of England bishops and the secular social elites. Of 31 bishops surveyed for the year 1900, no fewer than 29 were related, either by birth or by marriage, to the landed gentry or peerage.<sup>1</sup> Some of the most senior figures in the Church were also closely associated with the political and military figures that conducted the war. The Bishop of Winchester was the brother-in-law of General Sir Neville Lyttleton. Archbishop Davidson, an old Harrovian and graduate of Trinity College, Oxford, prided himself on being personally acquainted with all seven prime ministers who served during his primacy and was particularly close to Herbert Asquith. The viscount and Liberal Peer, Lord Bryce, was a close friend of Davidson and of the Talbots. The Bishop of London was connected through marriage to the aristocracy and claimed personal friendship with General French and Admiral Jellicoe.<sup>2</sup> It can thus be said with a degree of certainty that the men who made up the Anglican leadership during the war were members of a socially privileged elite that strongly identified with the established state institutions. But what of the junior clergy, and specifically those clergymen who served as chaplains during the war? Did they come from similarly elite backgrounds?

The vast amount of qualitative evidence in the shape of personal narratives, memoirs, and biographies sheds considerable light on the political and social outlooks, the values, and the class backgrounds of the clergymen who joined the Army Chaplains' Department between 1914 and 1918. But given that over 3000 Anglican chaplains saw service of some kind during the war, it is difficult to draw a definitive picture using such subjective material alone. There are also more than 1500 War Office files on chaplains of all denominations housed in the National Archives at Kew. Some of the files contain interesting personal histories, but most of them disclose no more than the scantest detail about the men they concern – name, rank, date of joining the Department, date of death, and occasional queries about pay – and often even the most basic of social particulars, such as age, birthplace, marital status, and religious denomination, are missing. The Archives of the Museum of Army Chaplaincy at Amport House in Hampshire contain the original interview cards of many chaplains who were given temporary commissions during the war, but these cards often give even less personal information than the National Archive files. Crockford's Clerical Directory contains information on almost all the licensed Anglican clergy in any given year and constitutes an important source for clerical history. First published in 1868, the directory was in its fiftieth edition in 1919 and the clergy list contained approximately 35,000 names. The full subtitle of the directory is *A Statistical Book of Reference for Facts relating to the Clergy and the Church*. It differs from conventional directories in that it gives not only the name and address of each clergyman but also provides a limited but useful amount of biographical information. Importantly, in this context, the third level institution attended by each priest is listed, as are the years of his ordinations as deacon and priest and any positions he has held since ordination. Additionally, if an individual clergyman served as a temporary chaplain during the war, this is indicated by the letters TCF (Temporary Chaplain to the Forces) and a date. If the chaplain won a military award this is also usually, although not always, recorded. What Crockford's lacks, however, is any information relating to the theatre of war in which the chaplain served or any precise indication of his age. In order, then, to gain a more comprehensive picture of the social backgrounds and service records of a representative group of BEF chaplains, a survey of the files contained in the papers of the Deputy Chaplain-General, Llewellyn H. Gwynne, was conducted.

Towards the end of 1916<sup>3</sup> Bishop Gwynne began compiling a series of files on the chaplains serving under him, entering them into a large,



bound war-book. The completed book, which is now housed in the Church Missionary Society Archives at the University of Birmingham, contains the files of over 720 Anglican chaplains who served in France and Flanders between 1914 and 1918. Some of the files give little more than the name of the chaplain and the unit, or units, to which he was attached but most entries contain a certain amount of pre-service biographical information along with comments relating to individual performance as a padre. In February 1916 the number of Anglican chaplains serving on the Western Front numbered 460.<sup>4</sup> By the Armistice, as we have seen, the figure had reached 878.<sup>5</sup> Wastage in the form of death, injury, illness, capture, and retirement, and the replacements for these losses notwithstanding, the 723 chaplains in Gwynne's book can be considered a more than reasonably representative group. By examining these files in conjunction with the personal data contained in Crockford's Clerical Directory, the uneven data in the War Office files, and the wealth of personal narrative material that survives from the period, one can gain a nuanced insight into the wartime experience and, importantly, war-performance or record, of precisely the group that Robert Graves and others criticised so strongly. The service information will be looked at in more depth in Chapters 3 and 4. This chapter will present the data derived from the survey that relates to the chaplains' educational backgrounds and examine its social implications in order to determine the type of men who made up the Anglican military chaplaincy during the war. Before proceeding to look at the overall patterns that emerge from the survey, however, pre-war conditions and attitudes regarding the training of Anglican clergy must be examined.

### **Education and training**

The 1880s were a kind of vocational hey-day for the Church of England. The number of newly ordained priests never fell below an annual figure of 735 and the year 1886 saw 814 ordinations, the highest number recorded since the sixteenth century. As the century drew to a close, however, the annual figures began to fall slightly but steadily with 720 ordinations in 1895, 650 in 1900, reaching an unprecedented low of 569 in 1901.<sup>6</sup> This decrease has been attributed to the fact that the Anglican clergy had traditionally been made up of the sons of the landed gentry and professionals – the upper and upper middle classes. The clerical profession was still viewed as a very acceptable area for men from this background to work in but it was increasingly rivalled by opportunities of civil and military service in an expanding empire, and by the world

of commerce, fields that had traditionally been looked down upon by the professional and landed classes.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, from a strictly professional perspective, life as a junior clergyman was not financially rewarding. Bishops, depending on the 'See' to which they were appointed, could command huge salaries. The Archbishop of Canterbury, as we have seen, was particularly well rewarded financially, yet he was not the richest clergyman in the country. In the 'phenomenally wealthy' diocese of Durham, the Bishop had been commanding an annual income of over £28,000 since the 1830s.<sup>8</sup> At the other end of the clerical chain of command, however, incomes could be extremely low and the impecunious curate was quite a common figure in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Church.<sup>9</sup> Yet the Church continued to attract men from the more privileged sections of British society. Writing in 1899 Anthony Deane, curate at Gnosall, Staffordshire, and a graduate of Clare College, Cambridge, deplored the decrease in vocations and blamed it, in part, on paltry clerical stipends. Deane insisted, however, that, on the plus side, 'The Church was one of three or four professions which a gentleman could enter without forfeiting his self-respect'.<sup>10</sup>

This gradual decrease in ordinations coincided with the advent of improved educational opportunities for young men from the lower and lower-middle social strata who had received full secondary education but for whom three years at a university were financially out of the question. Within this group were men with strongly Christian beliefs who were interested in pursuing a career in the Anglican priesthood.<sup>11</sup> The goal of ordination was difficult, but not impossible, for such men to attain. Ordinands were ideally expected to have a university degree, although exceptions were certainly made to this rule in the decades before the war.<sup>12</sup> They were also increasingly advised by their bishops to undergo some form of theological training at a recognised post-graduate theological college, the fees for which ranged between £70 and £170 per annum. This optimum level of training could cost somewhere in the region of £1000 per student, no small sum in the early 1900s.<sup>13</sup> Universities did offer a certain number of scholarships, exhibitions, and prizes to assist financially less well-off school-leavers, but this kind of funding was limited to a small number of particularly bright students and, in any case, was generally not enough to cover the full cost of third-level education. The possession of a university degree, however, while certainly preferable, was not yet a mandatory requirement for ordination and poorer candidates could pass the General Ordination Exam and enter the priesthood provided they spent one or two years at a theological college. In some cases, candidates who had received

no formal training were ordained on passing the exam but those who entered the priesthood with this minimum level of training remained very small in number.

Certain theological colleges were known to assist ordination candidates financially despite often being short of funding themselves. The College of the Resurrection at Mirfield was founded in 1903 with the expressed intention of providing theological training for men 'to whom other avenues to the priesthood' were not open. The college established a link with Leeds University, where students generally took an Arts degree before returning to the College for one or two years of theological training. None of the students who took courses at the college, or through its programme at Leeds, were expected to make any form of payment before ordination. Once ordained, Mirfield alumni were expected to repay the Mirfield Community for their education at the rate of £50 per annum over five or six years.<sup>14</sup> The Community of the Resurrection had been founded by Charles Gore in Oxford in 1892, and always maintained a strong link with the University. Several members of the community, and graduates of the college, served as army chaplains during the war. Edward Talbot, graduate of Christ Church, Oxford, and son of the Bishop of Winchester served for over four years as a chaplain on the Western Front before returning to become head of the Community of the Resurrection. Mildenhall College, founded by the Society of the Sacred Mission in 1897, had an ethos that was similar to that of Mirfield. At the Church Conference in 1902, Rev. A. Davenport Kelly, the vice-principal of the House of the Sacred Mission, described the college as offering 'a free open door to men in all classes of society'.<sup>15</sup> The College moved to Kelham Hall in 1903 and was henceforth known as Kelham. Mirfield and Kelham were commendably progressive in their liberal ethos and commitment to students without private means. There were no other colleges quite like them, however, and their ability to make changes in the social composition of the clergy was limited. If a student could not secure assistance from a college or university there were some charities that sponsored education and a diocese might occasionally support a man if he agreed to serve his ministry locally. But again, this kind of assistance was rare and the number of students who benefited from it remained small. The early 1900s also saw increasing numbers of ordination candidates who could afford university education but who opted to take degrees at the new University Colleges in London, Leeds, Manchester, and Liverpool instead of going to the traditional seats of learning at Oxford, Cambridge, Durham, or Dublin. The emergence of these new types of ordinands made for an Anglican

priesthood in which the clergy often had quite disparate levels of education and experiences of training.

The gradual decrease in candidates and the education question were matters of some concern for the Church of England leadership and both issues were much talked about in Anglican circles in the early years of the last century. In May 1904 the notion that all training for the priesthood should be standardised and that university and postgraduate qualifications be made prerequisites for ordination, was mooted in the Upper House of the Convocation of Canterbury. In July of the same year the Lower House of Canterbury made the following resolution:

In view of the urgent need of duly qualified candidates for Holy Orders, and the gradual decrease in the number of those who present themselves, it is expedient that in every diocese an organisation should be established under the direction of the Bishop for the purpose of bringing before young men the needs of the Church in this respect, of making enquiries for suitable candidates, and *of providing assistance to those whose means are insufficient to procure necessary training*.<sup>16</sup>

The Lower House of York made a similar resolution the following year. These suggestions became official in 1909 when the Upper House of Canterbury heard from a committee of bishops that had been set up to investigate the issue of 'Qualifications of candidates for Holy Orders' and made a number of important recommendations. Firstly, it was decided that, as of January 1917, candidates for Holy Orders would be required to possess a degree from a recognised university or college. It was further agreed that after the same date candidates would also be required to have received at least one year's theological training at a recognised theological college, or under some authorised supervision. Importantly, the House accepted that making these stipulations official would render training for the priesthood more financially demanding for the less well off.<sup>17</sup> It was accordingly decided that an Ordination Candidates Council and Fund be established in every diocese. Due to the circumstances of the war, however, 1917 saw a record low number of ordinands and the rules did not come into effect until 1919, by which time a new and more imaginative approach to the training of clergy was in place.<sup>18</sup>

The Church seemed to be expressing a desire to counter the decrease in fresh ordinands by opening up the priesthood to members of the less-privileged classes but at the same time insisting that all priests receive a

uniformly high standard of education. This was, in part, an attempt to counter the perceived absence of professionalism among the Anglican clergy. If a devout young Anglican took a degree in theology, followed it up with a year in a good theological college, and then spent a year as a deacon in a parish with an active and conscientious vicar who could serve as a spiritual mentor, he had arguably received a good grounding for ordination and a life in the ministry. This was by no means always the route taken, however, and in terms of systematically ensuring that its clergy received good professional or vocational training, the pre-war Church had a poor record. During the war years debate on the issue of standardising training for the clergy continued and in 1917 an independent group of clergymen, including the well-known theologian Hastings Rashdall, compiled a report on clerical training for an organisation known as The Churchmen's Union. The report concluded that it was, 'unfortunately, no exaggeration to affirm that for his profession of Christian teacher the English ordinand is worse trained technically than the members of any other professional class in England. Certainly he is in most cases far less adequately trained than the ordinands of other Christian communions in Western Europe'.<sup>19</sup> The training for certain Roman Catholic orders was notoriously intense and Stewart Mews has argued that the academic standards of Anglican theological colleges 'compared poorly with [those] of the Free Churches, which had larger staffs and offered longer training'.<sup>20</sup> The absence of strict guidelines as to training, and the general lack of professionalism in the ministry, meant that the clergy who were to serve as chaplains during the war were often quite 'declericalised' as a group and possessed of few obvious qualifications to distinguish them from the well-to-do laity. Concerning the Edwardian clergy, Adrian Hastings has written,

Within the gentleman class the division between clergy and laity was a remarkably slight one ... [The clergy] were both declericalised by what they had and what they lacked: they had the common Oxbridge education, large houses, the style of a gentleman. What they largely lacked was professional training. The theological colleges were indeed now a reality which, in principle, the bishops expected ordinands to have attended (though compulsorily only from 1917), if often very briefly: one term could still be quite sufficient.<sup>21</sup>

Hastings's picture of the Oxbridge educated priest who lived in a big house and enjoyed the life of a gentleman by no means applied to all the clergy of the pre-war generation. There appears, however, to have

been a tradition in the Anglican ministry of favouring social grooming over professional training or spiritual vocation. This emphasis on 'gentlemanly amateurism' could lead to a perception of the Anglican clergy as often highly cultivated but ineffectual.<sup>22</sup>

While the Anglican priesthood was slowly becoming less exclusive in the period before the war, then, it was still dominated by men from socially privileged backgrounds with varying levels of professional training. This does not mean that the clergymen who became chaplains all emerged from wealthy, patrician families but rather that many of them, through their upbringing and education, were in more socially advantageous positions than most of their compatriots. Frank Russell Barry provides a good representative example. The son of a clergyman, he was born in 1890. While his father worked as a curate in Rochester and later in Surbiton, the family often had difficulty making ends meet. These straightened conditions persisted until Barry's father was appointed to a more comfortable country 'living' in Norwich. That he would be educated among the sons of the wealthy and privileged was never really in doubt, however, and at the age of twelve he won a scholarship to attend Bradfield College, a celebrated public school in West Berkshire. His school friends included two future RAF Air Marshals, a future Lord Admiral and a number of boys who went on to become prominent clergymen, including the future Dean of Windsor, Eric Hamilton. At Bradfield he sat the Oxford Open Scholarship exam and in 1908 he enrolled at Oriel College. He graduated in 1910 and by 1913 he had been elected to an Oriel fellowship. In 1915 he shelved a blooming academic career to take a temporary commission as an army chaplain.<sup>23</sup>

Barry's family was neither rich nor poor and his academic ability meant that his secondary and third-level education could be sponsored by scholarships. His upbringing and outlook as a young man, however, were clearly middle-class in character. Writing in the 1950s, he was quite candid about the exclusive nature of the ministry he entered and recalled a pre-war clergy that was made up of university graduates from comparatively comfortable backgrounds:

The Church had always tried to secure new graduates and before the 'new' universities were opened had only the ancient foundations to draw upon. The innovation of the nineteenth century was the emphasis on Public School and Oxbridge. Any candidate coming from a different background would have been regarded as an outsider ... There was then no University Grants Committee. There were no State or Country scholarships and no free secondary education, so

that, apart from the pioneer experiments of Mirfield and Kelham, there was no way for a poor man's son to get trained for the Ministry, nor if he did could he hope to receive more than a cheaply provided and second rate training; and that meant, in effect, that vocation to Holy Orders was conditioned by the income of the boy's father.<sup>24</sup>

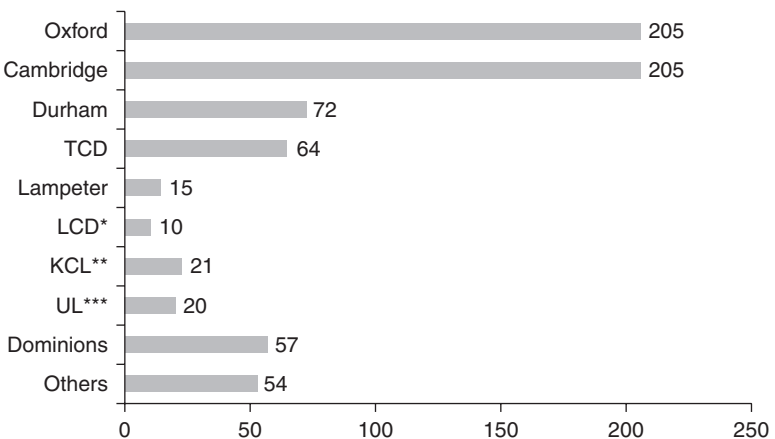
The pioneering nature of both Mirfield and Kelham, where there was less emphasis on social grooming, should not be overlooked. The level of training received by ordination candidates at these colleges was intense and often prolonged over a period of up to seven years. This was reflected in the type of priest they produced. One of the more well known graduates of Mirfield, John Groser, went on to make a very formidable chaplain in the BEF and to have a successful, although certainly controversial, pastoral career in the post-war Church. Groser was born on a mission station in Beverley, Australia in 1890. He was thus the same age as Frank Barry, although the formative experiences of the two men could not have been more different. Groser's father was an Anglican missionary who ministered to the cattle ranchers that lived in and around Beverley, which was then an isolated and very basic settlement. He spent much of his early adolescence working as a cattle hand, or 'Jackaroo', and by the time he arrived in England in 1905 he was poorly educated and ignorant of the ways of refined society.<sup>25</sup> He received some secondary education at Ellesmere School, and spent a total of six years with the Mirfield Fathers at the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield in Yorkshire, including one year at Leeds University. Groser was ordained in 1915 and became politically conscious and attracted to Christian socialism while working as a curate in the slum parish of All Souls, Newcastle. He gained a temporary commission as an army chaplain in 1916 and was posted to the Western Front where he impressed both officers and men with his strong, determined character. B. K. Cunningham, the former head of Farnham Theological College who ran the Army Chaplains' School at St Omer from 1917, found the young Groser 'a most interesting personality. A man of boundless courage ... Self-made but well-made'.<sup>26</sup>

Yet men from comparatively underprivileged backgrounds like Groser were still very much a rarity in a ministry that was dominated by graduates from the older universities. It should also be noted that the relatively small number of working- and lower-middle-class men who were ordained in the decades before the war tended to spend their clerical careers in working class parishes and often experienced difficulty when trying to gain professional advancement in the Church. Robert Lee has

demonstrated that while the University of Durham remained an elite institution, the diocese of Durham, in response to its rapidly growing working class population, increasingly accepted men from less privileged backgrounds as candidates for ordination in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Such men, however, ‘spent, on average, five and a half years longer in curacies than their elite colleagues’, and invariably worked in poorer parishes.<sup>27</sup> This suggests the existence of a strong class consciousness in the ministry that prevented clergy from poorer backgrounds receiving the same treatment as their middle- and upper-class colleagues.

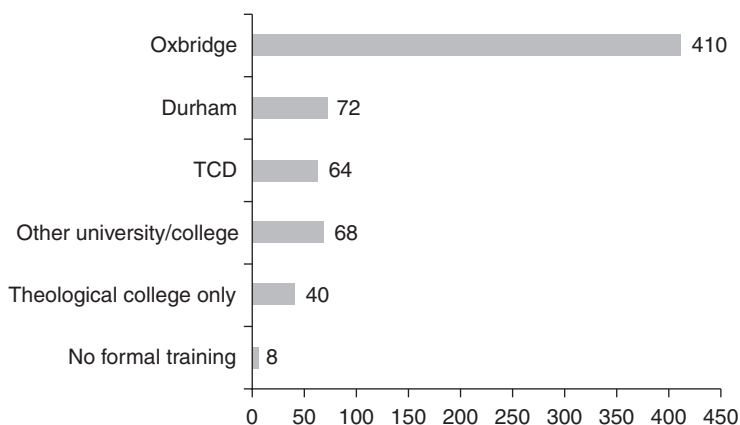
Thus, although the pre-war ministry was undergoing a process of gradual change, it remained socially exclusive. The task now is to see whether the data on the men who served as chaplains during the war reflects this picture of a largely exclusive, middle- and upper-class ministry or if it tells a different story.

Charts 2.1 and 2.2 below represent what is perhaps the most informative variable in the survey, the third level institution attended by the chaplain. The first chart covers the entire group, 723 chaplains, and divides them according to the university or college they attended. Any institution attended by fewer than five chaplains has been consigned to the category of ‘other’. The small number of chaplains who did not attend a third-level institution have also been included in this category, and all chaplains educated in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, or South Africa are listed under ‘Dominions’. The second chart covers only

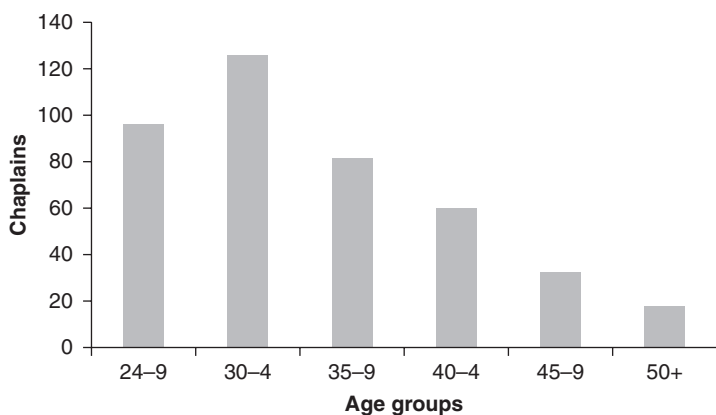


*Chart 2.1* Educational background of 723 chaplains in Bishop Gwynne’s files.  
\*London College of Divinity, \*\*King’s College London, \*\*\*University of London.





*Chart 2.2* Educational background of 662 chaplains in Bishop Gwynne's files ordained in Britain and Ireland.



*Chart 2.3* Sample age profile of 415 chaplains in Bishop Gwynne's files.

those chaplains, some 662 in total, who were ordained and educated in Britain and Ireland. Chart 2.3 provides a sample age profile using the 415 chaplains from the group for whom precise age at the time of service can be ascertained.

### **Pre-war Oxbridge and the Anglican Clergy**

The most immediately striking piece of data revealed by the first chart is that the overwhelming majority of the group took degrees at Oxford

or Cambridge, with Durham and Trinity College, Dublin, being the next two most commonly attended universities. These older institutions were not strictly closed to students from less privileged backgrounds; as we have seen, a certain number of such students were admitted on scholarships each year. It was quite common, however, for comparatively affluent public school boys to sit the scholarship exams and gain a sponsored education. Indeed, one of the criteria by which the standing of a public school was measured in the decades before the war was the number of Oxbridge scholarships its pupils were awarded in a given year.<sup>28</sup> Rugby School, for example, maintained a proud tradition of winning Balliol scholarships.<sup>29</sup>

In the decades before 1914, the students, and indeed the staff, of Oxford and Cambridge, and to perhaps a lesser extent, Durham and Trinity, lived in an atmosphere of exclusive privilege. Oxford and Cambridge, in particular, were the preserve of the sons of the affluent middle and upper classes – the future political, military, administrative, and religious leaders of the British Empire. Drawing on student journals published during the Victorian and Edwardian periods, Paul Deslandes has argued that Oxbridge undergraduates in the years before the war strongly identified themselves as belonging to a privileged and socially superior elite. Most undergraduates held a clearly middle-class worldview and, with the exception of the servants who attended to them, they were almost wholly unfamiliar with the working classes. Those members of the working classes with whom undergraduates were acquainted – personal servants, bed-makers, porters, townspeople – tended, moreover, to be depicted in a consistently negative manner in college magazines. According to Deslandes:

The boundaries that separated the university-educated elite from their social inferiors were most clearly demarcated ... in the comparisons that were often made between Oxford or Cambridge students and scouts (male servants at Oxford who attended to men in college), gyps (male servants who performed the same function at Cambridge), bed-makers, and porters. As representatives of the working class, college servants functioned as foils to the admired 'noble' or 'gentlemanly' traits of the Oxbridge man.<sup>30</sup>

Thus, rather than attenuating their sense of superiority and privilege, the average undergraduate's vague familiarity with his servants merely served to reinforce it. Deslandes' portrayal seems to be supported by the experiences of army chaplains who graduated from Oxford and

Cambridge in the period before the war. Writing in the 1970s, Frank Barry recalled that the undergraduate world he knew at Oriel College was one of insular and self-regarding privilege:

Oxford was, no doubt, rather a walled-in garden, sheltered from the rude winds beyond itself. Nearly all of us came from professional homes – in my college at least there were very few exceptions – and, although scholars at any rate had earned them, we took our privileges too much for granted. We had no very developed social awareness – that was to come in with the post-war generations. We had little knowledge or imagination of the hells beneath the surface of the establishment. ... we were not ashamed of being middle class. We knew nothing of that inverted snobbery which seems to afflict so many undergraduates and junior staff in the present-day universities.<sup>31</sup>

In his biography of the Cambridge graduate, theologian, and army chaplain, Charles Earl Raven, F. W. Dillistone, himself a clergyman and graduate of Brasenose College, Oxford, described pre-war Cambridge using very similar language to that employed by Barry with reference to Oxford:

Life in Cambridge in the Edwardian era could be extraordinarily sheltered. The majority of undergraduates came into residence straight from their public schools. They belonged to families who lived in ample and comfortable homes and in these they could spend their vacations. The scholarship system, of course, made it possible for a small number from grammar schools to enjoy the amenities of Oxford or Cambridge and this meant that there were always a few students in a College with first hand experience of life in an industrial town or of a system of education different from that of the public school. But they were very much in the minority. The average undergraduate had little knowledge of the social conditions of the East end of London or of the industrial North except through brief contacts, in School and College missions, with boys belonging to these areas.<sup>32</sup>

Dillistone is somewhat unfairly dismissive of the college missions. Beginning with Toynbee Hall, founded by Samuel Barnett and others in Whitechapel in 1884, the 1880s and '90s saw the establishment of a number of pioneering public school and university settlements

in socially deprived areas of London. Oxford House was founded in Bethnal Green in 1885, while Cambridge House, which sprang from the Trinity College Mission, was founded in Camberwell in 1896. The main aims of the settlement movement included the pursuit of scientific research concerning poverty, the improvement of the lives of men and women in disadvantaged communities through education, and the enhancement and promotion of stronger leadership in socially deprived areas.<sup>33</sup> Those students and graduates who were most committed to the settlements lived in them and attempted, as far as possible, to become active members of the communities in which they were situated. None of the settlements stood for any particular theory of social reform but they allowed students from, and graduates of, the elite public schools and the ancient universities, many of them future politicians, administrators, economists, and clergymen, to become familiar with the social circumstances of the urban poor.<sup>34</sup> Both the future Labour Party leader, Clement Attlee, and one of the most influential social reformers of the twentieth century, William Beveridge, spent extended periods of time at Toynbee Hall before the war.<sup>35</sup> In addition, along with the groundbreaking studies of urban poverty carried out by Charles Booth in London and B. Seebohm Rowntree in York, the research carried out by settlement workers went some way towards popularising the then novel notion that poverty was not necessarily the fault of the poor. The practical and community-based approach of the settlement houses also meant that they marked a pioneering move away from traditional philanthropy towards modern social work.<sup>36</sup> Importantly, in this context, a number of future army chaplains, including Dick Sheppard, Tom Pym, and P. B. Clayton were first exposed to the misery of slum life through the London settlements, most of which maintained strong links with the Church and were run by clergymen.

P. B. Clayton recalled being greatly influenced by Dr John Stansfeld as a student at Exeter College, Oxford. Stansfeld, who was himself an Exeter graduate, had founded the Oxford Medical Mission in 1897 and regularly visited Oxford colleges to encourage students to engage in social work there. Clayton's memory of his first exposure to slum life reveals just how alien the environment of the East End could be to a young man from a comparatively privileged background:

By this time I had attached myself to the tail of that most Christian comet which led far wiser men to Bermondsey. Neither *Across the*

*Bridges* nor *A Student in Arms* had yet been written, but the Franciscan figure of Dr Stansfeld had passed, like the Pied Piper, through the 'Varsity' and bidden us to the boys' club at 'Dockhead', 'Gordon' and 'Decima'. Myself, I could contribute nothing to the spirit of that spot, and was as much out of place as an Anglican arriving at Oberammergau by aeroplane.<sup>37</sup>

Undergraduate students only stayed in the settlements during vacations, however, and while they constituted an important outlet for a minority of young Oxbridge men, their capacity to genuinely influence undergraduate life remained limited. Also, and importantly, while the university settlements certainly introduced privileged young men to working class people and exposed them to the poor living conditions of East and South London, they did not necessarily change their often superior attitudes to working class culture and meaningfully bridge the gap between the classes. With reference to the university missions, Kenneth Thompson has argued that those who undertook social work in London before the war instinctively tried to impose middle or upper-class cultural values on the working classes. Thus, 'a chasm existed between styles of life which the Settlements did not bridge. They became little oases of upper-class life'.<sup>38</sup>

Those chaplains included in the 'Oxbridge' variable in Chart 2.2 would have shared largely common experiences, but only up to a point. The different colleges in Oxford and Cambridge retained, and continue to retain, their own individual sense of character and ethos and, as Crockford's indicates precisely which college each clerical graduate attended, it is worth taking a closer look (see Table 2.1).

Keble College, with 38 alumni in the survey group, was, by far, the greatest producer of chaplains at Oxford. Founded in 1870, the college is one of the University's youngest. It was named in honour of the leading figure of the Oxford Movement, John Keble. The Oxford Movement, or the Tractarians, were essentially a group of Anglo-Catholic clerical academics who sought to reassert the Church's influence over the British nation and to counter the individualism and anti-ritualism of the evangelical movement that had been sweeping the country in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This was the well-documented High-Church/Low-Church polarisation.<sup>39</sup> Keble died in 1866, and some of the remaining Tractarians decided to honour his memory by building a new college. It was decided early on that the college should prepare students especially, but not exclusively, for admission ordination in the Anglican Ministry. The life of

*Table. 2.1* Colleges attended by 410 Oxbridge graduates in Bishop Gwynne's files

<b>Oxford</b>		<b>Cambridge</b>	
Keble	38	Trinity	29
Exeter	16	Emmanuel	26
Christ Church	14	Selwyn	21
University	13	Queen	17
Wadham	12	St John's	14
Trinity	12	Clare	14
Oriel	9	Jesus	13
Queen's	9	Pembroke	13
Brasenose	8	Christ's	11
St John's	8	Corpus Christi	11
Jesus	7	Gonville & Caius	10
Worcester	7	Kings	6
Pembroke	6	Trinity Hall	4
St Edmund's Hall	6	Magdalen	2
Hertford	6	Sidney Sussex	2
Lincoln	5	St Catherine's	2
Balliol	4	St Peter's	2
Corpus Christi College	4	Fitzwilliam House	1
Magdalen	4		
Other:	17	Other:	7

the college was intended to be comparatively frugal and economic but it was made very clear that the authorities did not intend to admit 'persons of inferior social position, less cultivated manners or intellect below the ordinary level of the University', but 'gentlemen wishing to live economically'.<sup>40</sup> The founders were keen that their college would attract young gentlemen but avoid earning the kind of reputation for debauched decadence that was associated with some of the other Oxford colleges.<sup>41</sup>

The Cambridge college most attended by chaplains in the survey group is Trinity College, with 29 alumni. Founded in 1546 by Henry VIII, Trinity is a much older and larger college than Keble. In common with Keble, however, it was closely linked to the Tractarian movement in the nineteenth century. F. D. Maurice, a liberal Anglo-Catholic and pioneer of Christian socialism was an alumnus, as were the well known Tractarians and scholars of early Christianity, J. B. Lightfoot, B. F. Westcott, and F. J. A. Hort. These men did much in their time at Cambridge to promote a synthesis between socialism and traditional

Christianity that was to become influential in Anglican circles in the decades before the war.<sup>42</sup>

The most significant feature of these two Oxbridge colleges, which produced 9.2 per cent of the chaplains in the group, is their association with High-Church Anglicanism. The peacetime army of the pre-war period favoured a non-ritualistic Broad or Low-Church style of worship. This was due, in part, to the staunchly evangelical position of the Chaplain-General but also to the belief that the working-class rank and file would be unable to engage with an overly intellectual or ritualistic approach to religion. As we have seen, Taylor-Smith was accused of exercising biased judgement and appointing as chaplains only those clergymen he felt shared his Low Church beliefs. The *Church Times* was particularly critical of the Chaplain-General's perceived bias and Lord Halifax, President of the English Church Union, publicly and privately attacked his treatment of Anglo-Catholic chaplains.<sup>43</sup> The results of the survey, however, in as far as they allow accurate speculation on the Churchmanship of a given chaplain, do not support this.

Chart 2.2 excludes chaplains educated and ordained in the dominions,<sup>44</sup> covering only those from Britain and Ireland, but really throws the domination of Oxbridge, Durham, and Trinity into sharp relief. Fully 62 per cent (or just over three fifths) of the UK educated and ordained chaplains graduated from Oxbridge colleges, while just over 20 per cent (or one fifth) graduated from either Durham or Trinity. Chaplains who graduated from the newer universities in London, Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds, Belfast, and Lampeter make up approximately 10 per cent of the group. The 'Theological College Only' variable is important as it is made up mostly of men who were socially uninterested in, or unable to afford, a university education. It is not an insignificant number, 40 in total, but for every chaplain whose third-level education began and ended with a theological college, no fewer than ten graduated from either Oxford or Cambridge. The progressive colleges mentioned above, Kelham and Mirfield, produced six and three chaplains respectively.<sup>45</sup> A further eight chaplains received no formal third level education or training for the ministry whatever. The proportion of chaplains in the survey group that can definitely be said to have come from comparatively underprivileged backgrounds, and were educated in institutions that were specially designed to make the priesthood accessible to them, therefore numbers no more than 17, an extremely small figure in the context of the survey.

The majority of chaplains who make up the representative survey group were thus university men from socially privileged backgrounds.

The very fact that they sought ordination and life in the priesthood, however, distinguishes them from the average university graduate. Chart 2.3 above indicates that the vast majority of chaplains from the age profile survey group were less than 45 years of age when they saw service with the BEF and that 222, or over 50 per cent of the sample, were younger than 34 years of age during the war. The youngest age at which a man could be ordained was 23.<sup>46</sup> It therefore follows that most of the chaplains in the survey group were ordained after 1900. This allows us to place the overall group in broadly generational terms. What remains to be done is to consider these chaplains in the context of their status as clergymen, and examine the generational influences that made an impression on those clergy who were ordained in the two decades before the outbreak of the war.

### **The rise of Christian Socialism**

The 30 years that preceded the outbreak of the Great War saw a remarkably widespread use of Christian socialist rhetoric by senior Anglican clergy.<sup>47</sup> The organisation most responsible for the spread of this loosely defined, apolitical, and highly idealistic form of socialism in Church circles was the Christian Social Union. The CSU was founded in November 1889 and drew its inspiration from the short-lived but influential Christian social movement of the 1840s and 1850s, the socialistic Guild of St Matthew founded in 1877, and a growing academic interest among Anglo-Catholic clergy in the then acute social problems associated with the industrial system. The first president of the Union was F. B. Westcott, while its first Chairman was Henry Scott Holland. Charles Gore was also a key founding member.

Westcott, the son of a lecturer in botany, graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge in the 1840s. He excelled academically as an undergraduate and by the time of his association with the CSU he had become a celebrated theologian. From 1890 until his death in 1901 he held the See of Durham. Scott Holland was more than 20 years younger than Westcott but followed a similar career path. An old Etonian, he graduated from Balliol College, Oxford, in 1870 but spent a further 14 years in the University. His formal post was that of proctor at Christ Church but he engaged in a wide range of intellectual activities including academic theology and popular journalism. He also helped to establish the early Oxford settlements in London's East End. He was appointed Canon of St Paul's and was still at the Cathedral when the CSU was founded. Charles Gore came from a highly privileged, aristocratic background – his



uncle was the fourth earl of Arran and his maternal grandfather was the fourth earl of Bessborough – and he was educated at Harrow and Balliol College. While at Harrow he was influenced by Anglo-Catholicism and radical politics and inspired by F. B. Westcott. On graduating from Balliol he became a fellow of Trinity College, Oxford, and he was to remain closely associated with the University for the rest of his life. In the course of a remarkable ecclesiastical career Gore edited *Lux Mundi*, the hugely influential collection of Anglo-Catholic theological essays published in 1889, founded the Community of the Resurrection, subsequently known as the Mirfield Fathers, and held the Sees of Worcester, Birmingham, and Oxford. He was a committed and consistent critic of the social order in Britain and of government and Church policy; Alan Wilkinson has called him ‘the most fascinating and most influential bishop of the twentieth century Church’.<sup>48</sup> He was certainly *the* outstanding theologian of his generation and his influence over the Church and clergy in the twentieth century was rivalled only by that of William Temple.

The stated aims of the Christian Social Union were:

1. To claim for the Christian Law the ultimate authority to rule social practice.
2. To study in common how to apply the moral truths and principles of Christianity to the social and economic difficulties of the present time.
3. To present Christ in practical life as living Master and King, the enemy of wrong and selfishness, the power of righteousness and love.<sup>49</sup>

These goals were made deliberately vague to allow for a certain latitude in interpretation and to avoid alienating more conservative Anglicans but, essentially, the Union was founded to promote the application of Christian ethics to social practice and to encourage Christian, and specifically Anglican, thought on social issues. From the outset, CSU leaders adopted a philosophical, as opposed to strictly political, definition of the term ‘socialism’ and placed an emphasis on co-operation and brotherhood as a Christian counter to what they viewed as the rampant individualism of British society. The Union expressed its views through the sermons and public addresses of its members, in pamphlets and more weighty publications, and in journals like the *Economic Review* and *Commonwealth*, the official organ of the CSU, founded in 1896 and edited by Scott Holland. Some of the most promising young

clergymen of the period were attracted to the Union and between 1889 and 1913 no fewer than 16 of the 53 new bishops were members.<sup>50</sup> These included the radical canon of Manchester and sometime Bishop of Lincoln, Edward Lee Hicks, the Bishop of Bradford, Alfred Blunt, Edward Talbot, successively Bishop of Rochester, Southwark, and Winchester, and John Reginald Harmer, Bishop of Rochester from 1905 to 1930. The involvement of such high-profile figures meant that the Union's message was heard at successive Lambeth Conferences.

Support for the CSU and Christian socialism grew throughout the 1890s and by the early 1900s its influence was beginning to manifest itself in outspoken clerical criticism of the social order and active clerical commentary on social affairs. An interest in social questions became increasingly accepted as part of the average clergyman's *curriculum vitae*<sup>51</sup> and social change was called for at every kind of clerical gathering from lectures in theological colleges to the meetings of Bishops at Lambeth Palace.<sup>52</sup> The abuse of property ownership was viewed as a key issue, especially among the minority of clergy who worked in slum parishes, and slumlords were often attacked from the pulpit. One of A. F. Winnington-Ingram's first acts on being appointed Bishop of London was to order a denunciation of slum properties to be read from the pulpits of all the churches in the diocese.<sup>53</sup> Questions relating to labour and the economy were also increasingly tackled by clergymen. In December, 1905 the Reverend W. J. Conybeare spoke to a group of clergymen at Cambridge House, Camberwell on the theme of 'The Church and the Unemployed Problem'. He welcomed the new legislation embodied in the Unemployed Workmen's Act and urged those clergymen present to realise the natural role they had to play in social matters.<sup>54</sup> Importantly, however, Gore and other members of the CSU were reluctant to ally the Union with the embryonic Labour Party, even after the Party's success in the 1906 election.<sup>55</sup>

Evidence of the proliferation of Christian socialism in Anglican thought can be found in a number of influential books published in the decade before the war that were written by both clergy and laity. 1911 saw the publication of Alexander (or Alec) Paterson's influential *Across the Bridges*. Paterson came from a Unitarian background but converted to Anglicanism in adulthood. His interest in social questions and in the plight of the urban poor began with his involvement with the Bermondsey Medical Mission, later known as the Oxford and Bermondsey Club, during his undergraduate days at University College, Oxford. When he graduated in 1906 Paterson moved to the East End, became an unpaid teacher, and attempted to play an active role in the

community. *Across the Bridges* movingly described the material deprivation experienced by people living in Edwardian Bermondsey and was to become a key social text of the period. It had a particular impact on young men and boys from privileged backgrounds and was considered required reading for students at Eton preparing for confirmation.<sup>56</sup> Several future BEF padres recalled reading and being impressed by the book. Tom Pym, who was to become one of the more prominent Anglican chaplains on the Western Front, was a friend of Paterson's and had read *Across the Bridges*. Pym felt, however, that simply reading about the conditions of the urban working classes was not enough and in the years before the war he rented a workman's flat in Battersea in order to spend time working and living among the poor of South London.<sup>57</sup> A somewhat more academic volume than *Across the Bridges*, entitled *Property; Its Duties and Rights*, was edited by Charles Gore and published in 1913. The book was a collection of essays, written by various members of the CSU, including Henry Scott Holland and Hastings Rashdall, that investigated the philosophical and religious history of property ownership. In the introduction Gore explained that the inspiration for the volume was the belief the authors shared in the biblical doctrine of stewardship. This was the theological notion that as all property is produced by God it is, ultimately, also owned by God and men are merely looking after it. Men should thus be viewed as stewards with a moral obligation not to abuse their stewardship.<sup>58</sup> Gore's closing statements were very socialistic in tone, focusing on what he viewed as the rampantly acquisitive character of Edwardian society:

What are we to say, then, about all the still dominant individualism, the assertion of an almost unlimited right of acquiring, retaining and perpetuating property, which breaks out against either any strongly urged moral claim for voluntarily giving better conditions to the poorer workers as an act of justice, or against any function of the State which tends in the direction of a more equitable distribution of the proceeds of industry? We are bound to say that looking at the matter philosophically, it has no validity ... If it appears that the conditions of property holding at any particular period sacrifice the many to the few, and tend to starve the vitality or destroy the hope or depress the efforts of masses of men and women, there is no legitimate claim that property can make against the alteration of conditions by gradual and peaceable means.<sup>59</sup>

Another scholarly Christian socialist text that appeared around this time was William Cunningham's *Christianity and Social Questions*.

Published in 1910, Cunningham's book called for a more humanistic approach to economics that would take account of the social implications of changes in market forces.<sup>60</sup> Cunningham, who had studied at Edinburgh, Tübingen, and Cambridge before being ordained in 1874, was a prolific writer of books and pamphlets on economic history and philosophy. Writing in 1909, he offered a perceptive insight into the appeal of socialism to the new generation of clergy, 'The attraction of socialism lies not in the reasoning which supports it, but in the hope it holds out and the sense of duty it inspires. It is the form which the enthusiasm for humanity takes in the present day'.<sup>61</sup> In Cunningham's informed view, then, it was the humanist rather than the political aspect of socialism that appealed to clergymen.

There were, however, a number of somewhat more extreme Anglicans who felt that the views of the CSU were overly academic and not radical enough to effect real change. By 1905 a new group of younger clergy was emerging that was more directly in sympathy with the labour movement in general and the Independent Labour Party in particular than the leadership of the CSU. Prompted by the electoral success of the ILP in January 1906, a clerical conference was held in Morecambe. Those gathered included W. E. Moll, G. Algernon West, Conrad Noel, and F. W. Donaldson. Donaldson was the vicar who had famously led a march of unemployed men from Leicester to Lambeth the previous year. Half of the speakers at the conference were members of the CSU, yet it was decided that the Union was too indefinite in its objectives and its commitment to socialism, that the Guild of St Matthew was too narrow in its ecclesiastical membership, and that a new society was needed. Thus the Church Socialist League (CSL), the 'first Anglican society definitely committed to Socialism', was born.<sup>62</sup> The league aimed essentially to promote a spirit of brotherhood in society, to inform practising Anglicans about Socialism while also informing socialists about Christian doctrine, and to encourage a sense of equality between the sexes. The league never officially tied itself to the Labour Party but its more politically aware brand of socialism won it the support of such key Labour leaders as Keir Hardie and Ramsay MacDonald. Support for the CSL grew steadily over the following number of years and by 1909 it had 35 branches and 1200 members. Well-known commentators such as George Lansbury and G. K. Chesterton joined the league, as did Richard Tawney, then a relatively obscure figure. The CSL was marked from its inception, however, by division among its members concerning loyalties to variant forms of political socialism and to different schools of Anglo-Catholic thought, and its ability to genuinely inspire the younger generation of clergy remained limited.<sup>63</sup>

The achievements of the Christian Social Union should not be underestimated. It was the largest organisation for the promotion of social reform in the history of the Church of England and it began a tradition of Christian social thought that was to continue long after the Union itself ceased to function in 1919. In addition, and this was to become important for former army chaplains after the war, Christianity and socialism were not seen as being incompatible in Britain.<sup>64</sup> This was also the case in a number of other European countries but in Britain, and in England in particular, Christian socialism had led to a particularly strong overlap between the two distinct doctrines. This was partly due to the Christian conviction of Labour leaders like Keir Hardie, who were critical of the Church but staunchly Christian. Yet it was also the result of the efforts of clergymen like Henry Scott Holland and Charles Gore, who constantly promoted a loosely defined form of socialism. The CSU also helped to bring about some key changes in legislation that changed the lives of workers for the better. By exploiting the political connections of its members the Union successfully campaigned for the introduction of the Factory and Workshops Act (1901) and the Trade Boards Act (1909), both of which were designed to compel employers to provide for the safety of employees.<sup>65</sup>

Crucially, however, the CSU failed to make an impact on the social consciences of the mass of Anglican clergy and laity. Reflecting after the war on the work of the Union, Gore had to concede that 'it had not succeeded in stirring up what it believed to be the right spirit in the mass of those who preach in the pulpits or sit in the pews of the Anglican churches'.<sup>66</sup> The CSU raised a good deal of clerical awareness regarding issues like inadequate slum housing, dangerous working conditions, and the generally poor standard of health and living endured by the working classes, but did little to acquaint clergymen with the people that made up this social strata. The leadership of the CSU was composed of academics from extremely comfortable backgrounds and its membership reflected the social make-up of the clergy and the educated laity. In addition, the Union made no real attempt to attract working class members and the knowledge its most senior figures had of working-class life remained mostly theoretical. Of the junior clergymen who were associated with the Christian socialist movement in the 20 years before the War, William Temple was the most prominent. He was a public supporter of the Labour Party and a vocal critic of the social order, and was destined to become an extremely influential figure in the twentieth-century Church. Yet, by his own admission, he lacked, at this stage in his life, any real familiarity with the working classes.<sup>67</sup>

His father was an extremely senior clergyman, he was educated at Rugby and Oxford, and, with the exception of the servants at Fulham (where his father was Bishop of London) and Lambeth (where his father was Archbishop) and his scouts at Balliol and Queen's, Temple hardly spoke to an adult member of the working classes until he became involved with the Workers Educational Association in 1912, by which time he was over 30 years old.<sup>68</sup>

The Christian Socialist movement of the pre-war years definitely marked the beginnings of a clerical shift in emphasis with regard to social issues. Charitable work and charitable organisations had traditionally allowed the clergy to fulfil what they viewed as their social obligations. Now charity was often criticised and the focus was on effecting fundamental change in the societal order and in the social outlook of Churchpeople. The clerical lack of familiarity with the working classes, however, meant that the attitude of the members of the CSU, and of the clergy at large, with regard to this group was still quite paternalistic.<sup>69</sup> In addition, notwithstanding the effects of the pioneering projects at Mirfield and Kelham, both of which were inspired by Christian socialism, the Anglican clergy remained a socially exclusive group composed, for the most part, of men from the privileged middle and upper classes. Indeed, Edward Norman has argued, quite persuasively, that the great clerical interest in a broadly-defined socialism in antebellum Britain provides evidence of the bourgeois character of the clergy:

It is ... impossible to avoid the impression that, as in the nineteenth century, the development of social attitudes within the Church after 1900 closely corresponds to class moralism in the clergy. Their moral earnestness, their sense of social guilt, their academics' distaste for business practice, their willingness to criticize the organisation of industry in which they had no stake, their detachment from the self-help ethic of the lower middle class and the working classes, and even their attraction to the fashionable social criticism of the intelligentsia of the period – all these are class indicators. The Church remained an upper-class, and upper-middle-class, institution; its leaders reflected the social preferences of Edwardian England.<sup>70</sup>

In his examination of religion and English society in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, Hugh MacLeod contends that a new breed of clergy emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century that was

interested in getting away from the 'paternalistic gentleman' image of the traditional parson. As an example of this new type of cleric he cites the case of Stewart Headlam, the celebrated Christian socialist, vicar of Bethnal Green, and founder of the Guild of St Matthew. Macleod maintains, however, that, despite the influence of such notable figures, 'the prevailing image of the clergyman in the early twentieth century was still that of a highly educated gentleman, who mixed more readily with the elite than with ordinary parishioners'.<sup>71</sup>

The social background and social awareness, or utter lack thereof, of the men who became Anglican chaplains during the Great War must be considered key generational characteristics. Yet there were also a number of doctrinal issues that impacted on this generation of clergy that must be briefly taken into account.

### Sectional influences

Writing on the Edwardian period from the vantage point of the 1940s, the reactionary but often highly insightful clerical commentator, Herbert Hensley Henson, claimed that he could not 'recall a time in which the Church of England was more distracted or divided'.<sup>72</sup> This sense of division resulted from tensions between the Anglo-Catholic and Evangelical wings of the Anglican clergy that had been a feature of Church life for several generations by the time war broke out in 1914. The early nineteenth century had seen a strong wave of Evangelicalism sweep through the Church of England, the mid-century Tractarian movement had been an attempt to counter this, and by the 1880s an influential group of neo-Tractarians had emerged. This group included such key figures of the Christian social movement as Charles Gore and Henry Scott Holland. Their theological position was loosely outlined in the aforementioned *Lux Mundi*, a controversial collection of essays edited by Gore and published in 1889. The essays were influenced by the Anglo-Catholicism of the original Tractarian group, by the burgeoning Christian social movement, and by theological modernism. The subtitle of the book was 'A series of studies in the religion of the incarnation' and Gore's essay, which argued for a more historical, less literal, understanding of the Old Testament and aspects of the New Testament, caused considerable controversy. The book provoked a predictably negative response from evangelical literalists but also troubled some liberal Anglicans, who felt Gore had gone too far.<sup>73</sup> The neo-Tractarians were tightly bound together by university and family connections and in Gore they possessed an active and eminently capable leader.<sup>74</sup> By the

early 1900s their brand of Anglo-Catholic liberal socialism had become, as we have seen, extremely influential in clerical circles. This new Anglo-Catholicism, with its emphasis on rituals and sacrament and its association with Christian socialism, was attractive to young clergymen for a number of reasons. Adrian Hastings has succinctly summed up the different facets of the movement:

Anglo Catholicism ... represented an intense desire to recover the deep sense of sacrament, ritual and symbolism, the concern with prayer, mysticism and monastic ascetism, a theology of the Church, the consciousness of communion with the majority of other contemporary Christians rather than of a self-righteous criticism of them, the willingness to listen to the whole past (rather than Scripture and Reformation alone) an openness to art, music and literature.<sup>75</sup>

The Anglo-Catholic taste for ritualism had become so pervasive by the turn of the century that Holy Eucharist, which had formerly been quite an infrequently celebrated sacrament, was now offered daily in many Anglican churches. In addition, vestments were now worn by clergy in over 2000 churches, where just 12 years previously they had only been considered acceptable in 600.<sup>76</sup> Anglo-Catholicism shone particularly brightly in the universities and 1912 saw the publication of *Foundations*, a collection of modernist theological essays by young Anglo-Catholic dons that was edited by William Temple. The 'higher' form of worship promoted by Anglo-Catholics even began to influence some of the traditionally Protestant Nonconformist churches. Concerning the atmosphere of the churches in the late Victorian and Edwardian periods, Hugh McLeod has observed, 'The spirit of the age was against Protestantism, which seemed incompatible with the new ethos of aesthetic awareness, sensitivity to 'tradition' and nascent ecumenism'.<sup>77</sup>

A key reason for the advance of Anglo-Catholicism was the relative weakness during this period of the other main clerical party, Evangelicalism. Evangelical, or 'low church', Anglicanism was going through a difficult phase in the decades before the war. According to Hensley Henson, who was appointed Dean of Durham in 1912, Anglican Evangelicals in the pre-war period 'were exhibiting all the marks of a moribund party. They were out of touch with the prevailing tendencies, social and intellectual, of the time'.<sup>78</sup> The evangelical wing of the Anglican Church had been closely associated with the empire building of the Victorian period but appeared to have little to offer the Edwardian



generation in the way of inspiration.<sup>79</sup> As a clerical party, the Evangelicals lacked strong charismatic leaders like Gore and brilliant young intellectuals like Temple, and many of the most able Evangelical clergy were so devoted to missionary work that they had been largely lost to the home church.<sup>80</sup> Llewellyn H. Gwynne provides a good example of a talented and very capable clergyman who spent his entire career in various missionary postings, eventually becoming a missionary bishop. In a number of important spheres of Anglican influence, however, Evangelicalism remained strong. One of these was the Church of Ireland.

The Church of Ireland had been disestablished in 1871 and several practical and cultural factors combined to make its clergy generally more evangelical and Protestant in outlook than their English counterparts. In the Church of England clerical appointments were often made by private patrons and something known as the 'Parson's Freehold' meant that, notwithstanding cases of extreme unorthodoxy or moral degeneracy, it was very difficult to remove an incumbent once he had been officially granted a living.<sup>81</sup> This ensured that the clergy of each diocese included a certain number of theologically radical or eccentric incumbents like, for example, Conrad Noel, the radical Vicar of Thaxted whose patron was the socialist Countess of Warwick, Frances Greville.<sup>82</sup> The Irish scene was quite different. In Ireland a board of nominators made all parochial appointments. The board was made up of three representatives from the parish in question and three diocesan representatives, and was chaired by the diocesan bishop. Such a regimented system meant that potential incumbents came under a good deal of pressure to conform ecclesiastically and socially and made for a body of clergy that was quite conservative in outlook.<sup>83</sup> There was also the inescapable fact that, in Ireland, Anglicans made up a small minority in the midst of an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic population. The traditional cultural need for Irish Anglicans to define themselves in contrast to Roman Catholics thus meant that Anglo-Catholic ritualism enjoyed little of the popularity in Ireland that it did in England.<sup>84</sup>

Of the 723 chaplains in the survey group, 69, or 9.5 per cent, were educated and ordained in Ireland. The vast majority of these men, 64, were graduates of Trinity College, Dublin (or Dublin University). As an institution, Trinity College played a major role in Church of Ireland life. Regular attendance at the college chapel and catechism lectures were compulsory for all Anglican undergraduates who, in the latter half of the nineteenth century, amounted to made up about 80 per cent of the student body. A significant number of these students went on to take holy orders and most Irish Anglican clergy took their preliminary

degrees at Trinity. The University's divinity school was a major college institution and was strongly associated with a very Protestant form of Anglicanism that was 'definitely tinged with Evangelicalism'.<sup>85</sup> This Evangelicalism manifested itself in an emphasis on a traditional interpretation of scripture and the psalms, enthusiasm for missionary work, and an open disdain for the ritualism and theological modernism of the Anglo-Catholic movement. It should not be assumed that all of the army chaplains who had graduated from Trinity were staunch Evangelicals, but they emerged from an ecclesiastical environment in which a clearly evangelical Protestant form of Anglicanism was the norm.

By the turn of the century a new kind of liberal Evangelical was emerging that remained loyal to evangelical interpretations of scripture but adopted an ecumenical outlook and a healthy interest in social issues. Guy Rogers provides a good representative example of this type. He was born in Dublin and educated at an evangelical private school before going on to take a degree in Classics at Trinity College. He was ordained in 1900 and after spending just three years working as a curate in fashionable Dublin parishes he left Ireland and transferred to the Church of England. By the outbreak of war in 1914 he had been appointed Vicar of Reading, become heavily involved with the 'Christian Missionary Society', and managed to form a very close relationship with his diocesan bishop, the *de facto* leader of the High Church party, Charles Gore. He was considered 'quite one of the most thoughtful and ablest of the young Evangelicals'.<sup>86</sup> In the church hierarchy, this brand of liberal Evangelicalism was represented by men like Theodore Woods, who became Bishop of Peterborough in 1916. Few evangelical clergy, however, were willing or able to adopt the same ecumenical approach as Rogers. Anglo-Catholics, and the influential Anglo-Catholic bishops in particular, could also be quite obstinate in their refusal to compromise their views or practices and tension between the two parties remained high right up to the outbreak of the war. The existence of such tension was sensationally revealed in 1913 in the wake of an incident that occurred in another major field of evangelical influence, the African missions.

In June 1913 a group of Presbyterian missionaries based in Kikuyu in the British Protectorate of East Africa (modern day Kenya) held a conference to which they invited a number of Anglicans. Anglican missionaries in the region had enjoyed good relations with their nonconformist counterparts for some years and this was not the first ecumenical gathering. A very conciliatory atmosphere prevailed and the Anglican Bishop

of Mombasa, William Peel, was appointed chairman of the conference while Bishop Willis of Uganda was appointed secretary. A key theme of the conference was the necessity for pan-Protestant unity in the region as a means of countering the perceived threat from the very active, and united, Roman Catholic and Islamic missionaries.<sup>87</sup> The delegates focused on the doctrinal issues on which they held similar views and a degree of federalisation between the different Protestant churches in the region was proposed. It was decided that denominational differences should be, as far as possible, overlooked in the treatment of native converts. It was provisionally agreed, for example, that an African who had converted to Presbyterianism should be allowed to worship and receive the Eucharist in an Anglican or Wesleyan missionary church if he so wished. In practice this meant the foundation of a new 'native Church' that was neither Presbyterian nor Anglican nor Wesleyan but simply Protestant. For while the missionaries would continue to retain the services and rites of their respective sects, native African converts would be introduced to a common form of worship.<sup>88</sup> The conference ended with an unorthodox celebration of Holy Eucharist in the Presbyterian mission church at which Bishop Peel presided and delegates from all the main Protestant churches took part. The delegates were acting out of necessity and in a spirit of extremely idealistic, and indeed admirable, ecumenism. The implications of what they were proposing, however, went far beyond Kikuyu and their conference was to cause no small amount of controversy.

The Bishop of Zanzibar in 1913 was Frank Weston. Weston was a former slum-priest, devoted missionary, staunch Anglo-Catholic, and one of the most senior Anglican clergymen in Africa. In September he wrote to Archbishop Davidson accusing Bishops Peel and Willis of heresy in both word and deed and demanded that disciplinary action be taken. With characteristic caution, Davidson replied over a month later to say that he needed more time to think. In February of 1914 he eventually decided on a compromise. There was to be no heresy trial but a committee comprising 14 bishops from different provinces would be appointed to judge on the matter.<sup>89</sup> The committee did not actually meet until late July when war in Europe was imminent and, due to the radically changed circumstances brought about by the outbreak of the conflict, the Archbishop did not deliver his final verdict until the Easter of 1915. In the event, Davidson and the committee merely decreed that the proposed federation could not be approved of and that while the mixed celebration of Eucharist that had taken place at Kikuyu was 'eminently pleasing to God' it 'must on no account be repeated'.<sup>90</sup>

The protracted nature of this judgement process meant that those who wished to take sides on the issue had plenty of time to do so, and heated exchanges were played out in the pages of the secular and religious press. Anglican opinion on Kikuyu was not neatly divided along party lines, but there was much argument and debate and not all of it was cordial. The Bishop of Durham, the Dean of Durham, and the former Bishop of Uganda all weighed in the on the side of the bishops who took part in the conference, while Charles Gore and Bishop Talbot of Winchester publicly and emphatically sided with their denouncer, the Bishop of Zanzibar.<sup>91</sup> The so-called Kikuyu controversy was, no doubt, a matter of very minor importance to many Anglicans, but it consumed the minds of many others. The clergy, in particular, were forced to consider their own doctrinal positions. Above all, however, the controversy was significant in that it revealed just how precarious the foundations of Anglican unity were on the eve of the Great War.

## **Conclusion**

The generation of Anglican clergy who became chaplains during the Great War joined the Church at a time when Christian socialism was an influential force and clerical curiosity about social issues was high. It was also a period in which the Anglican ministry was gradually becoming less socially exclusive. The pre-war ministry remained dominated by Oxbridge graduates, however, and the Anglican chaplaincy on the Western Front and elsewhere reflected this dominance. In addition, while clerical interest in a range of social issues increased during the period, many Anglican clergymen were still ignorant regarding the circumstances and culture of the industrial working classes. As the process of preparing for the priesthood was not standardised until after the war, moreover, the clergymen who were ordained in the pre-war years had received quite disparate levels of training. While some possessed a devoted sense of vocational commitment, others could best be described as gentlemen amateurs. Also, and importantly, the traditional emphasis on social grooming over professional training meant that the clergy who went on to serve as Anglican padres were not as well trained professionally as the clergy of other churches.

The questions of social grooming and class outlook should be viewed as central to the experiences of Anglican chaplains during the war. An interesting insight into this issue is provided by Eric Milner-White, who gained a commission as an Anglican chaplain very early in the war and served for almost four years on the Western Front. By the time he was

discharged, under apparently mysterious circumstances in 1918, he had risen to the position of Senior Chaplain to the Seventh Division and had personally been presented with the Distinguished Service Order by King George V. A very erudite essay he wrote on the theme of 'Worship and Services' appeared in an edited volume of essays by Anglican chaplains in 1917.<sup>92</sup> His DSO citation suggests that he was a popular, or at least respected, figure at the front and there seems to be little doubt that he was committed to his wartime ministry.<sup>93</sup>

In his sense of commitment, and, importantly, in terms of his social background, Milner-White was quite typical of the Church of England clergymen who served as temporary chaplains during the war. He was born into a solidly middle-class family in Southampton in 1884. He received his secondary education at Harrow and, like his father before him, he went up to Cambridge where, with the aid of a scholarship, he read history at King's College. In the post-war years, he returned to King's to act as dean where he became known for his unrivalled expertise on stained-glass windows. When describing Milner-White's first experience of parish life at St Paul's, Newington, his biographer makes some interesting remarks about an attitude that seems to have been common among men of his class:

The world of the parish must have been exceedingly unfamiliar to him. His background was that of a secure, comparatively wealthy middle class home. Harrow, King's, and Cuddesdon had, if anything, accentuated this. He belonged to the class whose right it was to be waited on. Indeed, to the end of his life the Dean never really understood what work it meant to run a house, a college, or a camp efficiently. All through his life meals appeared, rooms were cleaned, beds were made, clothes were washed and mended, and he took this for granted.<sup>94</sup>

This sense of privileged entitlement was probably widespread among the British officer class in the first years of the war when the officer corps was still quite socially homogenous. But while such an attitude was almost an expected requirement for combatant officers, it could prove to be a handicap for padres who attempted to reach out to, and communicate with, ordinary rank-and-file soldiers. Yet even some of the most conscientious and committed chaplains found it difficult to shake the tendency to divide the world into those who waited and those who were waited on.

# 3

## The Anglican Clergy-in-Uniform

In April 1930, Frank Percival Crozier, a former Brigadier General who had seen extensive service on the Western Front during the war but later embraced pacifism, was quoted in the *Daily Mirror* as saying that during a war a Christian country ceases to be Christian. 'For this reason', he insisted 'chaplains are quite out of place during a war. There were some very fine chaplains at the Front. They served a useful purpose when they gave out cigarettes and that sort of thing. But their usefulness was limited to that'.<sup>1</sup> Crozier's memoir of his wartime experiences, *A Brass Hat in No Man's Land*, was first published shortly before these remarks were made. The iconoclastic and disenchanting tone of the book, as well as the author's preference for colourful vignettes at the expense of chronological coherence, bear some comparison with the text of *Goodbye to All That*. Yet unlike Graves, and indeed Siegfried Sassoon, Edmund Blunden, and Guy Chapman, Crozier had significant pre-war experience as an officer with regular and irregular armed forces. He had fought in the South African War and had gone on to serve with a variety of military and paramilitary formations in West Africa, Canada, and Ireland. He also had a wartime record of aggressively efficient command of combat troops and a post-war history that included a brief command of the notorious Auxiliary forces during the Anglo-Irish War.<sup>2</sup> Thus, far from being a sensitive young subaltern, Crozier was a high-ranking martinet who, by his own admission, had delighted in the front-line experience.

Robert Graves was struck by the incongruity of such a figure writing an essentially anti-war memoir and wrote to the *Times Literary Supplement* to stress the importance of Crozier's book as the work of a former senior officer of distinction who 'had turned King's evidence against modern war'.<sup>3</sup> His testimony was valuable, Graves suggested, because, unlike the authors of many other war books, he knew a great deal about war

and commanding men in the field. But would other high-ranking officers have shared Crozier's quite dismissive views on the utility of army chaplains in wartime? What exactly was the role of the army chaplain, as envisioned by padres themselves and, importantly, by the military authorities? Did Anglican chaplains act simply as vicars or curates in uniform or did they take on another role? This chapter will examine the role of the army chaplain and the ways in which it evolved during the war. The difficulties chaplains commonly encountered in attempting to perform their duties and the dilemma they faced in dividing those that were considered 'official' from those that were considered 'unofficial' will be considered. The key, and increasingly recognised, link between the work of the army chaplain and troop morale will also be explored. It will be seen that, by at least 1916, the military authorities had come to recognise the important role chaplains played in the morale, and therefore the fighting efficiency, of the British Army.

### **Combatant indifference to organised religion**

The Anglican clergymen who volunteered for service as chaplains in 1914 and 1915 had good reason to believe that their church was behind them, that they were needed in the army and would, therefore, be welcomed at the front, and that non-combatant military service was, under the circumstances, their best course of action. Yet young clergymen often had quite unrealistic notions of what the front would be like when they got there. Under the misguided impression that the experience of war would make soldiers hungry for religious ministrations and bring about some sort of revival, newly appointed chaplains looked forward to what they thought would be a tough but rewarding ministry. Writing in 1919, Ernest Crosse, who had been awarded the Military Cross and the Distinguished Service Order as a senior Anglican chaplain on the Western Front, recalled the clerical optimism of the early stages of the war, 'At the time chaplains at home pictured soldiers crowding into barns to hear them preach. We expected to be overwhelmed with men anxious to make their confessions or be converted. We dreamt continually of ministering to dying penitents'.<sup>4</sup>

It soon became clear, however, that no religious revival was taking place in Britain or among her troops overseas. In his 1916 book *Christianity after the War*, Frank Ballard put the early forecasts of a revival in context:

The notion which did at first obtain no small hold, that through the overwhelming tragedy of this frightful war, a new spiritual life was

going at once and permanently to flood the country, has already proved itself to be a delusion. There was a wave of strong national emotion, undoubtedly; and some of its overflowings found their way into the churches. For a while it seemed as if the long-looked-for tide of 'revival' was coming in. It did indeed rise, with varying degrees of promise. But all tides have their ebbings as well as rising, and this has been no exception. The ebb has already set in.<sup>5</sup>

Referring to the part army chaplains were expected to play in this revival, Donald Hankey, the popular soldier journalist who wrote for the *Spectator*, wrote the following early in 1916, '[The chaplains] admitted that they hoped that the war would make men more serious, and that when confronted daily with the mysteries of death and pain they would naturally turn to the church of their baptism for comfort and ghostly strength. But this has not happened to any marked extent. The men still appear to be the same careless, indifferent heathens they have always been'.<sup>6</sup> New chaplains who harboured such unrealistic expectations were initially shocked by the widespread indifference, apathy, and even hostility, to religion and religious ministrations that prevailed in the army.

Perhaps the most obvious way this indifference manifested itself was in the small numbers of men that came to voluntary, as opposed to compulsory, religious services. While it should be stressed that attendances at such services were not universally poor, small or non-existent congregations appear to have been an extremely common feature of the average Anglican chaplain's war experience and a sense of disillusionment is frequently evident in the contemporary narratives that refer to religious ministrations. In August 1916, chaplain Neville Talbot, who had been serving with the BEF for almost two years, sketched his impressions of religion in the army:

I think that on the whole I cannot agree with those who have the idea that there is a spiritual revival of the Christian religion at the front. The ministrations of the chaplains are to a considerable extent not wanted. Were the compulsion of Church parades generally removed, in many cases only a small minority of men would muster to worship of God.<sup>7</sup>

J. M. Stanhope-Walker was 45 years old when he exchanged his quiet Lincolnshire rectory for an army chaplaincy on the Western Front. He saw service in a casualty clearing station during the Battle of the Somme



before deciding to return to England in December 1916. He was moved by the cheerfulness and bravery of the wounded men, but in a letter to his wife he expressed grave disappointment with the soldiers' lack of interest in religion:

It's not worth staying out here whilst one has children at home. Tommy does not want religion, I don't persuade him. I give out there is a service and offer to conduct it and out of about 500, 200 of whom can walk, about a dozen come to matins and the same to Evensong. They would come as a favour to me if I pressed them, at least some would, but what is the use. They don't kneel when they come unless I ask them.<sup>8</sup>

Not all chaplains were as despairing as Stanhope-Walker, but he was certainly not the only one to notice a common indifference to prayer services and other forms of organised worship. Frank Barry felt that when one considered soldiers' almost complete disregard for conventional religion their general immorality seemed like a relatively minor issue. 'At first', he recalled 'we were worried about the superficial things like their bawdy language and their womanising ... but we soon learnt that they were superficial. Our real problems were very much deeper than that. Religion apparently meant nothing to them'.<sup>9</sup> In a 1917 essay entitled 'The Soldier's Religion' Philip T. Crick, a senior Church of England padre attached to the 61st Division, wrote that 'it must be frankly admitted that the average soldier is not conscious of any allegiance due from him to the authority and teaching of the Church. One simple but convincing proof of this may be found in the small number of communicants who may be expected even on such occasions as Christmas day'.<sup>10</sup> It is significant that Crick refers not to the individual and personal beliefs of soldiers but to an absence of a sense of allegiance to 'the *authority* and *teaching* of the Church'. Lack of interest in conventional religious observance does not necessarily indicate an absence of religious belief and there is evidence to suggest that while the majority of nominally Anglican troops had little time for formal religious worship, many of them did possess a kind of personal religion. As they gained experience chaplains came to realise that combatant faith, where it did exist, was complex and often wholly unconnected to the conventional religious rituals of the organised churches. For the Anglican clergy-in-uniform, this widespread indifference to conventional religion presented an acute challenge. Their conduct on the Western Front and elsewhere suggests, however, that many chaplains responded robustly

to this challenge by reimagining their ministry and embracing work that was not obviously spiritual but nonetheless had a clear value in the army and was appreciated by the military authorities.

### **Lack of preparation, training, and instruction**

By the time war broke out in 1914, Harry Blackburne had been serving as regular army chaplain for ten years. He had seen service as a combatant in the South African War and his energy and experience made him a useful asset to the army on active service. He went with the BEF to France in 1914 and remained on the Western Front for the entire period of the war. By the time of the Armistice he was Assistant Chaplain-General to the First Army and had been awarded the DSO and the MC. While on leave in London in February 1915, he had dinner with Dick Sheppard, the vicar of St Martin in the Fields, London, and George Bell, chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. During the course of the meal, Blackburne gave his fellow clergymen a blunt account of the difficulties chaplains were facing on the Western Front. He emphasised that most of them were eager to do well but that their lack of experience was a severe handicap. Bell paraphrased his words in a memo to Archbishop Davidson:

They were hampered also by the fact that while some of the men sent out as chaplains were splendid, willing to learn anything and did just what they had to do, many were simply impossible, not on account of views or anything of that sort but because they had no real experience of men or power or getting on to them: they were simply bewildered and had no power of getting unbewildered.<sup>11</sup>

This acute lack of experience of working with men, a shortcoming that was obvious to an experienced regular chaplain, had to be overcome in order for padres to perform effectively in their ministries. Despite this, however, for much of the war new army chaplains were given no preliminary training or instruction of any kind, physical, military, ecclesiastical or otherwise. Anglican clergymen had received varying amounts of special ecclesiastical training, usually in a theological college, and many had worked as curates. Yet this type of training was designed to groom a deacon for pastoral work in a conventional parish setting, not to prepare him for service at the front among battle-hardened officers and men. Frank Barry was just 24 years old when he gained a temporary commission as a chaplain in 1915. He later recalled feeling disorientated

and ill-prepared for his ministry when he arrived in France and entered a world that nothing in his background or life-experience had equipped him to deal with:

We young chaplains were 'thrown' into a ministry for which nothing in our experience had prepared us. I myself had only just been ordained priest, hopelessly ignorant and inexperienced, and should perhaps never have been allowed to go. But all of us, apart from a few regulars, came from academic or churchy circles, in which we had worked along traditional lines within an enclosed ecclesiastical world. Now we found ourselves called to serve a mass of men under intense moral and physical strain, to whom most of what we had been taught to preach seemed to be almost totally irrelevant.<sup>12</sup>

Chaplains were automatically granted the military rank of captain, yet they were given none of the training that a combatant officer received. As strict non-combatants chaplains would have no use for weapons training, but fitness training would have been helpful, as would some kind of general induction into the army and a chance to get used to camp life instead of simply being posted overseas and expected to learn from experience. Many Anglican padres were fortunate enough to spend a number of weeks or months with a regiment in a training camp in Britain before being deployed. Many others, however, were sent immediately to the Western Front or further a field. Within four days of his appointment as chaplain in December 1915, Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, probably the most well-known Anglican chaplain of the war, found himself conducting a Christmas service for 400 troops in a village square in France.<sup>13</sup> Studdert Kennedy appears to have possessed a natural gift for communicating with large numbers of ordinary soldiers but many clergymen would have struggled to meet such a challenge. It should also be noted that life in a training camp, while it acted as an introduction to army routine, did not constitute a realistic preparation for life in, or near, the line, for either the chaplain or the combatant.

Chaplain Ernest Crosse was quite clear about the lack of specific training for padres: 'In the first place it must be admitted with regret that [the chaplain] received no sort of preliminary training to equip him for his Army life. He went straight from his parish to his unit and was left almost entirely to gain his experience for himself'.<sup>14</sup> By the outbreak of war in 1914, the Reverend James Hannay, alias George Birmingham, had become quite a well-known novelist and author of ecclesiastical biographies. He took a temporary commission as an Anglican army

chaplain early in 1916 and was sent directly to France. In his amusing and occasionally informative memoir, published in 1918, he candidly describes the frustrating lack of instruction for new padres:

There are, or used to be, people who believe that you can best teach a boy to swim by throwing him into deep water from the end of a pier and leaving him there. If he survives, he has learned to swim and the method has proved its value. If he drowns, his parents have no further anxiety about him. The authorities who are responsible for the religion of the army believe in this plan for teaching chaplains their business. Having accepted a civilian parson as a volunteer, they dump him down in a camp without instruction or advice, without even so much as a small red handbook on field tactics to guide him. There he splutters about, makes an ass of himself in various ways, and either hammers out some plan for getting at his job by many failures, or subsides into the kind of man who sits in the mess-room with his feet on the stove, reading novels and smoking cigarettes – either he learns to swim after a fashion or drowns unlamented.<sup>15</sup>

A newly appointed 4th class padre generally met with a senior chaplain before being assigned to a base hospital, camp, division, or other unit. The senior chaplain, if he were so inclined and in a position to do so, could offer the new man helpful words of advice. Studdert Kennedy famously had a long chat with Theodore Bayley Hardy at the base camp in Rouen before Hardy went up the line for the first time and Hardy later remembered being very grateful for the advice the more experienced padre had given him.<sup>16</sup> Such talks cannot be considered ‘training’, however, and, unlike combatant officers and men, chaplains were not constantly surrounded by a coterie of old hands on whom they could rely for advice or example. The contemporary personal narratives of chaplains often reveal a feeling of loneliness and isolation, and padres who had just been appointed felt these emotions particularly keenly. As Hannay made clear, these clergymen, especially in the early stages of the war, were very much on their own in a sink-or-swim scenario. They had to learn by their mistakes in an environment in which they could ill-afford to make mistakes.

The situation with regard to the guidance and instruction of chaplains gradually began to improve in 1916 when a number of special chaplains’ conferences were organised in France. Julian Bickersteth attended a major Anglican conference in May 1916, which was hosted by the Deputy Chaplain-General and attended by the Archbishop of

Canterbury. Over 120 Anglican chaplains were present. The conference was not an unqualified success<sup>17</sup> but it did lay the foundations for future meetings and from the end of 1916 onwards Anglican and Nonconformist padres co-operated to organise ecumenical conferences at which they could discuss their work. Roman Catholic chaplains were invited but declined to attend these events.<sup>18</sup> The meetings featured talks by experienced chaplains and allowed padres to come together informally and exchange ideas. Such gatherings, however, although clearly valuable, were necessarily brief and it was felt that chaplains would benefit from a more sustained period of instruction.

In the spring of 1916, Harry Blackburne set up a small School of Instruction at Aires. Here lectures were delivered by senior chaplains and combatant officers to small groups of padres. Yet while the initiative was generally deemed to be a success, the school was small and could really only cater to the chaplains of the First Army. Inspired by its apparently positive impact, however, Bishop Gwynne recommended the establishment of a permanent centre for instruction to the War Office. The military authorities were initially sceptical about the venture but agreed to help equip the former Army Headquarters at St Omer, which was opened in February 1917 with the former warden of the theological college at Farnham, Bertram Keir Cunningham, acting as director.<sup>19</sup> Harry Blackburne outlined the plans for the school in his diary:

The Bishop is now starting a Chaplains' School for chaplains from all the Armies. He is kind enough to say he 'cribbed' the idea from me. Chaplains will go there for a whole week, and B. K. Cunningham is to be in charge of it. We are to send six chaplains each week from each of the five Armies. My Army Commander is going to the first of them to talk about chaplains' work from an Army Commander's point of view. He has asked Sykes and myself to get him out some headings for his talk.<sup>20</sup>

The school at St Omer undoubtedly gave Anglican padres much needed support and helped them define their ministry. Frank Barry clearly recognised the value of the pastoral care offered by Gwynne and Cunningham, which he claimed 'saved many from mental and moral breakdown and sustained us all in our dangers and adversities'.<sup>21</sup> Yet although it was clearly a very useful resource, the School of Instruction acted less as a training school for new chaplains and more as a retreat centre where over-worked and disenchanted padres could revive their spirits and spend time in prayer and reflection. It became

euphemistically known as the 'bombing school for chaplains'.<sup>22</sup> Bombing schools and other such schools of instruction for combatant officers were commonly accepted as a means through which officers could be given a period of rest out of the line before they succumbed to battle fatigue. Julian Bickersteth described the school as 'a house at old GHQ where chaplains have a rest and some mental refreshment'.<sup>23</sup> It was thus a valuable, if not indispensable, institution to chaplains working in the field but it was not designed to instruct or train new chaplains before they were posted.

A school of initiation with just such a purpose in mind was established at Woolwich Barracks in 1916. Here newly commissioned padres were introduced to army life and instructed on how to take church parades and minister to the sick and wounded in military hospitals. The course was described as 'a rough and ready affair', but since nothing remotely like it had been available before it marked a significant advancement in the training of Anglican chaplains.<sup>24</sup> Another school of instruction was founded in Ripon in the second half of 1917. The school was set up independently by the Archdeacon of Richmond, Henry Armstrong-Hall, then serving as Senior Chaplain attached to the Northern Command in England, and offered chaplains a genuinely comprehensive course of instruction over a two-month period. Physical training was provided through riding lessons, physical exercises, stretcher drill, and route marches while lectures covered subjects as diverse as first aid, preparation of sermons, conduct of parade services, and camp hygiene. The potential benefits of such a school for new chaplains were considerable but it was conceived quite late in the war and each course trained no more than 12 chaplains at a time.<sup>25</sup> It therefore helped to instruct only a very limited number of chaplains.

The instruction and advice provided at St Omer, Woolwich, and Ripon were complemented by a number of books and pamphlets produced by experienced padres and designed to help the novice chaplain find his feet. The most comprehensive of these, Everard Digby's *Tips for Padres*, was published in 1917. Digby was a temporary chaplain serving at Blackdown Camp, Aldershot, and his book gave simple but valuable advice concerning military etiquette, the type of kit required, and informal prayer services.<sup>26</sup> October 1917 saw the publication of the first edition of the *Chaplains' Bulletin*, the first newspaper produced by, and for, army chaplains. According to the editorial printed in the first issue the *Bulletin* was designed to keep 'chaplains in touch with one another and afford an opportunity for the interchange and pooling of experience'.<sup>27</sup> The paper was edited by Canon C. S. Woodward, a temporary chaplain

who had served with distinction at the front before being invalided home in 1916.<sup>28</sup> The *Bulletin* enhanced the sense of community and common purpose among Anglican chaplains and, importantly, gave padres a limited but useful forum for mutually beneficial advice and opinion.

The combination of the padres' conferences, the induction schools in England, the retreat and instruction centre at St Omer, and the various publications that were designed to help chaplains in their ministry, including the *Chaplains Bulletin*, meant that by the later stages of the war, army chaplains were quite well instructed and supported. These different measures and initiatives did not begin to impact on chaplains as a group until 1916, however, and for the first 16 months of the war new chaplains often found it difficult to find a productive place for themselves in the army. For Anglican chaplains, the lack of military training was not helped by their often very uneven clerical training. B. K. Cunningham had been asked to run the school at St Omer because of the reputation he had gained during his time at Farnham. Reflecting on his experiences with chaplains in 1919 he wrote:

The pre-war theological college system, as judged by the padres it produced, did not come well out of the experience of war; the devotional training had been along too narrow lines and depended too much on [a] favourable environment, and when that was no longer given the padre was apt to lose his bearings.<sup>29</sup>

In the opening phases of the war, moreover, this lack of training and preparation was compounded by a poorly defined brief. Many of the chaplains who arrived in France in 1914 and 1915 simply had no idea what exactly they were supposed to be doing or what was expected of them, either by their church or their army.

A book entitled *A War-Time Chaplaincy*, written by R. Langley Barnes, a padre who had been attached to the 11th Division in France, was published in London shortly after the outbreak of the Second World War. It was intended to be a sort of guidebook for new chaplains. In the first chapter Barnes touches on the difficulties of a wartime chaplaincy but makes it clear that, first and foremost, an army chaplain is a religious minister:

A chaplain is appointed to the Forces because he is a minister of religion; and the Forces – sea, land or air – want to have a minister of religion among them. His first duty, then, is the ministry according

to the regulations of the religious body from which he is appointed. That is his duty to God, his duty to his Church, and his duty to the Force in which he is commissioned as chaplain. He will often recall to himself the dignity of his office and charge, as it was set before him at his ordination. He has a great need to do so, for life on active service is hard, brutish, crowded and full of uncertainties. Men are engrossed by the mere job of 'carrying on'.<sup>30</sup>

The message that Barnes was at pains to get across was that a chaplain should never forget, irrespective of unique circumstances, that he is a clergyman and that this is the reason he has been granted a commission. The civilian churches clearly wanted their chaplains to act like ministers of religion and provide conventional spiritual guidance and pastoral care. The military authorities wanted these things too, but really only where they were required. New Anglican chaplains often quickly discovered that if they were to confine themselves to strictly religious work they would come into real contact with only a small proportion of the men in their charge. In addition, once a chaplain had completed his official duties, the duties that only he, as a clergyman-in-uniform, could perform, he usually found that he still had a great deal of time and energy left for other important but non-religious work. This mix of clearly religious and ministerial duties with more secular unofficial duties was typical of the average Anglican chaplain's ministry during the Great War, and the specific kinds of work that fell into each category should be looked at in more detail.

## **Official Duties**

The lack of proper training for chaplains for much of the war can, in part, be explained by the fact that as clergymen, chaplains were already trained and qualified to perform the small but important number of official duties that the army required of them. This work, which could only be carried out by an accredited clergyman, legitimised the chaplain's unusual status in the army and while other, less official tasks may have taken up most of a padre's time, his strictly religious or spiritual work remained fundamental to his ministry.

## **Church Parades**

In a talk given at Weymouth College in the 1920s, Rev. Edward Victor Tanner, who had been awarded the MC during the war, recounted what he had been told at the War Office regarding chaplains' work, 'When



I asked the Chaplain-General at the War Office what my work was to be I was told that, officially, I was to be responsible for the morning church parade and that whatever other work I did I should have to make for myself – the only apparatus given me was a Communion Set and 50 Army Prayer Books!<sup>31</sup> In training camps and anywhere at a safe distance from the fighting line, the most obvious task a chaplain had to perform was indeed the organisation of church parades. These parades were a kind of formal and militaristic religious service and were generally favoured by the military authorities as all forms of ceremonial assembly were felt to be good for discipline, morale, and *esprit de corps*. They also provided a regular opportunity for senior officers to address a battalion as a whole and importantly, to inspect the troops. The King's Regulations governing discipline and ceremony in the British Army made attendance at church parades compulsory and while it was technically possible to declare oneself an atheist or a member of an obscure sect to avoid attending, the alternative option of tedious fatigue duty was often a less attractive prospect than the parade itself.<sup>32</sup> The principle of enforcing attendance at religious services had a long pre-war history in the British Army and remained in place until it was finally abolished in the aftermath of the Second World War.<sup>33</sup>

The existence of compulsory religious services in the form of church parades meant that when they enlisted or gained commissions, many British men were leaving a civilian world in which formal religion often played a negligible role and entering a military environment where religious services were a regular, unavoidable feature. The fact that attendance at parades was enforced had the potential to work in a chaplain's favour. Although his congregation might be there under unspoken protest, a padre presiding over a parade nonetheless had a regular captive audience, which, through determination and force of personality, he could gradually win over. In practice, however, persuading soldiers that these services were anything more than yet another manifestation of military discipline could prove difficult. A key reason for this was that church parades in the pre-war regular army had become ominously linked in soldiers' minds with kit inspection. According to padre Tanner, 'Some C.O.s differed from others but, generally speaking, advantage was taken of this weekly parade to carry out a prolonged inspection of buttons, general equipment etc., so that by the time the hour arrived for the Padre to start the service, the men had become thoroughly tired, irritable and restless'.<sup>34</sup> This close association with discipline and inspection, combined with the fact that they were often conducted in the open air, regardless of the weather, led many

of the rank-and-file, whatever their personal feelings about religion, to dread the weekly parades.

In his wartime diary, Major R. S. Cockburn, who served with the King's Royal Rifle Corps on the Western Front, insisted that compulsory parades were unpopular and that voluntary services were poorly attended:

Church Parade on Sunday is never a popular parade, especially when the padre is late (as he often is), or when he does not arrive at all. If a commander decides on a voluntary service – I am speaking of the Church of England – it often happens that hardly a man will turn up, unless the padre is a man of unusual influence, or the officers get hold of their men beforehand.<sup>35</sup>

The lyrics of a popular soldier's song from the war reflect this sense of antipathy; they describe some of the benefits of demobilisation:

No more blooming kit inspections,  
No more Church Parades for me!<sup>36</sup>

An inelegant but revealing poem on the deplorable state of religion in the BEF, written by a certain Captain Cochrane and printed in the pages of *Country Life* magazine in 1917, alluded to some of the possible reasons for combatant indifference to organised worship:

Battalion Church Parade: no blooming lark  
To clean your person, clothes and belt to suit  
The fancy of a Captain swift to mark  
The missing button, the untended boot;  
Too much it savoured of the Barrack Square:  
Too stiff and formal to his reckoning:  
True there was music, for the Band was there,  
But everybody seemed afraid to sing.<sup>37</sup>

Thus, when the average soldier thought of religion in the army, he thought of kit inspection and perhaps standing in the rain for up to two hours. Needless to say, this negative association did little to help the conscientious chaplain. Many chaplains were opposed in principle to the idea of compulsory services, but as the organisation and conduct of such services was one of their few official duties they were reluctant to give it up. This was especially the case for new chaplains who were

anxious to have clear, concrete tasks to perform while finding their feet. Interestingly, these unpopular church parades may have contributed to the impression on the home front in the early days of the war that a religious revival was occurring among British soldiers in camps in France. Civilian observers did not often understand that attendance at huge open-air parades in places like Rouen was compulsory. Correspondents for the *Church Times* and other religious papers reported seeing battalions of men listening to sermons and passionately singing hymns little realising that these men had been effectively ordered to do so.<sup>38</sup> Frank Richards, as we have seen, clearly had little regard for army chaplains, and as a lifelong atheist he was understandably unenthusiastic about religious services of any kind. In *Old Soldiers Never Die* he claims that his loathing of church parades was shared by virtually all of his comrades. He also insisted that these parades took place 'if we happened to be out of the line on a Sunday' and that they were regularly held within range of enemy shellfire.<sup>39</sup> Generally speaking, however, as a regiment moved closer to the line and away from the base camps, Sunday became just like any other day and formal church parades were a less frequent occurrence. Even during rest periods, chaplains were not usually allowed to gather large numbers of men together in the open where they might be vulnerable to enemy fire. In these more dangerous areas, and particularly in the front-line, a chaplain was more likely to devote his time to his other major official duty, burial services.

### **Burial services**

Irrespective of the religious inclinations of those present, funerals that were held at a safe distance from the line were often quite well attended. If the deceased had been popular, or in any way well known, the turnout at a funeral could be very large. It would be a mistake, however, to interpret large congregations at funerals as an indication that religious sentiment among soldiers was strong. Much like civilians, soldiers saw funerals or mass burial services as an occasion to pay their last respects to men they had known or been friends with. It could also be a great comfort to families on the home front, again irrespective of their religious convictions, to know that their deceased relative had been given a proper burial. Combatant officers and men sometimes buried dead comrades in the absence of a padre,<sup>40</sup> but as the only officer in the army who could officially perform Christian burial rites, the chaplain was highly valued in this capacity. If a chaplain was near the front-line or actually in the trenches he could conceivably devote nearly all his time to burying the dead and tending to temporary or permanent cemeteries.

Until the graves registration authorities undertook the supervision of cemeteries towards the end of 1916, chaplains, of all denominations, played a key role in recording the deaths and final resting places of British soldiers.<sup>41</sup>

In dangerous parts of the line, and especially after battles or more minor engagements with the enemy, burial work was extremely important. Quite apart from any religious significance that a Christian burial might take on, there was also a very practical side to the interment of dead men. Firstly, once a man had been buried he was officially dead and it was often the chaplain who supplied this information to Divisional Headquarters, thereby helping the army to compile accurate casualty lists.<sup>42</sup> After burial, a padre usually made a note of the name and serial number of the deceased, his unit, the date of the death, and, importantly, the map location of the grave. On 10 August 1917, for example, padre Mervyn Evers, attached to the 74th Brigade of the Fourth Army on the Western Front, recorded burying Privates Cross and Johnson 'opposite concrete dugout in Jaffa trench'.<sup>43</sup> An officer had thus officially recorded the deaths and noted the exact whereabouts of the remains of two fallen soldiers. Secondly, from the point of view of both hygiene and morale it was naturally considered undesirable for the ground around the trenches to be littered with unburied corpses. Burying the dead in and around the front-line was dangerous work, as retrieving and burying bodies could lead to fresh casualties, and chaplains who were prepared to do it earned the respect and appreciation of their superiors. Ernest Crosse remembered burying corpses that had been lying for months around the trenches in Beaumont-Hamel during the winter of 1916. He also recalled greatly shortening the Prayer Book version of the funeral service but being sure to include the following in his ceremony, 'Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord; even so saith the Spirit, for they rest from their labours'. He felt it was important in an environment where death was around every corner that it be seen not as a shadowy and final end but as a release and rest from the labour, toil, and torment of life on earth.<sup>44</sup>

Carrying out burial work, particularly the mass burials that followed major engagements, brought padres into direct contact with the often horrific results of industrialised warfare and required considerable nerve. In September 1916, David Railton, by then an experienced temporary chaplain, was involved in directing mass burials on a section of the Somme battlefield. In a troubled letter to his wife, he confided:

No words can tell you all I feel, nor can words tell you of the horror of clearing a battlefield. This battalion was left to do that and several

men went off with shell shock and two were wounded. I am certain the shell shock was caused not just by the explosion of a shell near by, but by the sights and smell of the battlefield in general. I felt dreadful, and had to do my best to keep the men up to the task.<sup>45</sup>

In July of the following year, Edward Campbell, a former Irish rugby international and regular senior Anglican chaplain attached to the 5th Corps, was recommended for the DSO for similar work on the Somme front. The wording of the recommendation gives an insight into the grim nature of the task and the level of professional determination it required:

Campbell, E. F.

For devotion and perseverance in burial of numerous dead in Serre – Beaumont Hamel area. A most arduous duty, the majority of bodies being in [an] advanced state of putrefaction. Between 5,000 and 6,000 bodies were buried during about 15 weeks. Only Mr Campbell's determination enabled him to perform the work; his assistants and working parties had frequently to be changed.<sup>46</sup>

The area that Campbell had been working in, just in front of Gommecourt Wood, was the same ground over which the London Division had advanced at the beginning of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. Many of the bodies that had to be buried had thus been lying exposed to the elements for over a year. Writing years after the war, Noel Mellish recalled meeting Campbell and his burial party as they worked among the dead. Mellish had been awarded the Victoria Cross for extraordinary gallantry during an engagement with the enemy at St Eloi in March 1916 and was revered for his physical bravery by the officers and men of the Royal Fusiliers. In his memoir he emphasised the importance of the task Campbell had set for himself and paid tribute to what he viewed as a less dramatic but no less genuine feat of courage:

After all those months our dead were still lying in hundreds on the wire, which all our artillery preparation had left untouched ... There I came across Edward Campbell, who had been a senior padre of our Division, now promoted to a Corps, doing a piece of work which most would shrink from undertaking. Day after day, with careful system, he searched the dead for identification. Because of long exposure many of the identity discs, being made of paper or wood or

pulp, seemed at first quite obliterated, but with wonderful patience he collected them and, taking them to his hut, washed them carefully in petrol and when they were dry was able, in most cases, to read the name, number and regiment on each.

For six weeks he continued that noble work, labelling those identified and directing the burial of them all. Through this devoted work over 600 before marked 'missing' were certified as 'killed in action'. Imagine how dreadful and repulsive this work must have been to a sensitive man, yet he never shrank from it till at last, having nearly finished his task, he was taken ill and had to leave it to be completed by others. There is more true devotion in work such as this than much that is spectacular and applauded by the public.<sup>47</sup>

Although Campbell's life was not in any great danger while he conducted this work, it nonetheless took considerable courage and dedication to return to the site every day and deal with the human debris of the battlefield. Significantly, the army readily acknowledged his contribution; he was mentioned in despatches while overseeing the burials and the aforementioned DSO was awarded on New Year's Day 1918.

Many of the bodies that Campbell identified and buried had been decomposing for so long that they were unrecognisable. Yet padres regularly buried men they had known well shortly after they had been killed. Dora Pym recalled that her husband, senior Church of England chaplain Tom Pym, had found that 'while burying so many of the men he loved, the very weight of slaughter pressed heavily upon him'.<sup>48</sup> When burying young men they had known personally chaplains were forced to confront all the pathos, tragedy, and horror of the war. Pym himself described the experience in powerful terms, 'Often, standing at the grave of a subaltern so young and fresh from England that you could see him only last week buying kit with his mother in the Army and Navy Stores, I felt ashamed to be alive'.<sup>49</sup>

### **Notification of next-of-kin**

Another important task that chaplains carried out was quite closely related to burial work. If an officer was killed, the CO or one or more of his fellow officers would write to his next-of-kin, giving details about the circumstances of his death and often a few personal words of consolation. In the case of other ranks such letters were by no means guaranteed and it often fell to the chaplain to provide the family of a recently killed soldier with a personal message to support the cold, official notification they received from the War Office. According to

Crosse, a conscientious padre would make it his business to be present during the Medical Officer's inspection of new drafts to note down the name and address of the person to whom the man concerned would like him to write to in the event of his death.<sup>50</sup> After a major action a chaplain might have several hundred such letters to write. This type of correspondence was not strictly the preserve of the chaplain – comrades of fallen men often undertook to contact their families – and so in that sense it was not an 'official' duty. Yet consoling the bereaved was an integral part of the civilian clergyman's ministry and this type of pastoral work, when performed by the clergyman-in-uniform, was often greatly appreciated by the parents, wives, and children of men who had been killed. The very sincere letters of thanks from mourning mothers and wives that commonly appear in chaplains' personal papers testify to this appreciation. As with burial work, writing to the relatives of dead men was an emotionally draining task that brought chaplains face to face with the reality of war. Padre Charles Raven was posted to the Western Front in 1917 where he served in the front-line with the 1/Royal Berkshire Regiment. To begin with he quite enjoyed the danger of the forward trenches, which he described as 'extraordinarily exhilarating',<sup>51</sup> but while out of the line he succumbed to a bout of depression prompted by the cancellation of leave and the stress of corresponding with soldiers' families. He expressed his feelings in a letter to a close friend:

I read or deal with every letter that comes to our casualties as well as writing to the wife or mother of each man who falls. One learns to know so well the cry of the widow; one reads her artless letters when her man is dead and she not yet informed and one receives the heart-broken gratitude for one's own letter. And then one realises that such may be one's own wife's fate and that more than likely one will never be able to see the kiddies grow up or stand between them and poverty.<sup>52</sup>

Raven was perhaps an unusually sensitive man but he was certainly not the only padre to find the task of writing to soldiers' families difficult. Carl Parry Okeden, formerly a curate at Whitby in Yorkshire, was attached to the 6th Battalion of the Northamptonshire Regiment during the massive German offensive of March 1918. Much like Raven, he was initially quite thrilled by the excitement and danger of war. In two fairly cheerful letters to his wife he emphasised just how much he was enjoying being in the thick of the action. In a third letter, however,

written some two weeks after the start of the offensive, the tone is more sombre as Parry Okeden describes dealing with the aftermath of the British retreat:

I've been writing dozens of letters to people whose relatives have been killed and wounded – a painful job. One dear lad very badly wounded saw me in the dressing station and said 'Hello Padre old sport' and then 'come and kiss me Padre' and he put his arms round me and kissed me. He is an E. Londoner; but I am afraid he'll die. I could hardly help from crying. Well I must stop and write to others.<sup>53</sup>

Thus, in their correspondence with the families of dead men, padres were constantly reminded of the enormous human cost of the conflict and of the sacrifices made not only by the men fighting and dying in the various theatres of war but also by their families on the home front. Yet in performing this work, chaplains provided a valuable, and much valued, human link between the army and bereaved relatives. Oswin Creighton, son of the former Bishop of London, Mandell Creighton, served with the 29th Division in Gallipoli in 1915 and was later posted to the Western Front where he was attached to the 3rd Division. He was killed while visiting a forward gun battery in the spring of 1918. His letters and diaries reveal him to have been a highly intelligent, dedicated, perceptive but occasionally naïve and patronising man, and give an extraordinary insight into the army chaplains' ministry during the war. Writing in 1916, he was keen to stress the importance of the chaplain's role in maintaining the link between the home front and the battlefield:

[The chaplain] is the best channel of communication between the men and those at home. Very often one is asked to promise to write if anything happens, and the little personal letters the chaplain can write to those at home are most welcome, and the knowledge that all that can be done by decent burial has been done.<sup>54</sup>

Montague, Graves and the other post-war critics all suggested that army chaplains were spared the experience of war at its most horrific. It is true that padres occupied a relatively sheltered position when compared with combatant officers; they were free of the sometimes enormous pressure of commanding men in the field, and although they regularly entered the front-line, they were generally less exposed to enemy fire than combatants and they took no direct part in the business of killing



or ordering others to kill. Yet when supervising the burial of corpses and corresponding with the families of fallen men, chaplains were forced to deal with the brutal realities of industrialised war and mass death in a very direct, hands-on manner.

It should be stressed that it was not only to convey bad news that chaplains wrote to soldiers' families. Padres working in hospitals, casualty clearing stations, or aid-posts often wrote letters for seriously wounded or illiterate men who were unable to write for themselves and informed their families that they were injured but alive. Chaplains stationed in such places frequently got involved in the practical work of caring for the wounded. This must be considered useful but unofficial work and, before going into further detail, the last of the chaplains' official duties, the organisation of voluntary services, must be taken into account.

### **Voluntary services**

When the unit to which the chaplain was attached was out of the line voluntary services were generally held every Sunday. This type of work was very close to the chaplain's vocation as a clergyman and must be considered a central part of his ministry in the British Army. Voluntary services were often held in huts provided either by the YMCA or the Church Army. Some chaplains were quite successful in attracting officers and men to such services and remembered them fondly. Ernest Crosse, for example, claimed they were 'a great encouragement ... because [I] realised then, what it was not so easy to see at other times, that, though we may not be a church-going nation, the gap which separates men from the Church is really much less than it is apt to appear'. As we have seen, however, poor attendances at voluntary services were very common. According to Crosse, men would attend if it suited them, if they had nothing else to do, and if the padre was able to make the service an unrestricted, simple, and direct affair, with much hymn-singing.<sup>55</sup> Interestingly, Crosse insisted that communion services were particularly badly attended, 'Communion services were far more difficult, and I never met anyone who solved to his satisfaction the administrative difficulties which they presented ... Early morning communion services at the conventional hour of 8.00 a.m. were held every Sunday when the battalion was out of the line, but a chaplain had to work hard to get an average attendance of even a dozen, and quite frequently there were none'.<sup>56</sup>

This divergence between the number of troops who might be expected to come to a sermon and prayer service and those who would

attend a communion service is significant. A ranker or officer who regularly received communion would have to have been quite a committed Anglican and presumably a churchgoer in peacetime. A man who occasionally attended a conventional prayer service of an evening was not necessarily religious at all. The former, more devout type seems to have been comparatively scarce among Anglican troops.

## **Unofficial duties**

A number of key characteristics of the Great War made the issue of troop-morale even more pressing for the British Army than it had been in previous wars. Firstly, the sheer scale and extent of the conflict, and the large number of casualties incurred from the outset meant that the endurance of the individual soldier came to be seen as *the* decisive factor in advancing towards victory. In addition, for the first time the bulk of the army was made up of non-regular, temporary troops – civilians, in civilian occupations, who volunteered or were conscripted to fight for the duration of the war. The translations of French texts on the subject of morale<sup>57</sup> and experience in previous campaigns led the military authorities to view the combat-willingness of individuals or groups as being based directly on their morale. What exactly constituted ‘morale’ was complex, but it was generally recognised that the stronger the character of the individual soldier, the stronger and more combat-ready the group he was attached to would be. What precisely constituted ‘character’ is also difficult to determine, but discipline, courage, selflessness, and devotion to duty were viewed as the outward expression of ‘strong’ character. Character, moreover, was understood as something that could be developed. It could be strengthened and civilians could be turned into combat troops by cultivating the soldierly spirit through ‘character-training’. Concerning morale and discipline in the British Army, David Englander has observed that:

Character was held to be the source of great deeds and character-training, the means by which the soldier acquired the moral strength to withstand the stresses of modern warfare. Apart from military training, the army sought to build up character through religious influences and through the provision of rational recreation and leisure pursuits. The moral contribution of organized sports was considerable.<sup>58</sup>

Chaplains, as priest or ministers in uniform, clearly had a role to play in ‘religious influences’, but many Anglican chaplains eagerly took part

in activities that were less obviously related to their vocational calling. They learned to strike a balance between concerning themselves with the spiritual and moral welfare of the troops, as their church would have it, and their physical and material welfare, as the army would have it. The religious activities of a chaplain were often closely combined with his work as unofficial quartermaster, medical orderly, and welfare officer. Many of the personal narratives produced by chaplains record their involvement in a diverse range of secular activities including distributing food, cigarettes, and ammunition, organising football matches and recreational theatre, censoring letters and cutting hair, as well as conducting prayer services and consoling the wounded and dying. Writing in the 1950s the Reverend Duncan Blair, a Scottish clergyman who had served on the Western Front during the war, recalled how unofficial, secular work was as much a part of his ministry as official clerical work:

Out of the line in those earlier and more ill-directed days, there were the compulsory Church Parades, the relentless call for organised sport, the running of the inevitable canteen, while in the frantic turmoil and confusion of battle, first aid to the wounded, reverent attendance upon the last rites of the fallen and hurried and heart-breaking correspondence with the bereaved at home, crowded out all other demands upon a padre's time and energies.<sup>59</sup>

### **Sports and recreation**

In his survey of morale in the British and Dominion armies during the war, J. G. Fuller overlooks the link between the unofficial and official work performed by army chaplains and the maintenance of troop morale. He nonetheless highlights the key importance of organised recreation for troops at rest, which he argues 'was widely recognized to be an important factor in morale'.<sup>60</sup> Recreational activities in the shape of popular entertainments and organised sports were an integral part of service life in the regular, pre-war British army. This emphasis on organised and controlled recreation had developed in response to the social make-up of the peacetime army and the nature of garrison life overseas. The public school system had taught many regular officers that sports were a healthy way of 'usefully occupying young males in their spare time' and promoting the sporting values of fair play, self-control, and manliness.<sup>61</sup> Large numbers of troops stationed in colonial outposts should not, it was felt, be left to their own devices when not on duty. Such sporting diversions were not seen as being practical or desirable

during wartime conditions when the type of warfare envisioned was one of rapid movement. As static trench warfare became a reality in late 1914, however, organised soccer, cricket, and boxing matches were reintroduced as a means of exercise and diversion for troops at rest out of the line. When the new armies of volunteers began arriving in France and Belgium in 1915, sports were seen as a valuable means of boosting the morale of citizens in uniform by allowing them to engage in civilian pursuits. Soccer, in particular, although it had been codified in the public schools, was hugely popular among the working classes who composed the rank and file of the new divisions. Officers not only organised but also often took part in games and enhanced officer-man relations by engaging with rankers in a less formal setting than the camp or the parade ground. *Notes for Young Officers*, a handbook issued in 1917, clearly encouraged officers to take responsibility for organising leisure activities for the men in their charge: 'an officer must not think that his duties end with the dismissal of his platoon after the parade. The life of an average private soldier is a dull one, the class from which he comes has not much time for amusement, and it is his officers who have to teach him to amuse himself in the right way'.<sup>62</sup>

The organisation of sporting events did not conflict with a chaplain's non-combatant status and was something that many padres eagerly involved themselves in. A. L. J Shields took a temporary commission as a chaplain in 1915 and served until the end of the war. In the very early stages of the Second World War he was asked to draw on his experience to produce a short book of instruction for temporary chaplains. Under the heading of 'Unusual Duties' he had the following to say about sports and the chaplain:

Most Britishers love an open-air game, and the chaplain should take an interest in games organised for his unit. He may be asked to undertake the work of sports officer; he would be responsible for organising games and taking the necessary steps to provide the requisite gear for these games, to secure which he should consult the Adjutant ... The chaplain who is able to referee a football match should do so. Should he be able to play the game and play it well, the men will love it. Much spiritual work and many spiritual opportunities will present themselves to the chaplain through these social contacts.<sup>63</sup>

Shields was careful to link the unofficial (football) with the official (spiritual work), suggesting that a primary motivation for the chaplain in engaging in recreational work should be to improve his relationship

with the men and thereby increase his influence as a clergyman in uniform. From a chaplain's perspective sports thus had a number of advantages. Firstly, a padre who became actively involved in organising recreational diversions came into contact with a much greater number of men than a chaplain who confined himself to strictly official duties. The relaxed atmosphere of a football match or a concert party provided the chaplain with an opportunity to get to know the average soldier, and indeed the average officer, and to interact with them socially. This, in turn, allowed combatant troops, both officers and men, to view their padre in a more familiar and potentially sympathetic light and, it was hoped, make them better disposed towards the church he represented. The more conscientious chaplains realised that a definite rapport had to be established with officers and men before any meaningful religious ministrations could take place. It also allowed the chaplain to make a direct contribution to the maintenance of troop morale and thereby serve the army in a very clear and tangible fashion.

### **Concert parties and cinemas**

Music hall entertainment was a major element of working-class culture in pre-war Britain and one that made its way to the front in the form of concert parties that featured performances by both officers and men. By the end of 1916 most divisions had formed a concert party group and for the remainder of the war they constituted an extremely popular form of recreation and entertainment for troops at rest out of the line. Chaplains had more time than combatant officers to devote to the organisation of such diversions and many of them became enthusiastically embraced this kind of work. Padre Oswin Creighton by no means neglected church parades or voluntary services but he found that catering to men's material needs and entertainment was often more directly rewarding. The canteens and recreation rooms he organised for ordinary soldiers seem to have been extremely popular and in a letter written in August 1917 he described his involvement in the building of quite an elaborate theatre behind the lines:

The other evening we gave our opening show in the covered-in theatre I have built for the D.A.C. [*Divisional Ammunition Column*] It is a wonderful place. The framework and seats are all made of massive timber, collected from the villages round, and the whole covered by three gigantic tarpaulins. The men have fixed up a wonderful little dressing room behind the stage and are very comfortable. They gave an excellent show to a packed and enthusiastic house. The Church

Army have given us the most magnificent marquee. And I have had it erected on one of the wagon lines and built a stage in it and put the canteen in as well. We lead a strange life these days, sports, concerts, games of all kinds going on every day.<sup>64</sup>

Concert party performers upheld the music hall tradition of poking fun at authority and generally making light of a grim situation. The attendance at, and often participation in, these concerts by chaplains and other officers added to their comic appeal and helped to foster unit cohesion and promote *esprit de corps*.<sup>65</sup> Concerts and sporting events also helped to ease men's longing for home by going some way towards recreating the home environment near the front. As J. G. Fuller has remarked 'Entertainments acted to dissipate boredom and anxiety, but also, at a deeper level, to assuage the men's craving for the brightness and pleasure of civilian life'.<sup>66</sup>

Their often very active involvement in recreational and welfare work caused a certain amount of anxiety among Anglican chaplains, who felt that their association with work that was not overtly religious or spiritual compromised the integrity of their ministry. In organising recreational activities, setting up canteens, arranging comfortable billets, and assisting medical personnel, chaplains were performing tasks that were doubtlessly important for morale and fighting efficiency. This sort of work did not require ordained clergymen to carry it out, however, and if a chaplain devoted too much of his time to the material rather than the spiritual welfare of soldiers, he ran the risk of losing sight of his vocational role. Several Anglican chaplains expressed doubts about what Neville Talbot called 'Holy Grocery' during the war, but most padres seem to have been able to rationalise this dimension to their ministry by interpreting their unofficial duties as an extension of their priestly role. During the Battle of Loos, Harry Blackburne took a portable canteen as close to the front-line as possible and provided troops going forward and to the rear with tea and buttered bread. Despite his energy in performing this work, however, Blackburne was doubtful about the wisdom of chaplains taking on so much welfare work. Writing in the 1930s he recalled raising the issue with the Deputy Chaplain-General in 1915, 'I rather moaned to the Bishop that I had to spend so much time looking after buns but he cheered me by saying "Never mind, they are sanctified buns"'.<sup>67</sup>

Blackburne seems to have adopted Gwynne's view of the sacral or ministerial nature of much of the apparently mundane tasks chaplains found themselves performing. Indeed, he would later stress the value of

unofficial work when addressing other chaplains. At the first interdenominational conference in 1916, he encouraged his fellow padres to consider the supervision of sports and entertainments an important and legitimate part of the army chaplain's ministry:

Not only is [the Chaplain] required to be a diligent though tactful visitor among the hale and hearty and among the wounded and the sick, a conductor of interesting services, and a good preacher, but it is also expected of him, as part of his stock-in-trade, to be able to run clubs, to get up entertainments, to referee in football matches, to be time-keeper in boxing contests. These last, though they cannot be regarded in the same light as his main duties, should not be lightly esteemed or sneeringly spoken of; for to be able to do any of these things not only keeps us human – and some of us are woefully unhuman – but it also helps us in our work. Buns and tea can be turned into veritable Sacraments; clubs, football matches, and boxing contests can become powerful agencies in bringing men to Christ and Christ to men.<sup>68</sup>

Thus although chaplains were sometimes unsure of the spiritual value of performing work that could just as well be carried out by a quartermaster or any combatant officer, they nonetheless embraced their unofficial duties because they had a clearly positive impact on morale and they gave the padre concrete tasks to perform. They also had the potential to endear the clergyman-in-uniform, and, by extension, his church, to officers and men. By offering comfort and support to soldiers who were under the considerable strain of active service, moreover, chaplains were fulfilling the Christian mission of helping those in adversity. As such, it was relatively easy for clergymen to interpret organising canteens and distributing cigarettes as God's work. A final reason why chaplains often adopted such a broad view of their ministry is that the military authorities increasingly acknowledged their contribution to sustaining morale.

### **Chaplains, commanding officers, and troop morale**

One very instructive way of determining how the army defined the role of the chaplain is to look at the kind of activities or behaviour that chaplains were rewarded for in terms of military honours. Over 100 of the 723 Anglican chaplains whose files are contained in the Deputy Chaplain-General's war book were awarded Military Crosses,

75 were mentioned in despatches, and 13 both received MCs and were mentioned in despatches. Junior officers, including chaplains, were recommended for these honours by the commanding officer of the unit, to which they were attached, usually a Major-General or Brigadier-General. In many cases the wording of the text of the recommendation for the award is included in the file of the chaplain who received it. The recommendations for MCs, which became citations if the award was approved, provide a fascinating insight into what the British Army, as represented by its commanding officers, looked for in a good chaplain.

The perceived link between the work of the army chaplain and morale comes out very strongly in the recorded recommendations. As the following examples indicate, chaplains were consistently praised for maintaining a cheerful demeanour under stress, 'cheering' the men of their unit, and having a generally positive influence on morale.

Colquhoun, J. F.

Daily went up into the front line (22 to 31 March, 1918) and his presence was a great encouragement to the troops. Untiring in his efforts to cheer the men and look after their comfort in a very trying period.<sup>69</sup>

Griffin, J. W. K.

For conspicuous good work and devotion to duty. On all occasions afforded me most valuable help in keeping up moral[e] of fighting troops. Indefatigable in working for comfort and good of all ranks and is greatly liked and trusted by everybody.<sup>70</sup>

Gillenders, Rev. R.

For gallantry and devotion to duty ... Indefatigable in efforts and showed utmost cheerfulness in trying conditions. Before he was wounded, Sept. 21, 1917, he was continually amongst the men cheering them up.<sup>71</sup>

Hazledine, Rev. F. J.

For consistent and conspicuous devotion to duty. Constantly with the men in the trenches. By his unflagging energy and cheerfulness set a set a fine example to all. Immediately after attack in Metz-en-Couture he went around cheering and encouraging the men. His sturdy optimism and splendid example under all conditions were beyond praise.<sup>72</sup>



Law, J. H. A.

Indefatigable in ministering to all ranks since July 1916, constantly visiting the men in the trenches in spite of shell fire. Very successful in efforts to cheer and inspire the men.<sup>73</sup>

What the army really appears to have valued was a chaplain who was infectiously cheerful and optimistic and who made the morale of the men his primary concern.

This emphasis on cheerful demeanour is noteworthy as it is something that chaplains often consciously tried to project. Rev. Mervyn Evers, an evangelical Church of England padre who was attached to the Loyal North Lancashire Regiment on the Western Front, had an outstanding active service record and was clearly thought of as an exceptionally good chaplain. In January 1918 he was awarded a Bar to the MC he had received just over a year before. A combatant officer who knew him described him as 'one of the best and bravest men in the Expeditionary Force' and B. K. Cunningham reported that he was 'first class'.<sup>74</sup> In a letter to his sister written during the Somme offensive, Evers claimed that the ability to work against the generally depressing atmosphere at the front was central to a chaplain's ministry. 'One's job out here', he wrote 'is to be an uplifting and inspiring influence but all the time one has to be fighting ... ever-present down-dragging influences'.<sup>75</sup> Addressing a group of 70 chaplains at the aforementioned interdenominational conference in 1916, Harry Blackburne dealt with this precise issue. In Blackburne's view, presenting an outwardly optimistic attitude in order to lift the spirits of the troops was a key part of the army chaplain's ministry. He was quick to point out that this did not mean that chaplains should always be telling jokes or trying to be funny as this approach tended to backfire, and the padre who attempted it was 'nearly always a woeful bore'. He insisted, however, that a good chaplain should always remain optimistic, in spite of personal feelings to the contrary, as a Christian example to officers and men:

With the streams of wounded coming in to the aid-post or the dressing-station, as the case may be, one thing is needful, and that is 'to be cheerful'. Who of us is there whose heart has not been unutterably sad as he wandered round the messes and billets of his regiments after a battle, finding himself greeted with new faces and voices? ... And yet obviously it is our duty not only to wail about the past, but to be cheerful with an optimism that Christ alone can give. Oh yes,

to be cheerful, to be divinely cheerful, is an essential part of the duties of a Chaplain.<sup>76</sup>

Through the various conferences and initiatives he was involved in, and as Senior Chaplain to the First Army, Blackburne became an influential figure among Protestant padres on the Western Front and his views on the role of the padre appear to have been adopted by many junior Anglicans. For his service with the British Expeditionary Force Sir Henry Horne, Commander of the First Army, and one of the most successful generals of the war, recommended him for the DSO in 1918. In his recommendation Horne was effusive in his praise for his senior chaplain and made particular reference to his work for troop morale:

Has done work of conspicuous merit. Has realised how much chaplains can do to raise and maintain morale. Has laid himself out to train them and has succeeded in inspiring all chaplains (not only C. of E.) with some of his own zeal and energy. Has organised conferences of chaplains of all denominations (less R.C.) which have resulted in an exchange of ideas and co-ordination of methods most beneficial for the troops ... His peculiar knowledge of the soldiers, gained by service in the ranks, his health of mind combined with personality, tact, determination, drive and eloquence, mark him out as far above the average.<sup>77</sup>

In addition to many glowing references like the ones quoted above, the Deputy Chaplain-General's files include a small number of negative comments forwarded to St Omer by senior chaplains and commanding officers. One such comment concerns a Church of England chaplain attached to the 22nd Division and appears to reinforce the emphasis on cheerfulness in chaplains. Just as cheerful, optimistic demeanour attracted praise and reward, a gloomy or 'lugubrious' disposition appears to have attracted censure:

The General Officer Commanding (G.O.C.), Royal Artillery, of the Division reports of him that he is a very difficult man to provide quarters for, as no unit of RA will welcome him. The reason of this being almost entirely his manner, which is ungenial and appears to have a very depressing effect. I think there is probably full truth in this as I know that as far as his ministrations in Church are concerned he is most lugubrious and dull.<sup>78</sup>

Thus, from the point of view of the military authorities, a cheerful, optimistic demeanour was considered a vital attribute in a good chaplain, while an outward manner that might in any way 'have a depressing effect' was simply unacceptable. Morale is the key point here. If a chaplain could have a positive effect on morale he was potentially a valuable asset to his unit. If he could not influence morale, or worse, had an actively *negative* impact on it, he was unwelcome. The fact that a chaplain maintained morale more often through his unofficial duties than through his official duties seems to have been taken for granted by the military authorities.

The honour of being mentioned in despatches tended to be granted for meritorious service over an extended period or during a major engagement with the enemy rather than for specific acts of gallantry and was commonly awarded for service in exposed positions behind the lines. In the recorded recommendations for 'mentions', the unofficial, morale-related work of chaplains is referred to a number of times, as in the following brief examples:

Davies, T. H.

For most untiring and painstaking work from February 1917 until he returned to Eng. June 1917. His work in organising regimental canteens and getting up concerts and amusements was splendid and his attention to every detail in connection with the burial and registration of the battalion was most praiseworthy.<sup>79</sup>

French, R.

The interests of men always his first care. Initiated and organised Bde. cinema. Often in exposed positions. At all times showed disregard for own safety and comfort. Indefatigable in exertions to help the men both in and out of the line.<sup>80</sup>

Hughes, L. A.

Has proved himself a good chaplain, and has done much excellent work in providing entertainments and comforts for the men.<sup>81</sup>

Yet with the exception of burial work, for which padres were highly praised, their official duties are rarely referred to in recommendations for awards. This suggests that commanding officers prioritised the chaplain's unofficial work. Again, a rare negative comment helps bring out the army's attitude. In this case the remarks were made by D. F. Carey,

Senior Chaplain to the 5th Division, concerning a Welsh padre who was sent to the Western Front in 1915:

He is not and never has been suited to work among front line troops where he has to work on his own initiative almost entirely ... [He] will not help to provide men with rooms and recreation saying he is a priest not a publican. He appears to have only one bait wherewith to angle for souls *viz* the Mass – I think he will do better work in some large centre among other chaplains.<sup>82</sup>

This brief report is extremely revealing. By focusing exclusively on his strictly official work, the sort of work that only a clergyman could perform, and refusing to engage in the unofficial business of the men's recreation, this padre earned the strong disapproval of a senior chaplain. The unambiguous implication is that if a priest-in-uniform insisted on performing purely priestly tasks, he was of no use to front-line troops. There is also a clear acknowledgement that the Army Chaplains' Department, represented here by Carey, viewed unofficial work as a means of 'angling for souls'. This reinforces the argument that the Department recognised the work of attending to the rest and recreation of ordinary soldiers as integral to the chaplain's ministry as it allowed the clergy-in-uniform to increase their influence and attract men to the church they represented.

## **Chaplains and the High Command**

Another major issue that the award recommendations shed light on is that of the chaplains' role in the front-line. The great majority of the awards for gallantry were issued in 1917 and 1918, with an inordinate number being granted in the New Year's honours list of January 1918. In part, this reflects the considerable increase in the number of civilian clergymen granted temporary commissions as chaplains in the last two years of the war. Yet it also reveals a major shift in the attitude of the military authorities towards the clergy-in-uniform. During the late summer and autumn of 1914, when the war on the Western Front was still very much a war of movement, the military authorities, as we have seen, tended to view chaplains not as an essential part of the military machine but as an added luxury. Stretcher-bearers, medical orderlies, and doctors all served a non-combatant but obviously practical role during heavy fighting. The role of the chaplain, on the other hand, was more difficult to assess at this early stage. When the armies entrenched,

however, and it became clear that the war was going to last for some time, the military authorities, from junior officers to the upper echelons of command, began to see just how important the issue of maintaining troop morale over a protracted period had become. Thereafter, the notion gradually took hold that if chaplains could have a positive effect on morale in any way, they were to be encouraged. This change in attitude was reflected firstly in the increased establishment given to the Army Chaplains Department in the spring of 1915 but also in the greater freedom of movement granted to chaplains from the summer of 1915 onwards.

During the first phase of the war, chaplains had been ordered by their military superiors to stay with the battalion stores or at Brigade Headquarters while the division was in the line and were rarely, if ever, allowed in the front-line trenches. They were also generally forbidden from accompanying front-line troops during engagements, being posted no further forward than the field ambulances.<sup>83</sup> Initially, then, if a chaplain wanted to share some of the dangers commonly experienced by junior officers and men he had to go against army orders. The reasons given for this restriction were twofold. Firstly, when the absolute priority of the army was stemming the German advance, chaplains, as non-combatants, simply performed no obvious military function in the front-line. Secondly, it was felt that the sight of a severely wounded or dead padre would have a demoralising effect on front-line troops.<sup>84</sup> George Coppard, who served as a private throughout the war, later recalled hearing a talk given by Studdert Kennedy in which he relayed an anecdote about how he had been in the front-line during an enemy bombardment shortly after he arrived in France. A sergeant saw him and asked him who he was. 'I'm the Church', replied Kennedy. 'Then what the bloody hell are you doing here?' demanded the sergeant.<sup>85</sup>

Due, however, to the campaigning of junior chaplains and an increased consideration of the long-term morale of the troops on the part of the military authorities in 1915, padres were soon allowed to accompany their men practically everywhere they went and often acquitted themselves well in exposed positions.<sup>86</sup> The attitude of a number of very senior officers with regard to the role of the padre changed accordingly. In the preface to his short memoir, Harry Blackburne, quotes an army commander as having written the following to Army HQ in July, 1916:

These clergymen have now, very rightly, come to be regarded as a necessary part of the British Army on active service, and not as individuals merely attached to it for sentimental reasons. Our chaplains are doing

splendid work, and I consider we should do anything in our power to make their position fully recognised and their path smooth.<sup>87</sup>

The officer who wrote these words, General Horne, appears to have had a generally very positive relationship with Blackburne personally and with the Anglican chaplains under his command. Yet he was not the only senior staff officer to recognise the value of chaplains' work. Douglas Haig, in particular, viewed padres as playing an important role in the maintenance of troop morale and his promotion to the supreme rank of Commander-in-Chief at the end of 1915 was to prove fortuitous for chaplains.

Michael Snape has argued, quite persuasively, that 'Haig consistently sought to ensure that his chaplains made a concerted and systematic contribution to bolstering morale in the pursuit of victory, particularly among front-line units'.<sup>88</sup> In the first half of 1916, as Haig adapted to his new duties, the role of chaplains, which had already evolved considerably since the outbreak of the war, was to be further enhanced by the high command. On 15 January an important conference of army commanders was held at Cassel. Much of the discussion at the gathering focused on the question of morale and how to influence it. Haig told those present that chaplains should be considered an asset in this regard.<sup>89</sup> In Haig's view chaplains had a role to play in interpreting British ideals, and war-aims, for officers and men, thereby strengthening their resolve to defeat the enemy. He therefore viewed chaplains as playing a role in the maintenance of troop morale that was perhaps more political than spiritual. As David Englander has remarked, Haig understood the role of the British chaplain as akin to that of a political commissar.<sup>90</sup> This is not to suggest that Haig, a committed Presbyterian, was not also mindful of the spiritual dimension of the chaplains' ministry. In fact, he enjoyed a close relationship with a Scottish chaplain named Duncan and was inspired and encouraged by his weekly sermons.<sup>91</sup> This personal admiration for his own padre tended to make Haig well disposed towards, and supportive of, chaplains in general. On 28 June 1916, a mere two days before the launch of the Somme offensive, Haig wrote to George V and expressed keen satisfaction with the work of the British padres:

Everywhere I found the troops in great spirits and full of confidence of their ability to smash the enemy when the moment for action arrives. Several officers have said to me that they have never known troops in such enthusiastic spirits.

We must, I think, in fairness give a good deal of credit for this to the parsons. I have insisted on them preaching about the cause for which we are all fighting and encouraging the men to play their part. Some parsons too that were no use have been sent home. But, taken as a whole, they have done well and have been a very great help to us commanders.<sup>92</sup>

Haig clearly acknowledged and appreciated the contribution chaplains could make to the maintenance of troop morale. His views on the specific role chaplains should play during major engagements are less clear but the issue of the extent to which padres were allowed to experience the danger of battle was publicly resolved before the first British troops went over the top on 1 July. Just five days before Haig wrote to the King, an official notice was issued to all senior Anglican chaplains in the Fourth Army informing them that the Army Commander, Henry Rawlinson, forbade chaplains to advance with their units during engagements with the enemy. The notice had been written and signed by Henry K. Southwell, the assistant Chaplain-General to the Fourth Army:

It is the Army Commander's Instruction that Chaplains should be posted, during an Engagement, where they can best serve the wounded, and it is his order that Chaplains should, under no circumstances, advance with their regiments or Brigade, or, except in the cases of Chaplains allotted to the R. A., take up positions other than with a Medical Unit. This order is to be strictly obeyed, and S. C. F.'s C/E are responsible for making it known to all C/E Chaplains in their Division.

The Army Commander does not consider that Regimental Aid Posts and Advanced Dressing Stations are suitable positions for Chaplains, as the accommodation is restricted, and opportunities for aid to the wounded necessarily limited; where however such arrangements have been made with the consent of the Corps Commanders of G.O.C.s of Divisions, and by desire of the Medical Authorities, they can be allowed to stand.<sup>93</sup>

Thus, not only was Rawlinson against the idea of chaplains advancing with the regiments to which they were attached, he also felt that it was inappropriate for them to be stationed anywhere near the front-line and even regimental aid posts were off-limits to padres unless prior consent had been gained from a corps commander. The statement is explicitly clear, leaving no room for broad interpretation; as far as

Rawlinson was concerned, chaplains had no business in the front-line during major engagements with the enemy. Yet at around the same time that Haig was writing to the King, the Adjutant-General, Sir Nevil Macready, issued a circular that effectively countermanded Southwell's instructions and clarified the official position on chaplains and front-line service for the upcoming offensive.<sup>94</sup> Padres were now to be allowed remarkable freedom of movement at the front and it was left to the discretion of senior chaplains to decide where they should be stationed during engagements:

Some doubt appears to exist as to the position chaplains should occupy during active operations. It is considered that, provided their presence in no way hampers the operations in progress or in contemplation, no restrictions should be placed on their movements, and that chaplains should be encouraged to go where the Senior Chaplains ... of divisions decide that their services can be most advantageously employed, and where they can be of most use to the troops.<sup>95</sup>

The confusion caused by Southwell's instructions and the Adjutant-General's subsequent order is worth considering. The injunction against chaplains taking an active part in engagements was issued at a time when many Fourth Army chaplains naturally hoped that they would be free to advance with their units during the coming offensive. As such it must have come as something of a blow to padres who had worked hard to establish good relations with combatant officers and men. Also, and importantly, enough time elapsed between the appearance of the two sets of instructions for the contents of the assistant chaplain-general's notice to become common knowledge among the officers, and indeed the more informed rankers, of the Fourth Army divisions then preparing for the offensive. Southwell's statement may thus have given rise to a belief in the Fourth Army that Anglican chaplains were 'under orders' to stay out of the front-line. In his diatribe against the clergy-in-uniform Robert Graves insisted that chaplains were 'under orders not to get mixed up with the fighting, to stay behind with the transport and not to risk their lives'.<sup>96</sup> During the Battle of the Somme, in which he was severely wounded, Graves was attached to the 2/Royal Welch Fusiliers, a unit that formed part of the 33rd Division, which in turn formed part of the Fourth Army. If Graves had been aware of Rawlinson's original ban on chaplains advancing in battle or working in exposed positions, and did not personally see any padres on the battlefield or in forward



trenches, he may well have believed they were officially barred from front-line service. This, coupled with his personal antipathy to the Church of England and its clergy, may explain the particularly scathing tone of his remarks.

It is difficult to say precisely why the original notice was so quickly overturned. It is possible that Southwell had misrepresented Rawlinson and that the second document gives a more accurate picture of his position. It may also have been the case that the adjutant-general's orders, which applied to all chaplains in the BEF and not just the Fourth Army, more closely reflected the views of other army commanders, and indeed Haig himself. As Adjutant-General, Macready was directly responsible for burial and graves registration on the Western Front and would have understood the valuable role padres could perform in this capacity. It also seems likely that many of the chaplains whose movements were to be curtailed by the apparent injunction understood the potential damage it could cause and appealed to their superiors to have it overturned.

Whatever the reasons, the clarifying order should be viewed as highly significant as it applied to padres of all denominations and officially sanctioned the practice of chaplains accompanying their units during engagements. This was something chaplains in some divisions had done throughout 1915, but the official order gave the chaplains' case more force and helped make the sight of a padre in the front-line more common. It was a clear indication, moreover, that the high command of the BEF now recognised that chaplains, in both their strictly spiritual and more pastoral roles, were capable of making a key contribution to the maintenance of morale. That the issue was officially resolved before the Somme offensive is also significant as it meant that chaplains were free to play an active and quite visible part in the largest offensive in British military history and in engagements on the Western Front for the rest of the war. In light of this, the offensive should be considered an important turning point in the story of Anglican chaplains on active service during the war. Chaplains of all denominations played a very active role during engagements with the enemy on the Somme front throughout the summer and early autumn and Anglican padres appear to have acquitted themselves well. In September, Major-General Fielding, the CO of the Guards Division, wrote to the senior divisional Church of England chaplain to express his admiration and gratitude for the conduct of Anglican padres during one particular clash with the enemy:

I am very glad to have your report of the work of the chaplains during the fighting that took place on September 15–16. From all

sources I have heard the same story that the chaplains were doing everything that was possible in comforting the dying and in helping the wounded. They themselves were exposing themselves continually to the hottest shell fire, helping to find and collect the wounded. And what I think was perhaps grander they were doing it not to get for themselves merit or honour, but because it was their duty. I am told on all sides that Rogers, Hubbard, Llewellyn Jones, and Crawley were especially splendid ... I cannot thank the chaplains too much for all that they did.<sup>97</sup>

## Conclusion

Douglas Haig provides a good example of a devout commander who relied on his religious faith during the war and thus valued the services of a padre and recognised chaplains' potential to enhance troop morale. Yet, as Michael Snape has emphasised, he was by no means the only general to draw personal inspiration from his religious faith. Other senior figures were similarly religious and supportive of the chaplains in their respective formations.<sup>98</sup> Harry Blackburne enjoyed a good relationship not just with General Horne but also with Monro,<sup>99</sup> and both Rawlinson and General Butler gave him a good deal of support when he served as Senior Chaplain to the First Corps in 1915.<sup>100</sup> Plumer was also supportive of the work of the Chaplains' Department and facilitated the establishment of the chaplains' school at St Omer. As John Bourne, co-editor of the Haig diaries, has argued, 'Strong religious faith was common among senior military commanders, including Byng, Hubert Gough, Grierson, Horne, Plumer and Rawlinson ... all these men believed that religion was an important source of personal and Army morale, took an intimate interest in Army chaplaincy'.<sup>101</sup>

The interest and support of these senior figures allowed for an evolution of the role of the chaplain in the BEF during the war that gave padres the freedom of movement, and the official sanction, to work in all parts of the line. The notion that the army's perception of the chaplain changed over time is born out by the testimonies of Anglican chaplains. Frank Barry gave a typically articulate account of it:

When the Padres first went out with the BEF, the army had little idea what to do with them. In battle, they were left behind at the base and were not allowed to go up to the fighting front. What on earth, it was asked, could they do up there? A colonel would say 'No work

for you today, padre', meaning by that, no corpses for burial. The chaplains' job was to take church parades, on such rare occasions as these were practicable, to run entertainments, to help in censoring letters, and in general to act as welfare officers, thereby helping to keep up morale.

By the time the new temporary chaplains started arriving in force in 1915 and 1916, however, Barry claims that

All this was changed, chaplains were allowed to move freely everywhere and when the units 'went up' we went with them ... We would give Holy Communion in the dugouts, minister to the wounded and dying, share, so far as we might in what the troops endured. We did what we could to serve them in Christ's name ... and they understood that this was why we were doing it. They did not regard us just as welfare officers.<sup>102</sup>

Arthur Woods, a senior Canadian chaplain attached to the Third Canadian Division, took a similar view of the padre's altered status. 'It will be remembered', he reported at the end of 1915, 'that at the beginning of things the Chaplain was looked upon as so much unnecessary baggage – to put the matter bluntly ... It was seen anyhow that after all the padre was of some use in the army on active service. The officers and men were quick to see that he intended to be one of themselves, and as far as possible play the game. So today we find that every Battalion Commander wants his Padre. And no one is more welcome in the trenches than the padre'.<sup>103</sup>

Anglican chaplains who were posted overseas during the first two years of the war were often initially shocked by the levels of indifference to organised religious worship in the British Army. Their ability to deal with this indifference and establish a coherent role for themselves was impaired by the fact that they had received no specific training for their uniquely difficult ministry. The evidence suggests, however, that many chaplains responded well to the challenges presented by their ministry and established a valuable role for themselves in the army by combining their strictly clerical duties with other, less official duties. In both their official and unofficial work, moreover, army chaplains played a key, and increasingly recognised role, in the maintenance of troop morale.

# 4

## The Ministry of the Trenches

In the previous chapter it was seen that as the war progressed, and particularly from January 1916 onwards, elements of the mid-level and high command on the Western Front increasingly recognised the link between the role army chaplains established for themselves in the BEF and troop morale. Commanding officers of front-line units and staff officers very evidently came to value chaplains, of all denominations, for their perceived ability to maintain the material, psychological, and spiritual welfare of combatant officers and men. Something that is far more difficult to determine, however, is whether combatants themselves valued chaplains, or viewed them as instrumental in maintaining their often high levels of morale. This chapter focuses on the relationship between Anglican chaplains and the junior officers and men who bore the brunt of the fighting on the Western Front and elsewhere. It will be seen that while many padres succeeded in overcoming various obstacles and displaying the kind of personal courage and paternalism necessary to win the respect and admiration of combatants, there were other factors, some far beyond the control of individual chaplains, that continued to militate against their spiritual influence.

Their post-war literary critics, and Robert Graves in particular, portrayed the Anglican chaplains who served on the Western Front as men who were generally unpopular and out-of-touch with the troops, and who failed to command the respect of their fellow officers. The unpublished personal narratives produced by British soldiers during and immediately after the war reveal an extremely wide range of attitudes regarding army chaplains, some of which appear to fully support the negative image posited by the post-war critics. In February 1918 a certain D. L. Rowlands, then serving in France as an NCO with the Durham Light Infantry, wrote a remarkably candid letter to his fiancée.

The young corporal drew a grim picture of life at the front and behind the lines in a unit in which morale was clearly quite low:

As for religion, God forgive us all, it hasn't a place in one out of a million of the thoughts that hourly occupy men's minds. The padres, and it's anything but pleasant to say so, absolutely fail to keep up a shred of their Church's reputation. Nay, behind the line every man, and it's almost without exception, relies solely on drink for his relaxation, amusement, pleasure – everything.<sup>1</sup>

From Rowlands' point of view, religion was of little consolation in the dire conditions that prevailed at the front, and those who represented religion, the chaplains, did little to help the situation. His pointed reference to 'the padres' in a letter that expresses profound disillusionment is noteworthy. This sharp condemnation of chaplains and the generally angry tone of the letter seem to support the post-war literary portrayal of the clergy-in-uniform. Even his phrasing is echoed by Robert Graves ('not one man in a hundred'). Nor was Rowlands, as a ranker, alone in his criticism of padres. Writing in the 1920s, J. R. Skirth, a Londoner who had served as a sergeant with the Royal Garrison Artillery in France and Italy, recalled the cowardice of some Anglican padres he encountered near the front. Skirth had been quite a devout churchgoer before the war, yet after seeing two chaplains flee in terror during a light routine bombardment he lost his long-held trust in, and respect for, doctrinal Anglicanism.<sup>2</sup> In addition to such negative reports, the absence of any reference to chaplains in many contemporary sources and memoirs indicates a strong element of indifference on the part of ordinary soldiers to the clergy in their midst. Pronounced hostility towards chaplains on the part of combatants appears to have been rare, but there were a number of key factors that made the establishment of good, mutually respectful relations with ordinary soldiers a frustrating and difficult business for Anglican padres. Such factors were related to the pre-war popular image of the Church of England and its clergy and often had little to do with the ability or personality of individual padres.

### **The social divide**

Social class, and the factors that define it, are elusive concepts, yet notions of class had a definite impact on the way in which private soldiers, non-commissioned officers, and some junior officers viewed regimental chaplains, and Anglican chaplains in particular. Jay Winter

has argued that the men that volunteered for the Kitchener armies in 1914 and 1915, and those who were later conscripted, lived in 'the most class conscious nation in Europe'.<sup>3</sup> And while the industrial working classes of Edwardian Britain by no means constituted an undivided, homogeneous group, the differences between the quality of life experienced by those who earned their living through manual labour and those who did not were significant enough to allow for strong class consciousness across the social strata. In the individual, this consciousness often expressed itself in a sense of solidarity with other members of one's own class and a suspicion of those belonging to, or perceived as belonging to, other classes.<sup>4</sup>

As we have seen, the men who served as Anglican padres during the Great War came overwhelmingly from the more privileged sections of society. They were well educated, often highly literate, and had, in the majority of cases, graduated from one of the older, more prestigious British or Irish universities. This meant that, from a social point of view, their backgrounds were often similar to those of the combatant officers of the pre-war regular army and wholly distinct from those of ordinary rank-and-file soldiers. For combatant officers from privileged backgrounds this social divide was not necessarily problematic. Subalterns could challenge prejudices troops had about their class, or youth, through acts of leadership, bravery, and good soldiering. Importantly, the class division that placed the officer in charge of his social 'inferiors' enhanced the sense of deference necessary for the chain of command and allowed him to adopt the paternalistic role that the British Army envisaged for all its officers.<sup>5</sup> For chaplains, on the other hand, this social division could prove to be a genuine hindrance in their ministry. In order for a chaplain to carry out pastoral work with the men in his unit it was necessary for those men to feel reasonably comfortable in his presence and to be prepared to converse freely with him. To facilitate this, most chaplains downplayed their military rank and encouraged soldiers to address them as 'padre' rather than 'sir'. They often found, however, that rankers were predisposed to adopt a deferential and distant demeanour in the presence of an officer, chaplain or otherwise. This division was reinforced by the fact that officers usually enjoyed a greater degree of comfort, both in the line and in billets, and lived a generally more privileged existence than the men they commanded.<sup>6</sup> In terms of the quarters he lived in, the rations he received, the clothes he wore, the amount of leave he was granted, and the freedom of movement he enjoyed, the officer was clearly better off than the rank-and-file soldier. Chaplains, although they served in a non-combatant

capacity and often de-emphasised their military rank, clearly belonged to this officer's world. Stephen Graham, a journalist who served as a private in the Scots Guards on the Western Front, viewed the chaplains' association with the officer class as a distinct disadvantage. 'Padres', he recalled, 'being officers, lived at ease; and whereas the men had poor food, they ate and drank in the company of officers. I could not help feeling how badly handicapped the padres were'.<sup>7</sup> In a short but insightful book published during the war and entitled *Thoughts on Religion at the Front*, Neville Talbot wrote with great candour of the barrier that inevitably existed between chaplains and the men to whom they were trying to minister:

There is something wrong about the status of the chaplains. They belong to what the author of *A Student in Arms*<sup>8</sup> calls 'the super-world' of officers, which as such is separate from the men. As a class we find it hard to penetrate the surface of the men – that surface we can almost see thrust out at us like a shield, in the suddenly assumed rigidity of men as they salute us.<sup>9</sup>

Writing in 1917, M. Linton-Smith, a senior Anglican chaplain who was awarded the DSO, maintained that while it could be useful in dealing with military bureaucracy, and that the individual chaplain would be at a 'distinct disadvantage without it', a padre's military rank acted as an impediment when attempting to form relations with ordinary soldiers:

In his relations with the men it is rather a hindrance to be overcome; it removes him to a distance; the duty of frequent saluting is irksome, and certainly adds to the irritation which a certain class of man seems to feel at the very sight of a parson.<sup>10</sup>

Linton-Smith's reference to the 'irritation' certain rankers felt at the mere sight of a clergyman is quite revealing. In an enormous citizen army, working-class attitudes towards the clergy were quite easily transferred from Britain to the various theatres of war. With reference to relations between the Anglican clergy and the working classes in Edwardian England, Hugh MacLeod has argued that a vast, and therefore very obvious, gulf existed between the two groups that could engender feelings of resentment and suspicion:

Even the best intentioned clergyman could cause suspicion on the part of his poorer parishioners by his manner of speaking, appearance

and way of life. Anglican clergymen tended to live in large houses, they went on holidays, their wives dressed as 'ladies' and their children went to fee-paying schools. They spoke an 'educated' English, often with a distinct 'upper class' accent.<sup>11</sup>

Their membership of the more privileged classes and their association with the officer corps thus clearly acted as a barrier between chaplains and ordinary soldiers. This rather obvious social division was compounded, moreover, by a cultural division that had less to do with a chaplain's rank and class as an officer and more to do with his role as a member of the clergy.

### The cultural divide

Writing many years after the war, Frank Barry recalled the shock chaplains felt on arriving in France and encountering the gulf that had developed between the working classes and the Church of England:

We found ourselves called upon to serve a mass of men under intense moral and physical strain, to whom most of what we had been taught to preach seemed almost totally irrelevant. The war revealed to us for the first time and with a very heart-searching shock what we ought to have known long before – the results of the industrial revolution in the alienation of the workers, who were now the armies, from the life of the Church.<sup>12</sup>

This estrangement of the British working classes from the Church of England meant that for working-class troops the figure of the Anglican clergyman was often alien and unfamiliar. What many soldiers *were* familiar with, however, was an unhelpful (from the padres' perspective) caricature of a nineteenth century village parson. Ernest Crosse recalled that, to begin with, padres had to work against the popular pre-war stereotypes of vicars and curates that were a staple of music-hall and theatre comedy:

The plain fact of the matter was that when the war broke out the soldiers and the clergy were habitually strangers to each other. The soldiers pictured to themselves a bogey of their own creation, the type of parson who used to figure on the stage, even if this did not go quite as far as being complete only with 'white socks and a Bath bun'.<sup>13</sup>



Hugh Cecil has remarked that 'the majority of ordinary soldiers derived their notion of a clergyman from the music-halls', and according to Alan Wilkinson the Anglican chaplain 'arrived trailing behind him the image of the stage parson, who was upper-class, naive, shockable, only really at home in the company of women, and who never did any proper work: a well meaning but ineffective and rather comic figure'.<sup>14</sup> Nor was it only working-class soldiers who were inclined to view the clergy in a humorous light. The playwrights who produced work for the bourgeois world of theatre in the decades before the war were also prepared to poke fun at the English parson. Indeed, Crosse's 'white socks and a Bath bun' is a reference to Charles Henry Hawtrey's 1883 comedy farce *The Private Secretary*, the hero of which, the Reverend Robert Spalding, is a caricature of an Anglican clergyman with a penchant for currant buns. The play was hugely popular in London theatres during the 1880s and a published version was still in print on the eve of the Great War. The illustrated satirical magazine, *Punch*, which had a largely middle-class readership, was also fond of lampooning clergymen. Cartoons featuring clerics were usually mild enough in tone but could occasionally be quite cutting. *Punch* featured 11 anti-clerical cartoons in 1866, 18 in 1880, and 17 in 1910. Such cartoons typically portrayed the clergy as over-refined, effeminate, and easily shocked.<sup>15</sup> The prim and proper cleric was thus the perennial 'straight man' of the pre-war stage and press cartoon. His air of refined propriety served to highlight the saucy innuendo or rough manners embodied by other comedy archetypes. One music hall comedian, John Foster Hall, enjoyed a reasonably good career by specialising in playing an unctuous and hopelessly unworldly clergyman. His stage persona, the Reverend Vivian Foster, also known as the 'Vicar of Mirth', regularly appeared in British music halls and theatres before and during the war.<sup>16</sup>

This popular stereotyping of the clergy had a number of implications for chaplains. To begin with it meant that troops were often disinclined to take an unknown padre seriously and tended to view him instead as a figure of fun. Frank Richards adopted a tone of humorous contempt to describe a chaplain attached to the Royal Welch Fusiliers and implied that he and his comrades saw the man as an alcoholic buffoon.<sup>17</sup> Many years after the war, Robbie Roberts, a veteran machine gunner who had fought in the Battle of the Somme, recalled a certain lack of respect for chaplains at the front, 'Though I never personally met a padre at the front, they were generally regarded as a bit of a joke – "Here's the old Sky Pilot"'.<sup>18</sup> Anglican chaplains, given their social backgrounds, were particularly vulnerable to this kind of casual stereotyping and had to

work hard to bridge the sheer cultural distance between themselves and the men they encountered. James Hannay was generally quite positive in his estimation of rankers' perceptions of their chaplains and noted that soldiers could think of padres with genuine appreciation and affection. Yet while he was proud to be called a padre he admitted that chaplains were rarely viewed with the same seriousness as senior officers and NCOs:

I, who had no part in winning the name, feel a real satisfaction when I open a letter from a man or officer and find that it begins 'Dear Padre.' And yet – there is a certain playfulness in the name. A padre is not one of the serious things in army life. No such nickname attaches itself to a C.O. or a sergeant-major. They matter. A padre does not matter much. Religion, his proper business, is an extra, like music lessons at a public school.<sup>19</sup>

The biased assumptions soldiers made about clergymen also meant that men often felt they had to be especially restrained in the company of a chaplain who might be offended by the use of strong language and generally suggestive or lewd topics of conversation. This is an interesting point, as it seems to have applied not just to ordinary soldiers but also to combatant officers for whom the Anglican clergyman was often a more familiar figure. The presence of a new chaplain in the officers' mess, or in the rankers' billets, could potentially create such an atmosphere of restraint that the padre, as a clergyman among soldiers, came to be thought of as something of an unwanted nuisance. Ernest Crosse clearly recognised this phenomenon, claiming that when he became a senior chaplain the main problem he had to solve 'was not where, from the point of view of his work, it was most desirable for the padre to live, but rather, which of the many messes in the padre's care was willing to have a padre billeted on them at all'.<sup>20</sup> Ideally, the padre's unusual position as a clergyman in uniform would work to his advantage and he would be welcome in the society of both officers and men. In reality, this unusual status could be a distinct disadvantage, something that a new padre had to overcome to gain acceptance. Writing in 1917, Hannay summed up the difficulty of the chaplain's outsider position particularly well:

It is hard for a padre to get into touch with men in the ranks. It is just as hard for him to get into touch with commissioned officers. The officer is a man. The private is a man. The padre is officially not quite

a man, or perhaps a little more than a man, at all events something else, a priest.<sup>21</sup>

The perception of the padre as an alien figure was heightened by the fact that chaplains were very often attached to regiments where they knew, or were known by, virtually no one. In forming good relations with the men under their command, combatant officers who joined their units while in training had a clear advantage over officers who joined units on active service.<sup>22</sup> Yet many newly appointed Anglican chaplains, particularly after the supply of chaplains was significantly increased in 1915, were sent directly overseas and posted to a base hospital, or regiment, that they were wholly unfamiliar with, and so arrived at their posts as unknown and sometimes unwelcome figures. Through his undeniable physical courage and devotion to duty, Noel Mellish won the respect and deep admiration of the officers and men of the Northumberland Fusiliers. Yet when he first arrived at the regimental field ambulance in September 1915, he got a very cool reception from his fellow officers. 'I found myself', he recalled 'in an environment which had no welcome for me. The officers were friendly, but detached'.<sup>23</sup>

The fact that they often joined formations in which they were initially unknown and unwelcome was made worse by the fact that chaplains, of all denominations, signed only a short, temporary contract on gaining a commission. When a civilian enlisted or gained a combatant commission he was expected to serve for the well-known 'three years or the duration'. Yet a clergyman who gained a temporary commission as an army chaplain undertook to serve for just one year and only signed an agreement to this effect if he was volunteering for overseas service.<sup>24</sup> Many chaplains renewed their contracts when the year was up and went on to serve until after the Armistice, but many others went home to their parishes after one year, often being under pressure from parishioners or their bishop to do so. By the beginning of 1918, some 2472 Anglican clergymen had been granted commissions as army chaplains since the start of the war. Of this figure, no fewer than 668, or 27 per cent, had relinquished their commissions.<sup>25</sup> Some of these men had been invalided out of the army as a result of wounds or illness but most of them had simply returned to civilian life once their contractual obligations had been fulfilled. This freedom of choice caused some controversy and resentment, not least among the more dedicated chaplains. David Railton was working as a senior curate in the parish church at Folkestone when he gained a temporary commission. In France he was attached to the 47th Division and was awarded the MC

in November 1916 and later mentioned in despatches. In his wartime correspondence, Railton comes across as a good-natured, sincere, and capable chaplain who was genuinely concerned with the welfare of his men. He was also clearly bothered by the unusually privileged status accorded to chaplains, and wrote the following in June 1916:

Two of our padres are leaving. One need not go at all. He is simply going because his year is up. It is simply scandalous that all officers here have to stick it out for the duration of the war – and then a chaplain who has got to know the men well goes off as he has had enough of it – and his year is up.<sup>26</sup>

Fourth class chaplains held the military rank of captain yet were paid, throughout the war, at the same rate as second-lieutenants, officers who were, technically, two ranks junior to captains.<sup>27</sup> According to Ernest Crosse, the comparatively low pay meant that many married clergy could not afford to take on chaplaincies.<sup>28</sup> This implies that some of the married clergy who became chaplains may have quit after their first year for financial reasons. Such financial worries also presumably affected married civilians who gained commissions and became junior officers. Yet, unlike chaplains, these men could not remedy such worries by simply going home and re-entering civilian life. This special status meant that from the perspective of combatant officers and men, not only were chaplains exempt from the experience of combat, they also appeared to be free from the constraints of the military machine.

It should also be remembered that, as the war progressed, chaplains' relations with other officers may also have been increasingly frustrated by the social factors referred to above. Throughout the Edwardian period 'the gently born and those of good family connection' were well represented in the officer corps.<sup>29</sup> This upper class element was heavily complemented by men from select sections of the middle class and the vast majority of British officers who gained commissions in the years before the war had been educated at one of England's elite public schools.<sup>30</sup> The officer corps of the pre-war regular army was thus a socially exclusive group in which men were expected not merely to be competent soldiers but also to act like gentlemen. Due, however, to the vast expansion of the army throughout the period of the war and the considerably high death rate among officers during the first year, the military authorities began recruiting officers from the ranks as early as 1915 and by the Armistice the social make-up of the combatant officer corps had changed quite significantly.<sup>31</sup> From the outset, the

men who were chosen to act as officers in the new armies were drawn from lower social strata than had traditionally been the case and, by 1916, what Gary Sheffield has referred to as a 'rough meritocracy' had emerged. Under this system, rankers who had shown leadership potential could be trained as officers irrespective of their peacetime occupation and social status,<sup>32</sup> whereas in the pre-war army officers who had been promoted from the ranks were extremely rare.<sup>33</sup> In the BEF rankers were promoted with increasing frequency and from 1916 the majority of new temporary officers were selected from the ranks.<sup>34</sup>

Writing in the 1950s, the Labour Party leader and former Prime Minister, Clement Atlee, contrasted the battalion he had joined and served with in 1914 (6/Sth. Lancs.) with the one he served with at the end of the war (5/Sth. Lancs.). In 1914 the officer's mess had been made up mostly of ex-public schoolboys and Oxbridge graduates. By 1918 the social composition of the mess was much more diverse and included a miner and a former errand boy.<sup>35</sup> In 1913 a mere 2 per cent of officers had originally served in the ranks; by 1919 about 38 per cent of demobilised officers had formerly worked in working-class or lower middle-class occupations.<sup>36</sup> For Anglican chaplains this meant that by at least 1916 not only were the rankers they met from different social backgrounds to themselves, but there was also an increased likelihood that their fellow officers were too.<sup>37</sup>

If most rankers and some officers held certain preconceived notions about the clergy, chaplains themselves also often had quite prejudiced ideas about the men with whom they served. Charles Raven joined the Army Chaplains' Department in the spring of 1917 and while he admired the officers he shared quarters with he seems to have felt that their lower-middle class backgrounds made them poor company for a cultivated, affluent, and intellectual clergyman. The following description of the junior officers in his battalion, written in France in October 1917, reveals a distinct class-consciousness:

I'm not really a desperate snob, I hope, but the modern subaltern who is simply a bank clerk with a commission, is not altogether satisfactory as a permanent companion. In this battalion there is one regular soldier (the C. O.), and two men with university degrees, the rest are worthy fellows but quite devoid of brains and breeding.<sup>38</sup>

Oswin Creighton seems to have been genuinely dedicated to the material and spiritual welfare of ordinary soldiers. He was also deeply curious about the views of rank-and-file troops on religion, society, and life

in general. His letters reveal, however, that, at least to begin with, he assumed that the intellectual capacity of working-class soldiers was limited. Writing to his mother from France after over a year in the army, he seems to have been quite surprised to learn that soldiers were actually capable of intelligent thought:

I think the more I get to see the men at their ease away from horses, harness, ammunition, mud and sergeant-majors, the more I find that they are not quite so stupid as one usually supposes them. They can think independently to a certain extent when allowed to.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, in their attempts to establish a good working rapport with officers and men, padres not only had to overcome the preconceptions of others, some of them also had to confront their own personal prejudices.

### **Praise for Anglican chaplains**

During his time in the army, the average Anglican chaplain could encounter considerable obstacles relating to class, rank, and his special status, or lack of status, as a clergyman in uniform. Surmounting these obstacles required great reserves of personal strength and determination. Also, and importantly, it took time. Yet there is enough personal narrative evidence to suggest that many Anglican padres succeeded in establishing good relations with combatants and ultimately in winning their respect and admiration. Clergy that had ministered to working-class communities before the war possessed a certain advantage in this regard. P. B. Clayton and Tom Pym, for example, had worked among the poor of Portsea and Battersea respectively and seem to have been able to form close relationships with private soldiers. In contrast to Frank Richards and George Coppard, moreover, some ranker veterans had quite fond memories of the chaplains they met at the front. Typical of the tone of much of this commentary is the following excerpt from the unpublished memoir of Pte. Archie Surfleet, a young volunteer from Lincolnshire who served with the East Yorkshire Regiment. The chaplain referred to was an Anglican named Lynn:

The 'C. of E.' chap we had was one of the finest types I have ever known. He was always with us ... at play, in the trenches, at celebrations and even 'over the top'. He was a most devout man, utterly

unafraid and yet as unlike the 'tub thumping' parson as you could imagine. He gets less than his share of mention in the diary but 'higher authorities' recognised his superlative worth with an M.C. and Bar. I feel sure a good many got comfort and courage from these padres.<sup>40</sup>

Significantly, Surfleet was convinced that in providing comfort and inspiring courage, padres had a positive effect on morale. Norman Demuth served as a private with a London regiment during the war and later acknowledged the visits padres made to the front-line but emphasised the value of their work among those convalescing at base hospitals:

From a practical point of view there was no religion in the front line, although our padre used to come and visit us quite a lot. But he was never allowed to stay in one place because he got in the way ... Then when you were on rest, the padre would come round to the billets – ours was very good indeed. And when I was wounded and got to hospital I thanked heaven for the padres, they were wonderful. They came round and took down your name and address and wrote your casualty postcards and generally looked after you. They never ranted, they never told you what a sinner you were or anything like that, and if they said a prayer it was a very short one.<sup>41</sup>

Officers could be equally effusive in their praise of regimental chaplains. Noel Mellish was working as a curate at St Paul's in Deptford when he applied for and received a temporary commission as an army chaplain. On arriving in France he was posted to the Third Division and soon won the respect and admiration of both officers and men. Captain William Bell was so moved by what he viewed as Mellish's heroism at the front that he felt compelled to write to the chaplain's mother expressing his high esteem for her son:

I feel I cannot let this opportunity pass of telling you what a splendid man your son Noel is. During the recent operations at St Eloi, in which my Battalion unfortunately lost heavily, he did the work of ten men in dressing and helping wounded men, he is a most modest and unassuming man, and would probably say he 'was only doing his job', but I was there, I know the splendid work he did. Many a man owes his life to your son and we are proud of him. The men of the Battalion love him and swear by 'our Padre'.<sup>42</sup>

Mellish was awarded the Victoria Cross in April 1916 for his conduct during this episode at St Eloi, becoming one of only two chaplains on the Western Front who were honoured in this way. Significantly, it was the padres who were prepared to be present at times of danger, as in the three examples above, that received the most praise. The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that, as was the case with combatant subalterns, a personal willingness to expose himself to danger was the one attribute a chaplain had to possess in order to win the respect of the men to whom he was trying to minister.

### Anglican Chaplains and the front-line – the reality

One of the most striking pieces of data revealed in Bishop Gwynne's war-book is that a significant number of Anglican chaplains were recommended for, and in most cases received, awards for gallantry or meritorious service. As shown in the table below, 199 of the 723 chaplains won a military award of some kind. This constitutes 26.8 per cent of the whole, or slightly over one in four:

Table 4.1 Awards received by 199 Anglican army chaplains listed in Deputy Chaplain-General's files<sup>43</sup>

Military Cross	Distinguished Service Order	Mentioned in Despatches	Order of St Michael and St George <sup>44</sup>	Victoria Cross	Total no. of awards
121	26	81	3	2	233

As can be seen from the discrepancy between the total number of awards and the number of chaplains, 20 Anglican padres received two or more different awards. W. H. Miller, for example, was awarded the CMG and the Military Cross as well as being mentioned in despatches. No fewer than nine of the chaplains who were awarded Military Crosses were also later awarded bars (i.e. they won the Cross twice). John Thom, an Irish Anglican who was attached to the 39th Division, was awarded the Cross three times, making him one of only a very small number of men, just 157, who were so honoured in the British Army during the war.<sup>45</sup> Such consistent recognition from superior officers is a remarkable testament to his commitment to front-line service. Being mentioned in despatches was also an honour that could befall a chaplain repeatedly. Bishop Gwynne himself was mentioned on no fewer than



seven occasions during his time in France. Not only, then, was there a large number of Anglicans who received medals and had what would be termed good service records, there was also a not inconsiderable number with *exceptional* records.

The medal most commonly awarded to Anglican chaplains on the Western Front was the Military Cross. The Military Cross, or MC, was instituted in December 1914 as an award for gallantry for combatant and non-combatant officers of the rank of Captain and below.<sup>46</sup> Robert Graves's greatest criticism of Anglican chaplains was that they lacked courage. Guy Chapman, Frank Richards, and George Coppard also suggested that chaplains were unwilling to share the dangers endured by combatant officers and men. The fact that a chaplain received an award for gallantry does not in itself indicate that he was brave. What it does irrefutably confirm, however, is that the recipient was exposed to enemy fire, and that his conduct while under fire was considered by his commanding officer to be in some way exemplary. As the recommendations for these awards were often recorded in the file of the individual chaplain, moreover, a clear insight into what exactly the award was being granted for can be gained. The picture that emerges is in stark contrast to that painted by the post-war critics. The following are three examples are quite typical:

Best, J. K.

Captain Best has been chaplain of the Battalion for over a year and has from the first held an almost unique position in the estimation of the men. His absolute fearlessness under fire and complete disregard for danger is a by-word among them and many instances of his great courage and fine example under fire can be quoted both on the Somme and Hebuterne and in the Oppy sector during May and June 1917. On many occasions he has tended the wounded under very heavy shell fire.<sup>47</sup>

Burnaby, Rev. H. B. F.

For gallant, self-sacrificing work ... His bright and cheery way of looking at life, and his power of putting heart in the men during trying times and of consoling the wounded, has done much to enhance the fighting value of the Brigade. His own personal gallantry under fire is most inspiring. On many occasions under the heaviest fire I have never known him flinch or fail to quietly carry out his duties with the utmost disregard of personal danger.<sup>48</sup>

Tyndall, E. D.

Has shown a complete disregard of danger and a supreme devotion to duty. After the attack by this Battalion on May 23rd 1917 at Oppy, he helped the Medical Officer in every possible way, assisting to carry in wounded men under shell fire and exhibiting a fine example of great bravery. His example of courage and cheerful performance of all duties under the most trying conditions in the trenches as well as out of the line sets a very high standard and greatly aids the moral[e] of the Battalion.<sup>49</sup>

As well as providing further evidence that commanding officers often viewed their padres not as ineffectual, but as valuable assets to their units, these recommendations, and dozens like them, illustrate the willingness of Anglican chaplains to place themselves in positions of danger. In all three cases direct reference is made to the personal bravery of the individual padre and the positive effect this had on his relationship with 'the men', or, as in the case of Edward Tyndall, the morale of the battalion.

Chaplains were quick to realise that their ability to exert any kind of influence on combatants would be greatly compromised unless they were seen to willingly expose themselves to the same dangers and discomforts that junior officers and men regularly endured. Guy Rogers initially had some difficulty in winning the respect of the officers and men of the Guards' Brigade he served with at the front. They gradually came to accept him, however, and he ultimately became a popular and influential chaplain. His willingness to enter the front-line was crucial in this regard. 'The Guards' he wrote, 'expected their padres, once they had taken them to their bosom (the metaphor seems singularly inept), to share their dangers with them. If they disliked their padre, they left him behind with the baggage'.<sup>50</sup> An Australian chaplain serving on the Western Front stressed the paramount importance of personal courage, insisting that

The influence of a chaplain over the men depends on one thing – his obvious physical bravery. Everyone can value courage, for all know the meaning of fear. All things may be forgiven to the chaplain who shows himself prepared to share their dangers; nothing can mitigate the failure of the man who is not.<sup>51</sup>

Charles Raven's wartime letters reveal that he had difficulty adapting to certain aspects of life in the BEF. He does seem to have enjoyed

front-line service, however, and was determined to be an active presence in the trenches. He was struck by the effect this had on his relationship with ordinary soldiers and wrote of the new sense of approval he noticed after his first tour in the front-line:

Going up with the men has made an enormous difference in their attitude to me. I've really become one of them. I've so to say passed their test, they'll listen to me now, and, I think, try to follow what I say. Anyway they've admitted me to their fellowship – and I'm consequently ever so much happier.<sup>52</sup>

In the original official history of the Army Chaplains' Department, John Smyth maintained that a soldier would rather have listened to an indifferent discourse from a padre who had been with him in the trenches than a brilliant one from a padre who had 'remained at the back'.<sup>53</sup> As a veteran of the Western Front who had been awarded the Victoria Cross, Smyth had some insight into the issue of personal courage. Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, who was awarded the MC in 1917, had quite a keen understanding of the need for chaplains to be willing to accompany their men, and lead them by example, in the most dangerous circumstances. He expressed his views in an informal interview he had with a newly commissioned 4th class chaplain in Rouen in 1917. The new padre had just arrived in France and was anxious to know what advice an experienced chaplain could give him. Kennedy later recalled telling him:

Live with the men; go everywhere they go. Make up your mind you will share all their risks, and more, if you can do any good. The line is the key to the whole business. Work in the very front, and they will listen to you; but if you stay behind, you're wasting your time. Men will forgive you anything but lack of courage and devotion.' ... I said the more padres died in battle doing Christian deeds the better.<sup>54</sup>

The willingness of Anglican chaplains to expose themselves to danger is certainly evidenced by the number of deaths they suffered as a group. The chaplain who listened to these words of advice, Theodore Bayley Hardy, went on to become the most highly-decorated British chaplain of the war before finally dying of wounds sustained in the front-line in October 1918. Hardy was so committed to working in the line that during the Third Battle of Ypres he returned to the forward trenches

just one day after the unit he was attached to, the 8th Somerset Light Infantry, had been relieved after two weeks in the line, where they had suffered considerable losses.<sup>55</sup> Nor was Hardy the only Anglican padre to actively over-expose himself to danger in this manner. William Duncan Geare received a commission as a temporary chaplain to the forces in May 1916 and was attached to the King's Liverpool Regiment. The picture that emerges from his correspondence is that of a sincere, committed, and energetic young padre who was devoted to the welfare of the men in his division. In a letter to his mother written in October 1916 he explained the importance of front-line service:

Since I last wrote I have got permission from the C.O. of the 9th to attach myself temporarily to the 7th, while the 9th go into support in the town and 7th take the place of the 9th in the trenches. I attach tremendous importance to the presence of the padre in the trenches, so that I can now be with both of my battalions in the firing line consecutively. It means a double dose of it for me, with all the discomforts of never having my clothes off etc. for a fortnight, until both battalions go into rest.<sup>56</sup>

Geare's dedication to front-line work resulted in his death on active service in August 1917.

In his 1940 book, *The Army Chaplain*, a former Great War padre, P. Middleton-Brumwell, claimed that 'in comparison with their numbers' army chaplains, of all denominations and in all theatres, suffered more deaths 'than that of any other branch in the Army'.<sup>57</sup> Peter Howson has argued that we should be slow to take such grandiose claims at face value.<sup>58</sup> The fact remains, however, that over 170 chaplains died during the war and the majority of these were Anglican. It is difficult to settle on a precise figure for deaths of Anglican chaplains as sources differ as to the total amount.<sup>59</sup> Yet if the chaplains in Bishop Gwynne's war-book are taken as a sample, 42 were killed or died on active service, while a further 58, or 8 per cent, were wounded but survived their wounds. In *The Great War and the British People* Jay Winter gives an overall figure for deaths of British Army soldiers of between 11.8 and 12.4 per cent of all mobilised combatant and non-combatant officers and men. The figure for officers alone, according to Winter, is higher still, at 15.2 per cent.<sup>60</sup> A comparison of the figure for the chaplains in the survey group with these overall figures thus reveals that while Anglican chaplains clearly died they did so at about half the rate for the army overall, and at a third of the rate for officers, with whom they might most obviously be

compared. Yet in the context of the post-war literary criticism, much of which suggests that Anglican chaplains were unwilling to expose themselves to any real danger, the fact that more than three dozen chaplains from the survey group were killed or died at the front must still be considered significant.

As Charles Raven and others discovered, their readiness to expose themselves to danger had a decisive impact on the way troops viewed the padres they encountered. An officer of the Northumberland Fusiliers recalled the effect that Noel Mellish's display of courage had on the officers and men who witnessed the incident for which he won the VC:

Into this tempest of fire the brave parson walked, a prayer book under his arm as though on church parade in peace time. He reached the first of the wounded and knelt down to do what he could for them. The first few he brought in himself without any aid and *it made us think a bit more of parsons* to see how he walked quietly under fire assisting the slow moving wounded and thinking more of saving them from discomfort than of his own safety.<sup>61</sup>

In the 1970s, William Daniels, who had served in the Royal Artillery during the war, recalled meeting a padre during his first tour in the front-line as a 16 year-old gunner, 'My first experience in the trenches concerned the padre, who we called the chaplain then. He arrived from brigade headquarters, and I was pleased to see a man of that description risking his life in the front-line trenches'.<sup>62</sup>

Padres themselves were not always happy to receive official recognition for their bravery. Julian Bickersteth felt that as chaplains' work was not as demanding, or necessarily as dangerous, as that of combatant officers, padres should not be awarded gallantry medals. When he was awarded the MC he wrote to his family to express his views on the subject:

I am honestly sorry about it. I hold, and shall continue to hold, strong views about chaplains' decorations. They never have to 'go over the top'; they have a comparatively easy job from the military point of view. I could in fact name hundreds of officers in this division still undecorated who more than deserve a decoration. I feel you won't perhaps agree with me, but I would rather have been without it. A chaplain, if he is a worthy priest, must be prepared to go into

really dangerous places to save others ... we don't want to be decorated for doing that.<sup>63</sup>

Tom Pym was similarly opposed to the granting of gallantry awards to padres, yet he was able to recognise the value of such awards in an environment where bravery was highly idealised. In a letter written to his wife after he was awarded DSO he played down the significance of the decoration but accepted that it could do a certain amount of good:

About the D.S.O. ... purchased with other men's blood ... my views remain exactly the same; before ever I clutched anything I maintained that these things don't go to the right people, and that in any case Ministers of Christ ought to be entirely excluded. However, one has no choice in the matter, but I can promise I have done my best to avoid it in every way ... and pretty consistently! Anyhow, it seems to be giving a lot of people a good deal of innocent pleasure, and it will certainly help me in my new job, and so may yet be turned to the greater glory of God.<sup>64</sup>

It was not just Anglican chaplains who felt this way. Fr Willie Doyle, the well known Roman Catholic padre who served with the 16th Irish Division and was awarded the MC, wrote to his father to say that he was 'sorry these rewards are given to chaplains, for surely he would be a poor specimen of the Lord's Anointed who would do his work for such a thing'.<sup>65</sup> The views of these padres seem to have been expressed not with coy modesty but with the genuine sincerity of brave men.

Medals were awarded, and chaplains received them, with increasing frequency in the later stages of the conflict but there is little evidence to suggest that they became a debased currency, and the actual awarding of medals was often carried out with great pomp and ceremony. Kenneth Best, whose recommendation for the MC is cited above, was summoned, along with a number of other men, to Buckingham Palace to be officially awarded his medal by George V. A photograph of Best leaving the Palace with his parents, his father dressed in slightly old-fashioned clerical garb, shows him surrounded by a large crowd of onlookers.

This sort of high profile publicity was complemented by the press coverage chaplains received during the war, much of which was very positive. The *Times* was particularly supportive of British chaplains and printed a steady stream of articles that highlighted their valuable and brave service. In a detailed article, entitled 'The Soldier's Chaplain' and printed in September 1916, the paper's special correspondent

lauded the work that chaplains, of all denominations, were engaged in at the front. The article outlined the dangerous tasks, such as burying the dead and rescuing the wounded under fire, that chaplains took upon themselves and insisted that the padres had won the respect and admiration of all ranks:

The Higher Command has come thoroughly to recognize their value as an integral part of the war establishment in the maintenance of the moral [*sic*] and the good spirits of the men. The officers have come to know the individual 'padre' in the daily friction of life in the field and in times of danger and they have found him a good fellow and a brave man. The men have learned his value as a comrade who has a power to help them and minister to their comfort.<sup>66</sup>

The report came as the Somme offensive, a campaign in which BEF chaplains had acquitted themselves well, entered its final stages. The authors of *The Times History of the War*, a detailed series of illustrated volumes that was published in instalments during the war years, devoted a lengthy chapter in the 1916 volume to the work of chaplains on active service. The following extract paints a picture of a brave and committed band of clergymen for whom no sacrifice was too great as long as the welfare of the troops was assured:

The spirit which everywhere manifested itself among the chaplains, not of one denomination only but of all who went to the war, was a spirit which prompted them to do and dare and die if only they could promote the welfare of the men committed to their charge. The Army Chaplain held military rank, and he was no feather-bed officer. Again and again, in France, in Egypt, in Gallipoli and in other theatres of operations, he proved his readiness to endure the hardships and to identify himself with the life of the men.<sup>67</sup>

The chapter featured a photo-montage of hero clergymen from the armed forces that included several Anglican chaplains (see Illustration 4.1). In March 1918, the *Times* special correspondent claimed that 'the war has provided the "padre" with great opportunities, and it is generally admitted that he has used them *ad majorem Dei gloriam*'.<sup>68</sup> Finally, just two months after the Armistice, the paper ran another lengthy article entitled 'The Padre in the Field, Heroism and Devotion to Duty' that summarised the BEF chaplains' war record in the most glowing terms. The author claimed that 'the heroism shown by many



*Illustration 4.1* This photomontage from the *Times History of the War VIII*, published in 1916, highlights the heroism of British clergymen serving in the army and navy and includes four Anglican padres, M. T. W. Conran MC, Noel Mellish VC, A. G. Parham MC, and Basil Plumptre MC.



[chaplains], when opportunities offered, has received national recognition. But the best celebration of their constant disregard of danger in the pursuit of duty comes from the men among whom they laboured'.<sup>69</sup> The bravery of chaplains was attested to, in part, by the decorations they had received. According to the article 205 Anglican padres, in all theatres, had been awarded the MC. This high figure is supported by reports that the Chaplain-General's office sent to Lambeth Palace.<sup>70</sup> Nor was the *Times* alone in painting chaplains in a noble light. Throughout the war chaplains' acts of gallantry were reported in a variety of local and national papers, thereby adding to their generally positive public profile.<sup>71</sup>

This positive wartime publicity contrasts sharply with the 'bad press' directed at chaplains in the post-war period. Contrary to the picture presented by the veteran memoirists, significant numbers of Anglican army chaplains were willing to expose themselves to the dangers of trench life and to enter the maelstrom of battle with the men to whom they were trying to minister. In so doing, they very often won the respect of the officers and men of their units. If, in addition to displaying personal courage, a chaplain efficiently organised recreation, entertainment, and comfortable billets for officers and men, he could become not only respected but also genuinely popular and well liked.

## **Troop welfare and paternalism**

Gary Sheffield has argued that the British Army that fought on the Western Front inherited the strong Victorian paternalism with which the regular, pre-war army had been imbued. In the context of officer-man relations, this paternalistic ethos demanded that junior officers prioritise the welfare of the men in their command. Thus, 'the primary responsibility of the officer was to ensure that his men were well fed and clothed and comfortable. There were many instances of officers taking this duty very seriously indeed'.<sup>72</sup> Many Anglican chaplains seem to have ardently embraced this paternalistic spirit. As we have seen, the organisation of canteens, concert parties, mobile cinemas, and the more directly personal distribution of cigarettes so dominated the work of the average padre that some of them expressed real concern that the spiritual aspects of their work were being neglected. As the individual ranker's view of a given officer tended to be based on that officer's behaviour towards him, the enthusiastic focus on troop welfare displayed by many Anglicans had the potential to make them popular figures with the men they encountered. Also, from the junior combatant officer's perspective,

an interest in the wellbeing of the rank and file was a prerequisite to acceptance. In a short book written in 1939, Harry Blackburne drew on his long experience of military chaplaincy in order to advise the new chaplains then being granted commissions. In a section entitled 'The Chaplain with Officers and Men' Blackburne referred to the paternalistic ethos of the Army and identified what he felt was the key to good relations with combatant officers:

Our officers, naval, military and Air Force, are the best in the world. They have inherited a great tradition, which has always included putting the needs of their men before their own ... The surest way, then, for a padre to win the confidence and affection of officers is by real interest in the welfare and happiness of the men.<sup>73</sup>

Some Anglicans naturally assumed a paternalistic role because of their advanced years. If the age profile survey from Gwynne's files is considered again it may be seen that most of the chaplains in the group were already in their thirties when they began serving with the BEF while a significant number of them, no fewer than 116, were aged 40 or older.<sup>74</sup> Oliver Holden, graduate of Exeter College, Oxford, and chaplain attached to the London Rifle Brigade, was killed by shell blast when attempting to rescue wounded at the front in November 1916. In an obituary written for a local newspaper, Frank Barry described Holden, who was 43 years old, as 'rather older than most chaplains at the front'.<sup>75</sup> Yet a number of the better known chaplains who were killed in France and Flanders were also in their forties, and even fifties, when they gained temporary commissions. Maurice Peel, a revered chaplain who was awarded a bar to his MC in 1917, was 42 when he was killed and T. B. Hardy was 53. Age, then, does not appear to have precluded chaplains from serving in the front-line, but it may have been an important factor in chaplain-combatant relations. Most of the junior officers and ranking soldiers that served in the British Army during the war were in their late teens and early twenties when they enlisted or gained commissions.<sup>76</sup> The age gap between combatant troops and chaplains meant that the social and cultural divisions that frustrated relations between padres and soldiers could be compounded by generational differences. On the positive side, however, for chaplains who were old enough to be the fathers of the officers and men in their units, age was an advantage in the fulfilment of their paternalistic role.

In April 1917 Burgon Bickersteth, a devout young cavalry officer and brother of chaplain Julian Bickersteth, wrote to his father, a senior

Church of England clergyman, from France and told him a little about the religious atmosphere at the front and the position of Anglican padres:

The padre [he wrote] is appreciated by the men in so far as he busies himself with their recreational and physical comfort, and respected if he visits the front line and shares their dangers. When he does both, he is loved. His uniform is probably more of a disadvantage than advantage, though as usual it is personal attraction rather than religious sentiment which draws.<sup>77</sup>

Given his family background and his personal convictions, Burgon was perhaps more sympathetic to, and interested in, the work of Anglican chaplains than the average officer. Yet his remark that it was personal attraction, rather than religious sentiment, that made a padre attractive to soldiers is revealing. Many Anglican padres succeeding in commanding the respect of officers and men and becoming popular figures by combining a willing approach to front-line service with a keen interest in troop welfare. This respect and popularity, however, often had little to do with religion, or the Anglican Church, and a great deal to do with the individual padre's own personal attributes. In other words, if a chaplain was liked it was very often because he was considered a decent man, not because he was a good priest.

### **Respect, popularity, and the absence of a religious revival**

With experience, some of the more reflective Anglican chaplains came to realise that the respect and admiration they commanded among soldiers was rarely, if ever, extended to the church they represented. Soldiers often liked their chaplains as individual personalities but were consistently slow to respond to their chaplains' attempts to steer them towards the institution of the Church of England. An interesting example of this is the case of the aforementioned padre hero, T. B. Hardy. When Hardy died of wounds in 1918 he was eulogised by the officers and men of his unit who clearly held him in very high regard. Yet despite the respect combatants had for him, Hardy had repeatedly encountered very low attendances at the voluntary prayer services he used to hold behind the lines.<sup>78</sup> Joe Cottrill, a friend of Siegfried Sassoon, wrote to a colleague in 1917 informing him of the death of a brigade chaplain. Cottrill expressed a definite

sense of loss but made it clear that he was generally unsympathetic towards clergymen:

I am sorry to say that the Padre – the Hon. Rev. Peel M.C. got killed. He was with the lads again in the very front line of the fight and got sniped by a Bosche in the stomach and died immediately. He is a great loss. I have not much room for his crowd as a rule but Peel was the finest parson I have ever known. He leaves two children. He was bound to get killed sooner or later as he was absolutely indifferent to danger – in fact courted it ... Truly a splendid man, one of whom the Church should be proud.<sup>79</sup>

Thus while he could genuinely regret the loss of one clergyman, Cottrill's attitude towards the clergy in general remained unchanged. Robert Keable served as an Anglican padre with the South African Labour Corps on the Western Front for most of 1917. In 1919 a collection of essays he wrote during the war was published as *Standing By*. In a chapter entitled 'Army Chaplains' Keable discusses the issue of the relationship between chaplains and soldiers and explains that while individual chaplains were often very popular, the conventional religion that they represented meant little to combatants. 'Nine Englishmen out of ten' he argued 'no longer desire the religious system in which a special order of minister is necessary.'

All they ask of a padre is that he shall be a genial, all-round, broad-minded (how often have I heard that!) good chap, a smoker, not averse to a glass of whisky and soda, athletic, and a speaker who will speak straight out on common-sense things like clean living, duty, honesty, patriotism, gentlemanliness, good-humour, broad-mindedness. And one curious phenomenon results: nine times out of ten the chaplain is a thoroughly popular person, for quite a large percentage of chaplains are what I have described above ... Chaplains are liked in the individual but not in the abstract ... Englishmen do not like or want the things for which they think the Chaplains' Department stands.<sup>80</sup>

Brophy and Partridge echo this very lucid testimony in their lexicon where they remark that the 'spiritual but determined' padre was 'respected as a person, but not as a parson. Men would even say, "A pity old So-and-so's a padre; he's not a bad sort"'.<sup>81</sup> While many Anglican chaplains were respected and well-liked by combatants, then, this was often in spite of, not because of, their status as priests and representatives

of the established Church. This precise issue was explored in an essay written by a Church of England chaplain in 1917:

The admiration of the men for many but by no means all, of their chaplains will not affect their attitude towards the church. If they find a parson they admire they too often think of him as a good fellow *in spite* of being a parson: an exception which proves the rule. They see that the Church as a whole stands for keeping things as they are, or even for remodelling them after a medieval pattern: that the clergy as a whole are opposed to all changes within and without the Church: that the ecclesiastical parties are unable to agree amongst themselves about any single thing except the refusal to allow any changes to be made in the formularities of the Church and the refusal to countenance independence of mind in any individual priest.<sup>82</sup>

This suggests that some chaplains suspected that the image of the Church was unattractive to soldiers and that Anglicanism could be a difficult rod with which to guide men, particularly the young men who lived and died at the front. In 1918 Neville Talbot wrote that he felt like he was 'peddling unmarketable C. of E. goods'.<sup>83</sup> Talbot had insisted on sharing the dangers of trench-life with combatants since his arrival in 1914. He was wounded and decorated for gallantry during his time as chaplain to the 8th Division. He was well-liked by both officers and men and, by any standards, can be considered to have been a good chaplain. Yet he was painfully aware of the limits of his ministry. Writing in 1918, he lamented what he saw as the 'unchristian position' in which chaplains found themselves:

We are in an unchristian position in the sense that we are in a position that Christ would not have occupied. He, I am sure, would have been a regimental stretcher-bearer, truly of and among the men. We are very unlike Him. We are often liked, and are thought good fellows, but we are unlike Him and miss what He could discover.<sup>84</sup>

Talbot's suspicion that he was on a path that Christ would not have walked must have been a disturbing realisation for a clergyman, yet he felt that while padres were often well liked and thought of as 'good fellows' they were limited in what they could achieve because they occupied such a different position to combat troops. The more experienced and conscientious Anglican padres readily acknowledged that although many of them were fully prepared to expose themselves to

the dangers of the front-line the chaplain, in contrast to junior officers and men, would always occupy a relatively privileged and safe position in the army.

### Civilian clergy, chaplains, and wartime privilege

Significant numbers of Anglican chaplains were quite evidently prepared to work in exposed areas of the front and accompany their units during engagements with the enemy. Unlike combatant officers and men, however, padres could exercise a level of control over the amount of time they spent in the front-line and were not usually obliged by orders to be in the trenches. There is also evidence to suggest that Anglican chaplains had a certain amount of influence over the decision, made ultimately by a senior chaplain or by the Deputy Chaplain-General himself, as to where exactly they were posted. Most Anglican padres who served in France and Belgium had a brief interview with Bishop Gwynne, or one of his subordinates, at the HQ of the Chaplains' Department at St Omer. The interviewer's impressions of the new chaplain were often recorded and the words 'ready to go anywhere' or 'would like to go to front' appear numerous times beside the names of individuals. In two instances, however, the phrase 'not keen on the front' is written beside a chaplain's name. On these two occasions the chaplains in question appear to have expressed a desire to avoid front-line service. In both cases the men were posted to base hospitals (Le Havre and Rouen respectively).<sup>85</sup> It should be stressed that this seems to have been rare. That it happened at all, however, is noteworthy. A combatant officer newly arrived on the Western Front would have been most unlikely to tell a superior that he wanted to avoid getting mixed up in the fighting!

It should also be remembered that clergymen and ministers of all denominations were exempted from compulsory military service when it was first introduced early in 1916, and, despite initial indications to the contrary, were ultimately excluded from the amended Manpower Bill in 1918. Clergymen thus occupied quite a privileged position in Britain during the conflict. This set priests and ministers apart from ordinary civilians after 1916 and attracted criticism in the secular and religious press as well as in parliament.

In November 1915, while the question of whether conscription would be introduced in the New Year was being widely discussed in the press, Horatio Bottomley launched a scathing attack on Church of England bishops in the *Sunday Pictorial* magazine. He insisted that it was 'insufferable that because [the bishops] are prelates they should be

permitted to prohibit British citizens from joining the Army because they are vicars and curates'.<sup>86</sup> Bottomley was a man of dubious moral character, and was certainly viewed as such in polite society, but during the war years his editorials in *John Bull*, his weekly column in the *Sunday Pictorial*, and his prolific public speaking made him one of the most successful and influential journalists in Britain.<sup>87</sup> Weightier voices, moreover, would soon speak out against the churches and their clergy. In a heated debate on the issue of clergy and combatant service that took place in the Commons in January 1916, Philip Snowden, a leading English socialist and Labour MP for Blackburn, argued that 'the last of all people who should be exempted from [the proposed conscription Bill] were the clergy ... because no class in the community were so anxious to engage in combatant service. During the last 18 months almost every pulpit in the country had been turned into a recruiting stand'. In the course of the same debate, John Dillon, the Irish Party MP for Mayo, remarked that it was 'nothing short of indecency to see ministers of religion, both in [Britain] and in Ireland, clamouring for conscription, while at the same time they insisted that it should not apply to themselves'.<sup>88</sup> Anglican chaplains were painfully aware of this privileged status, of the strong criticism it invited, and of the charge that the Church of England, in particular, was not doing all it could for the war effort. Some chaplains were so conscious of the degree to which the privileged status of the clergy militated against their influence at the front that they began to openly criticise the Church of England leadership for a stance on the war, and the role of the clergy, that they felt compromised their mission as clergy-in-uniform.

### **Chaplains' criticism of the church leadership**

In August 1914, Dean Hensley Henson, being convinced that the Church of England should take its share of responsibility for the war effort, registered his personal support for the war by actively participating in recruitment in Northumbria.<sup>89</sup> Yet writing in 1917 he asserted that it was 'not without significance that the perfervid and indiscriminating advocacy of the war by some clergymen has been observed to provoke among our soldiers a perceptible restiveness, and even a measure of repugnance'.<sup>90</sup> Reflecting on the issue many years later, he felt sure that the clergy's exemption from military service was a mistake:

I know that many of the chaplains shared my view, and I am sure that the exemption of the clergy lessened their influence with the

troops, whom they served, and for the most part served well, as military chaplains.<sup>91</sup>

The very vocal support of the Church of England clergy for the war, which had been mildly controversial in 1914 had become problematic by 1915 and was to draw quite serious criticism from 1916 until the Armistice. Much of this criticism, which came from a variety of sources, tended to focus on the refusal of the Church hierarchy to officially release Anglican clergy for combatant, or even non-combatant service, in the armed forces. How, it was argued, could Anglican bishops so staunchly support the war on one hand, yet bar their clergy from directly participating in it on the other? It was not only progressive politicians like Snowden and Dillon who denounced Church policy on the clergy and military service. Soldiers, and officers in particular, also took issue with the apparently paradoxical position of the hierarchy. On learning that the clergy were to be made exempt from compulsory military service in January 1916, Captain J. D. Birchall, then serving with the Durham Light Infantry, felt compelled to write the following to Archbishop Davidson's residential chaplain:

Has the Archbishop any idea of the strength of feeling amongst the rank and file of the Church on the subject of enlistment of curates? I believe that no one thing is doing and going to do more harm to the influence of this Church than the idea that its clergy are forbidden to fight for their country ... If this attitude is persisted in, the ordinary layman will be still further out of touch with the Clergy, for he cannot understand why it should be immoral for a minister to do what is a moral duty for a layman!<sup>92</sup>

The rank and file in the army were also quite aware of the protected status of civilian vicars and curates. In one of the more cutting passages in *Old Soldiers Never Die* Frank Richards gave vent to his feelings on what he viewed as the contradictory position of the clergy in wartime:

The Clergy on both sides were a funny crowd: they prayed for victory and thundered from the pulpits for the enemy to be smitten hip and thigh, but did not believe in doing any of the smiting themselves. They were all non-combatants with the exception of the Catholic priests who were forced to serve in the French Army the same as anybody else.<sup>93</sup>



It is noteworthy that this comment appears in a passage in which he discusses army chaplains suggesting that, for Richards, the clergy were the clergy, whether they were in uniform or not. The exemption of the clergy from military service was a government decision but the archbishops welcomed it as a vindication of their own position on the clergy's wartime role. Throughout 1915, Davidson and Lang, with the support of the majority of Anglican bishops, had maintained the view that the calling of a clergyman was 'incompatible with that of a combatant'. They argued further that, at a time of great national anxiety and stress, the work that the civilian clergy were doing in their parishes was of national importance and could not be subordinated to compulsory military service, even non-combatant service. While they insisted that every effort was being made to meet the demand for new chaplains, they were unwilling to release all clergy of military age unless required to do so by law. This remained their position, and thus the position of the Church, for almost the entire period of the war.

The stance of the Anglican leadership, and the committed advocacy of the war by individual members of the clergy, began to provoke unease among chaplains on active service when they saw, as Captain Birchall had seen, the effect they were having on combatants. As the war progressed, this unease was replaced by a strong sense of disaffection that manifested itself in increasingly outspoken criticism of the Church and civilian clergy. When Archbishop Davidson visited the front in 1916, Harry Blackburne, by then Senior Chaplain to the First Army, told him in a non-deferential and apparently rude manner that the bishops were 'sitting like a lot of old hens on eggs that they do not know how to hatch'.<sup>94</sup> Blackburne was suggesting that the opportunities that the war presented the Church with, about which so much had been said in 1914, were being squandered due to a lack of capable leadership.

Towards the end of 1916, British civilians who were not serving in the armed forces were called upon to engage in other war-related work in vital industries and munitions factories. As this 'National Service' work was non-combatant but still amounted to a contribution to the war effort, the archbishops contacted the director of the new scheme, Neville Chamberlain, to let him know that they hoped the clergy would have 'the fullest possible share in any scheme which might be formulated'.<sup>95</sup> From the leadership's perspective, allowing the younger clergy to participate in part-time civilian war-work was a way of responding to the carping criticism that the clergy were not active enough in the war effort. By the summer of 1917 over 5000 Anglican clergy had offered their services and were involved in work as diverse as farming, teaching, postal delivery, and mining.<sup>96</sup> Somewhat more controversially, Anglican

clergymen were now also working in munitions factories, and one Anglican priest was even employed as a senior research chemist for a poison-gas manufacturer in Birmingham.<sup>97</sup> The unpalatable implication was that while the Church leaders prohibited junior clergy from fighting and killing, and risking their own lives in so doing, it was perfectly acceptable for them to facilitate the killing process by manufacturing lethal weaponry at a safe distance from the front.

In June 1917 Geoffrey Gordon, a young chaplain attached to the Deputy Chaplain-General's HQ at St Omer, wrote to George Bell, secretary and personal chaplain to Archbishop Davidson, to inform him that 'a large number of chaplains in the British Expeditionary Force are very uneasy as to the part which the clergy are taking in the national effort'.<sup>98</sup> He went on to list a number of major concerns the BEF chaplains had with the position of the civilian clergy, and took particular issue with the apparently large numbers of clergy doing war-work under the direction of Neville Chamberlain. Gordon pointed out that at the beginning of the war the hierarchy had ruled that most clergymen could best contribute to the war effort by remaining in their parishes and continuing their spiritual work. Under the National Service scheme, however, large numbers of the younger clergy had been released from their parishes to carry out work that could be done equally well by laymen who were above military age. Such clergy, he argued, should have been serving as non-combatants, or even combatants, in the armed forces, not working 'in munitions factories, or [on] farms and in schools'. The opinion of officers and men regarding able-bodied civilians who carried out such work was apparently 'not very politely expressed'. Gordon also referred to the privileged position of the chaplains who were often called home to their parishes after a year's service:

The frequent summonses to chaplains to return home at the end of a year's contract puts us in a position which we often find it difficult to defend. Many of the officers and men with whom we talk have left important positions in business or the professions and, on the surface at any rate, it would seem that the Ministers of Christ are not leading in Sacrifice.<sup>99</sup>

Before concluding, Gordon called for a new pronouncement from the bishops concerning the position of clergy and combatant service. Significantly, he wrote in the first-person plural, making it clear that he was speaking on behalf of other chaplains. The letter was also stamped by Bishop Gwynne, which meant that it was officially endorsed by the most senior Anglican chaplain on the Western Front. While the tone

of the letter is quite measured, the sense of anger and frustration that active service chaplains were feeling is palpable throughout.

Any hope in Lambeth that Gordon was expressing the view of a negligible number of padres was dispelled the following month when a petition signed by no fewer than 96 chaplains was forwarded to Davidson by Bishop Gwynne. The petition, which was drawn up by Tom Pym, a personal friend of Gordon's, outlined six major difficulties the chaplains had with the Church's policy and the general situation regarding the civilian clergy. Reiterating much of what had been said in the earlier letter, the chaplains were adamant that the clergy's exemption from military service was going to do lasting damage to the Church. The substance of the document is summed up well by point IV:

We consider that the liberty of choice allowed to us as clergy and our exceptional treatment by exemption – misunderstood as they are – are becoming disastrous hindrances to the Church's influence. There is already evidence that, through this misunderstanding, clergy of military age who have not been allowed to take part in the national sacrifice will not be listened to after the war.<sup>100</sup>

Among the 96 padres who signed the 'memorial' were 17 senior chaplains, including a number of quite prominent figures with influence at the front such as Harry Blackburne and Neville Talbot. A hand-written note was attached to the memorial that read 'many other chaplains have expressed themselves in general agreement without being able to sign'. Bishop Gwynne did not himself sign the petition but he had clearly read it and agreed that it should be brought to the Archbishop's attention and, over the course of the following year, he was to add his own, more authoritative voice to those of his subordinates. In December 1917, he wrote to the Chaplain-General to complain of a severe shortage in the supply of chaplains to the BEF divisions. He referred to the 'sense of disgrace we all feel that the clergy, of all professions, should be unable to keep up the numbers required' and asked Taylor-Smith to appeal directly to the bishops to release more men for chaplaincies. He also insisted that the Church was in grave danger of failing the British people at a time of unparalleled crisis:

No amount of rhetoric or special pleading will get round the fact that we clergy remain even at this crisis in the history of our Empire the one class in the community outside conscription; and in the mind of men in the Army, the majority of whom have been required to give

up position and wealth and comfort; this cannot but be prejudicial to the Church.<sup>101</sup>

He closed the letter by making reference to the bishops' argument that the clergy were needed at home, arguing that 'it will surely be better to have failed in any department of home Church life than to have failed the actual fighting men'.<sup>102</sup>

When the civilian clergy were ultimately exempted from military service under the amended manpower legislation in April 1918 Gwynne again protested, writing this time directly to Davidson at Lambeth Palace. Making it clear that he was expressing the 'deep feeling among many of our chaplains', he argued that the privileged position of the clergy with regard to military service had now become indefensible. He maintained that padres in France and Belgium felt that there must be a great diversity of opinion among the bishops on the matter of clergy and military service and called for a new statement from the hierarchy adding, 'it is not easy, for example, for chaplains to speak upon the glory of sacrifice; unless it should be made far clearer that those who remain in their parishes, are remaining there under direct orders from both Church and State'.<sup>103</sup>

Gwynne had enjoyed a close, mutually supportive relationship with Archbishop Davidson from the earliest days of the war. As a consequence, the language he employed in writing to him was, for the most part, controlled and respectful. Yet the general tone of these letters is one of barely contained frustration. That the most senior Anglican chaplain on active service felt such dissatisfaction with the Church leadership, and was moved to give public voice to this dissatisfaction is quite significant. This was not a mere case of a small number of dissenting malcontents, but one of serious disaffection at all levels of the Anglican chaplaincy on the Western Front. As with combatant officers and the civilian establishment, a distinct 'us' and 'them' attitude had developed between padres and their leaders at home. At the root of the chaplains' discontent was a sense of anger at what they viewed as the leadership's mishandling of the civilian clergy and the conviction that this was a key factor in their inability to exert a lasting spiritual influence over the soldiers with whom they served.

## **Catholics versus Protestants**

As we have seen, the work of Robert Graves, Guy Chapman, Eric Partridge, and John Brophy presents a very positive picture of the

Roman Catholic chaplains who served in the BEF. Other sources corroborate this praise and Catholic chaplains certainly appear to have enjoyed a good reputation during the war years. Writing many years after the war, John Eliot Nelson, a Protestant officer who served with the Irish Guards on the Western Front, recalled the high standing Catholic padres enjoyed in France. They were men, he wrote, 'who were chaplains first and officers a long way second. Men who were never far from the hottest part of the line. It was said with justice that a Catholic chaplain was worth two extra officers to an Irish battalion, so great was [their] influence on all ranks, both Catholics and Protestants'.<sup>104</sup> Certain Anglican chaplains, including Oswin Creighton and Geoffrey Gordon, took a dim view of the Catholic Church and clergy but others admired their Catholic colleagues and some of the highest praise for Catholic chaplains comes from Anglican sources. Guy Rogers was clearly impressed by Fr Knapp, a Catholic padre attached to the Irish Guards who was killed in 1918. 'Knapp', he wrote, 'was one of the finest padres his Church produced during the war, and I was proud to know him. His influence was second only (if that) to the Colonel's. It was not uncommon, when we were out of the line, to see him on an evening in some field surrounded by hundreds of his men, saying the rosary on their knees'.<sup>105</sup> Both Neville Talbot and his brother Edward felt that Roman Catholicism was clearer in its teaching and that its spirituality was 'more suited to the needs of the average soldier' than that of the Anglican Church and were impressed with the men who represented it at the front.<sup>106</sup> This regard for the Catholic religion, if not the Catholic Church, was shared by a number of High-Church Anglicans, including Julian Bickersteth and Robert Keable.<sup>107</sup> Although the claim that Roman Catholic chaplains were somehow braver and more willing to expose themselves to danger than their Anglican counterparts is unfounded, Catholic padres do appear to have had fewer obstacles to overcome in their ministry. By considering the position of Catholic chaplains, therefore, an insight can be gained into the difficulties experienced by Anglicans.

Alan Wilkinson has argued that as Catholic chaplains 'almost wholly came from a working class background', it was easier for them to relate to and influence the men of their units.<sup>108</sup> Several other historians have taken this line but there is little evidence to suggest that this was the case.<sup>109</sup> Some Catholic chaplains came from humble origins but many others did not. Most of the Catholic chaplains who served in the British Army during the war years were either English or Irish, and Irish or Hiberno-Irish clergy seemed to have formed a substantial minority.<sup>110</sup>

Importantly, moreover, the Catholic padres that are portrayed in such a virtuous light by Graves and Chapman were both Irish. A survey of the Catholic secular clergy in Ireland in the second half of the nineteenth century has revealed that while some candidates for the Irish priesthood came from poor backgrounds, the social circumstances of most could be described as 'comfortable'.<sup>111</sup> In proportionate terms, however, British and Irish priests belonging to the old monastic orders responded more enthusiastically to the wartime call for chaplains than their secular brethren and the social backgrounds of many of these padres were not merely comfortable but genuinely privileged.<sup>112</sup> The Jesuit order provides a good case in point. At least 30 Catholic padres who served overseas during the war belonged to the Society of Jesus.<sup>113</sup> Many of these men, including Fr Willie Doyle and Fr Stephen Gwynne, the first padre to be killed on the Western Front, came from decidedly privileged middle-class Irish backgrounds.<sup>114</sup> Doyle's father was a High Court Judge, he grew up in the affluent Dublin village of Dalkey, and received his secondary education at Ratcliffe College, an exclusive Catholic boarding school in Leicestershire. In the years before the war Stephen Gwynne had studied at the University of Louvain and taught at Clongowes Wood College and Belvedere College, two of Ireland's most elite Catholic schools. By the time he volunteered for service as a chaplain, he was a member of the governing body of University College Dublin.

A look at the regular English clergy who served in the Catholic chaplaincy reveals a similar picture. Like their Irish counterparts English Jesuits, Benedictines, and Franciscans tended to be recruited from well-to-do families and had close associations with elite public school abbeys such as Downside, Stonyhurst, and Ampleforth. The regular clergy that belonged to this world of Catholic privilege made up as much of 40 per cent of the Catholic padres that were attached to the British Army during the war and were an influential presence on the Western Front and elsewhere.<sup>115</sup> Most Catholic padres were drawn from the secular or diocesan clergy, however, and the social backgrounds of these men seem to have been somewhat different. By and large, the Irish Catholic secular clergy tended to come from the rural middle and lower-middle classes, with a small number from families of agricultural labourers.<sup>116</sup> As a group they were, like many Anglican clergymen, largely unfamiliar with the urban working classes. They knew the rural population intimately, however, and in Ireland, a predominantly non-urban country, this meant that they knew the masses.<sup>117</sup> They were also familiar with poverty and the circumstances of the poor in a way that many Anglican

chaplains were not. It should be remembered, moreover, that Irish and British Catholic clergymen who lived in England and Scotland in the early twentieth century worked, unlike most clergy in Ireland, with parishioners in large industrial towns that were 'distinctly proletarian'.<sup>118</sup> Also, while Catholic clergymen were not necessarily drawn from the working classes, the Catholic ministry was not as exclusive as the traditional Anglican ministry, there was less emphasis on social grooming and, importantly, Catholic priests were not popularly associated with the ruling elite. Indeed, in Ireland from at least 1916 onwards many Catholic clergymen were distinctly anti-establishment and anti-war in their public statements.<sup>119</sup> This, combined with the fact that they often spoke with Irish accents, meant that to ordinary English rankers and officers Catholic padres seemed less patrician than their Anglican counterparts. Brophy and Partridge were almost certainly correct in their assertion that Catholic padres 'lacked the haw-haw voice'.<sup>120</sup> The social factors that often made it difficult for Anglican chaplains to establish a rapport with Anglican troops did not therefore work against Catholic chaplains in the same way.

An even more significant factor in the success of Roman Catholic chaplains than the absence of a major social divide was the absence of an obvious cultural one. In the pre-war world the priest still exerted considerable influence over Catholic communities in Britain and Ireland and the Catholic laity often granted their clergymen exaggerated authority in 'many areas of life'.<sup>121</sup> This deferential relationship between laity and clergy was easily transferred into the BEF and Michael Snape has argued that a key aspect of the religiosity of Catholic soldiers was 'the deference which they were perceived to show towards their chaplains'.<sup>122</sup> By contrast, the Anglican clergyman had ceased, by 1914, to be an influential figure for the men of the English industrial working classes that were nominal members of the established church and made up the bulk of the British Army. Catholic troops were thus generally predisposed to treat a Catholic priest with at least some respect, and to recognise him as belonging to their cultural milieu, irrespective of his class background, while this was not necessarily the case with Anglican chaplains and Anglican troops.

The evidence also suggests that Roman Catholic troops, in contrast to soldiers of other denominations, were simply very religious. Terence Denman has remarked that 'an outstanding feature of the Catholic Irish soldier was the depth of his religious feeling' and argued that while the piety of Catholic soldiers was often romanticised to the point of caricature, many Catholic officers and men were genuinely devout.<sup>123</sup>

The testimony of Catholic combatant officers and chaplains supports this. Willie Redmond, MP and brother of John, leader of the Irish Party, served as an officer with the 16th (Irish) Division and commented that 'the fortitude the men draw from their faith is great and marked'.<sup>124</sup> Redmond, who was killed in France in 1917, was said to be an extremely dedicated Catholic himself.<sup>125</sup> One Catholic padre felt that the religious outlook of Catholic troops set them apart from the mass of soldiery in the BEF:

God's Will is the clearest settler of all their 'fates' in the minds of our Catholic men. It comes out again and again in their letters home, in talking over their prospects before going over the top, in speaking of their comrades who were killed and in every other way. Their attitude is in sharp contrast with the impersonal fatalism of so many non-Catholics, to whom the question of their own or their comrades' deaths is just as insistent when living under shell-fire.<sup>126</sup>

Willie Doyle was similarly convinced that the deep faith of Irish soldiers enhanced their fighting prowess. He believed that it was 'an admitted fact that the Irish Catholic soldier is the bravest and best man in a fight, but few know that he draws his courage from the strong faith with which he is filled and the help that comes from the exercises of his religion'.<sup>127</sup> The celebrated war correspondent, Philip Gibbs, himself a Catholic, recalled the staunch faith of Catholic soldiers and suggested that the simple dogmatism of Catholic doctrine made the work of their chaplains less difficult.<sup>128</sup>

Catholic padres, then, were generally preaching to the converted whereas Anglican padres often had to struggle to get their troops, many of whom were Anglican only in a very nominal sense, to respond to their ministrations. The more ritualistic character of Roman Catholic worship was also an advantage for Catholic padres. The emphasis on saying the rosary, hearing Confession, receiving Holy Eucharist regularly and the ceremony of Mass itself, all rituals that practising Catholics are accustomed to from a young age, made Catholicism a very suitable religion in the unfamiliar, chaotic, and often frightening world of the front-line. Saying the rosary was a particularly popular practice among Catholic troops and one that could be performed with or without a chaplain.<sup>129</sup> Tellingly, hymn singing, the one form of worship that Anglican soldiers often responded very well to at the front, is extremely ritualistic.

It has also been suggested that popular Catholicism was possibly an easier code to live by than popular Protestantism. Concerning



Hiberno-English Catholics in the pre-war period, Adrian Hastings has remarked:

While Catholics shared some of the sectarian characteristics of Nonconformity, they differed profoundly over morality. The pious Free churchman had a horror of alcohol, dancing, cards, the theatre, and observed on Sundays a still more disciplined life-style. The pious Catholic, on the contrary, might well both drink and dance. He might play cards with the local clergy when they visited his home, and if he did not play tennis on Sunday it was only so as not to upset his protestant relatives or neighbours. Perhaps as a consequence the Catholic would not find loyalty to his faith so hard to reconcile with life in the modern world as would the Protestant.<sup>130</sup>

While the Catholic Church and clergy held very strict views regarding blasphemous words and actions, and sexual impurity, they took a comparatively relaxed attitude to gambling and drinking, both of which were popular vices in the British Army.<sup>131</sup> In addition, Catholic padres and soldiers had ready access to Catholic churches in France and Belgium whereas Anglican padres and troops either had to construct their own chapels, as at Toc H and elsewhere, or wait until they were on leave to enter an Anglican church. The formal observance of Catholicism when out of the line was thus somewhat more convenient. The abundance of Catholic churches in Northern France also meant that Catholic troops could attend Mass in the absence of a padre. Anglican padres were occasionally allowed to use Catholic churches to conduct services for their troops, but this depended on the good will of the local *curés* who were not always co-operative. C. J. Horsley-Smith, a Church of England padre attached to a London regiment with the 56th Division, recalled the distaste for ecumenism of one French priest in a town that had formerly been occupied by Germans:

There again I had trouble in finding a suitable place for services. The parish priest refused to allow me to use even the nave of the church; although for four years the Germans had used the whole church for Lutheran services. I am sorry to say that the French Church behaved very badly to us and refused to allow us to use even ruined churches for our services.<sup>132</sup>

Interestingly, Horsley-Smith believed that Catholic BEF chaplains were to blame for the unhelpful attitude of the French Church 'for it was they

who stirred up the good natured French Bishops against us'. Although Anglican, Nonconformist, and Catholic padres often enjoyed very good working relations at the front, some Roman Catholic chaplains were capable of the most blatant sectarianism. Fr Bernard Marshall, an English Catholic padre who served on the Western Front, was adamant that no Catholic troops should attend Protestant services, 'I told the Colonel I could not give my consent to the Catholics attending a C of E service ... war or no war principles admitted no compromise. Our position was that we were members of Christ's Church and we could not have any part in a formal gathering of heretics'.<sup>133</sup> Writing in 1917, Geoffrey Gordon, an old Etonian who served on Bishop Gwynne's staff, argued that Roman Catholic chaplains were 'frankly sectarian, and have dealt with their own particular flock alone'. Interestingly, Gordon also insisted that, unlike Anglicans, Catholic padres tended to be exclusively devoted to the strictly spiritual dimension of their ministry and that they refused 'to have anything to do with canteens and the like'.<sup>134</sup> This determination to focus exclusively on the work that they had been ordained to do may account for the perception, expressed by Guy Chapman and others, that Catholic padres were more professional and priestly than their Protestant comrades.

Some Roman Catholic chaplains, like their Anglican counterparts, were remarkably brave and competent men; others, again like the Anglicans, were less suited to the wartime ministry. The evidence seems to confirm, however, that, due to a variety of factors, including their considerable pre-war standing in Catholic communities, Roman Catholic padres had a different, and arguably less troubled, experience of chaplaincy on active service.

### **Different fronts, different ministries**

Although the overwhelming majority of chaplains, of all denominations, who served overseas during the war served on the Western Front, virtually everywhere the British Army was deployed padres were present, and chaplains saw service in Africa, Mesopotamia, Gallipoli, and Salonika.

The allied campaigns in Gallipoli and Mesopotamia were regarded by many, even those who planned them, as side-shows, and the fighting that took place in these theatres was viewed as peripheral to the war of attrition in Eastern and Western Europe. Nonetheless, hundreds of thousands of British and Dominion troops were deployed to the Dardanelles and the Middle East in the hope of achieving the sort of

strategic breakthrough that eluded the BEF on the Western Front. The ministries of the chaplains that went with these troops differed in a number of important ways from those of the chaplains that served in France and Belgium and are worth considering.

For the clergy-in-uniform who served in the British campaigns against the Ottoman Turkish forces, and at Gallipoli in particular, the war took on a distinct cultural and historical resonance. To Christian commentators in the early twentieth century, Islam was a matter of little concern, and devout Muslims were not generally perceived by their Christian counterparts to be a threat to Western civilisation.<sup>135</sup> From the outbreak of the war in 1914, and indeed for some years before, the real threat to the status quo in Europe, and to 'Christian values', was believed to emanate from within Christendom itself, that is, from Germany. The crusading rhetoric that became commonplace in Britain from August 1914 onwards was thus usually directed at the Kaiser and German, or Prussian, militarism. Any interpretations of the various campaigns against the Ottoman forces as re-enactments of the medieval crusades would also have been frustrated by the fact that the allied forces contained significant numbers of Muslim troops from the British and French imperial possessions. Yet some of the British officers who saw service at Gallipoli could not help but interpret the campaign in religious and ethnic terms and draw parallels with the crusades. Such comparisons came easily to chaplains who were naturally inclined to view world events through a religious or theological prism. Michael Snape has highlighted the manner in which Roman Catholic chaplains associated the allied campaigns in the Middle East with the ancient clashes between Christianity and Islam, especially as the British Army advanced through the 'Holy Land' towards the end of 1917.<sup>136</sup> Personal narrative sources suggest that Protestant padres adopted a similar view of the war against the Ottoman Empire.

Ernest Raymond served with the East Lancashire Territorials in Gallipoli and *Tell England* was very much informed by his own experiences. Two of the book's main characters, Padre Monty and Rupert Ray, refer to the campaign as a crusade and in one memorable passage the British subalterns making their way to the Dardanelles are treated to a rousing speech by their commanding officer in which the medieval crusades are directly invoked:

Now, boys, follow me through this. You're not over-religious, I expect, but you're Christians before you're Moslems, and your hands should fly to your swords when I say the Gallipoli campaign is

a New Crusade. You're going out to force a passage through the Dardanelles to Constantinople. And Constantinople is a sacred city ... Christendom United fights for Constantinople, under the leadership of the British, whose flag is made up of the crosses of the saints. The army opposing the Christians fights under the crescent of Islam. It's the Cross against the Crescent again, my lads. By Jove, it's splendid, perfectly splendid! And an English cross, too!<sup>137</sup>

Such bombast naturally belongs to the pages of a novel, but other veterans of the campaign made less fictional allusions to the crusades and holy war. William Ewing, a Presbyterian chaplain attached to the 4/Royal Scots at Gallipoli, insisted that the Kaiser had turned his back on Christianity and inveigled the Turks into declaring a holy war against the Western allies:

At the instance of Berlin the Caliph summoned the Moslem world to *jehad* – war in defence of Faith: a holy war. It was fondly hoped that the cry of 'Islam in danger' would sap the loyalty of the Mussulmans of India, and rally the followers of Mohammed from all lands to crush the infidel. In the brave and chivalrous Haj Wilhelm, to whom in the hour of crisis the Crescent had become dearer than the Cross, they would find a modern Saladin to lead them on to triumph.<sup>138</sup>

Nor were the clergy alone in dramatically portraying the war against the Turks as a modern-day crusade. Major Bryan Cooper, an Anglican officer who served with the 10th Irish Division at Gallipoli, wrote an account of his experiences that was published in 1918. The soldiers of the 10th Division were perhaps unusually devout and, according to Cooper, both Anglican and Catholic padres were held in high esteem. In one passage, the author departs from his usually restrained prose style to describe the atmosphere in the trenches as the troops prepared for an attack:

Orders were issued for the attack, and while they were being prepared, officers and men alike were receiving the comforts of religion. For the Church of England men, the Rev. J. W. Crozier celebrated Holy Communion; and Father O'Connor gave absolution to his flock. The bullets of the snipers were whistling overhead, and ploughed furrows through the ground as the men knelt in prayer and listened to the message of peace comfort delivered by the tall khaki-clad figure. In a few hours they were to plunge into a hand-to-hand struggle with the old enemy of Christendom, and their pulses throbbed with the spirit

of Tancred and Godfrey de Bouillon, as they fitted themselves to take their places in the last of the Crusades.<sup>139</sup>

The images evoked by Cooper and his fanciful allusion to ancient wars recalls the way Cyril Falls and Sir James Edmonds referenced the Battle of the Boyne when describing the fervour of the Ulstermen of the 36th Division on the first day of the Battle of the Somme. It should be stressed that most of the officers and men that fought at Gallipoli are unlikely to have dwelled on the historical connotations of the campaign or imagined themselves as crusaders. Yet for men like Cooper the cultural identity of British soldiers as Christians was heightened by the devout Islamic faith of their Turkish enemy. The presence of army chaplains was a very obvious reminder and reinforcement of this Christian identity and was valued as such.

Quite apart from these rather abstract cultural considerations, there were some very practical differences between Gallipoli and the Western Front that impacted on the ministries of chaplains who served there. Given the narrow footholds that the allied forces gained on the peninsula, all personnel, combatant and non-combatant, endured a degree of exposure to enemy fire.<sup>140</sup> There were areas of comparative safety, yet when even the hospital ships floating in the Aegean were vulnerable to long-range shelling, chaplains were often just as exposed to the possibility of severe injury or death as the men to whom they were trying to minister. This, combined with the determination of padres to serve in close contact with their units, meant that the restrictions that applied to chaplains on the Western Front in 1914 and 1915 did not hold in the Dardanelles.<sup>141</sup> Oswin Creighton recalled that before the first landings the senior chaplain to the forces at Egypt had insisted that padres were not to proceed beyond the advanced dressing-stations of the field ambulances to which they were attached. The object of these restrictions was to maximise on the limited number of padres. Once the campaign got underway, however, these restrictions were soon forgotten and chaplains were encouraged to decide for themselves where they could be of most use and often worked under direct enemy fire.<sup>142</sup> The first army chaplain to die on active service during the war, William Joseph Finn, an English Roman Catholic padre attached to the 29th Division, was killed as he landed with the men of the Dublin Fusiliers at Cape Helles. Thus, from the first allied landings on 25 April, padres played an active, visible, and hazardous part in the campaign and references to padres in sources produced by those who fought at Gallipoli are generally positive. Major Cooper was impressed by the chaplains

attached to the 10th Division and emphasised the willingness of both Catholic and Anglican padres to visit the front-line trenches and freely expose themselves to enemy fire. He was convinced these visits lifted the spirits of the troops:

Trench-life, however much its details may be mitigated, is none the less painfully monotonous, and in the Peninsula there were none of the distractions sometimes experienced on the Western Front. There were only two breaks in the tedium: the arrival of the mail and a visit from the chaplain. The latter should perhaps have precedence, both out of respect for his cloth and because it happened more frequently. Walking about at Anzac and Suvla was neither pleasant nor safe; but the chaplains were quite indefatigable, and would walk any distance and brave any danger in order to visit the units to which they were attached. By dint of untiring endeavour, the Church of England and Roman Catholic chaplains used, as a rule, to hold a service for each of the battalions in their charge on Sunday and one during the week as well. Sometimes these services took lace right up in the firing line, the celebrant moving along the trench to each communicant in turn.<sup>143</sup>

As we have seen, many of the chaplains that served with the BEF in France and Belgium were quite willing to enter the front-line and risk their lives with the officers and men of their units. Many others, however, were posted to base camps and hospitals that were far from the front, and while they performed doubtlessly valuable work, they were removed from the everyday front-line experience, and, crucially, remote from the dangers of the front. This was less the case at Gallipoli where the allied territory consisted of narrow, fire-swept beach-heads and generally high levels of danger and discomfort meant that a greater sense of everyone being 'in the same boat' prevailed. The fact that disease was rife enhanced this shared sense of discomfort as even those in comparatively safe positions were exposed to the enteric fever and dysentery that constantly added men to the casualty lists.<sup>144</sup> By July over a thousand wounded or ill men were being evacuated every week and infectious diseases were causing more casualties than enemy guns.<sup>145</sup> At least one Anglican chaplain, Francis Roche, died after a particularly aggressive attack of dysentery.<sup>146</sup> This feeling of unity in adversity was arguably even stronger in Mesopotamia, and during the Siege of Kut in particular. The circumstances of the siege, which began in December 1915, saw English and Indian riflemen, officers, and non-combatants

alike thrown into a bitter struggle for survival against superior Ottoman forces. Maj. Charles Barber survived the siege and later recalled the way officers and men were drawn to the ministrations provided by chaplains. His description of Evensong in an improvised chapel evokes the potentially moving power of a religious service in the midst of extreme violence:

The room was quite small, but could overflow into the padre's private room next door, and so accommodate some fifty people. At one end was a plain table covered by an improvised altar-cloth and a simple ornament or two, the body of the room occupied by a few benches, and by the altar of our surpliced padre. A simple church indeed but far more impressive than a mighty cathedral. For, mingled with the priest's solemn tones as he read the prayers for peace were the boom of the enemy's guns and the crack of his sniper's rifles, and it was easier perhaps amidst such surroundings to draw near to the God of Battles and the Prince of Peace.<sup>147</sup>

## Conclusion

Concerning the British chaplains of the Great War, Gary Sheffield has written that 'the most effective padres were those who allied courage and paternalism with the ability to overcome the barriers of rank and class'.<sup>148</sup> Despite the difficulties inherent in their ministry, which are highlighted by the contrasting experiences of Roman Catholic padres, many Anglican chaplains succeeded in doing precisely these things and becoming effective, respected, and well liked. Such chaplains very often failed, however, to convert the personal goodwill that officers and men felt towards them into a lasting allegiance to their Church. They increasingly suspected, moreover, that this failure was linked to the pre-war image of the church and clergy and the wartime conduct of the Anglican leadership.

# 5

## Combatant Faith on the Western Front

In Chapter 3 it was seen that the relationship between British soldiers and the orthodox Christianity of the churches was not entirely straightforward. Some soldiers retained the devout Christian faith they held in civilian life, others were converted. Some chaplains reported enthusiastic responses to their voluntary services and funeral services in particular were well attended. In the majority of officers and men, however, Anglican chaplains met with indifference to conventional forms of Christian worship and ignorance of Christian doctrine. Through being exposed to the reality of life and death on the Western Front and elsewhere, padres learned that, despite the hopes of some commentators, war was a poor reviver of religion. Coming to this realisation was sometimes traumatic for the clergy-in-uniform. The more they observed their charges, however, the more chaplains came to believe that while most troops were not Christian in the conventional sense, many of them had similar outlooks on life and held beliefs that were not completely alien to their own and those of traditional Christianity.

During the first three years of war, General Sir Hubert Gough acquired the reputation of a fighting general *par excellence* and by the Third Battle of Ypres in 1917 he had become commander of the Fifth Army.<sup>1</sup> It was around this time that he wrote, 'As a soldier I am convinced that no man can bear the terrific strain he is called to stand in war, if he trusts entirely in his own will and strength. He must have a Faith'.<sup>2</sup> This chapter will attempt to qualify the nature of combatant faith on the Western Front and argue that while most officers and men were uninterested in the conventional religion of the churches as promoted by army chaplains, they possessed a moral outlook and value system that was loosely Christian and amounted to a faith.



Before examining the intricacies of combatant faith, it is necessary to look further at the relationship between the soldier and orthodox Christianity and to examine some of the factors that prevented soldiers from embracing the traditional faith of their chaplains.

Rev. Leonard Jeeves was granted a temporary chaplain's commission shortly after the outbreak of the war and was attached to the 55th Infantry Brigade (18th Division). He was sent to France in August 1915 and from then until November of the following year he saw active service on the Somme front. Throughout his time in the army Jeeves sent regular open letters to the people of St Mary's, Whitechapel, the parish where he had worked as a curate before the war.<sup>3</sup> The letters, which were printed in the St Mary's parish magazine, are necessarily limited in depth but they reveal a great deal about the work and impressions of a young Church of England padre. An early letter from France reveals his dismay at the general lack of respect for the Sabbath that prevailed in the army during wartime. 'You can hardly imagine', he wrote, 'how difficult it is to distinguish one day from another out here, and how frequently it has been my business to inform officers and men that *Sunday* has come around once more. Frequently it is said, "I say, it isn't Sunday, is it?" There is no distinction, nor can there be for so many out here'. He went on to say that responses to services were mixed and that 'we get our ups and downs in the matter of numbers'.<sup>4</sup> Unlike in the civilian pre-war world, Sunday, on the Western Front and in other theatres, was treated much the same as any other day of the week. The army did provide for religious worship in the form of church parades but, as we have seen, many officers and men loathed these occasions for compulsory observance, associating them with the tiresome business of kit inspection. In any case, the closer a chaplain got to the front the more difficult it became to hold formal parades. Nor was the business of war put on hold to celebrate major religious holidays like Christmas and Easter. Christmas was of course 'celebrated' at the front, yet at least one Anglican padre felt that in the BEF Christmas seemed more like a celebration not of the birth of Christ but of the creation of the turkey.<sup>5</sup> Oswin Creighton was disappointed by the way the officers and men of the Royal Artillery seemed to consider Christmas a time for self-indulgence, 'I don't think I had realised before' he wrote, 'how much the ordinary man simply regards Christmas as a time of eating and drinking'.<sup>6</sup>

Philip Crick, Senior Chaplain to the 61st Division, felt that proof of the lack of interest of British soldiers in the Established Church lay 'in

the small number of communicants who may be expected even on such occasions as Easter and Christmas day'.<sup>7</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, in the guise of George Sherston, recalled:

Easter was late in April that year; my first three tours of the trenches occupied me during the last thirty days of Lent. This essential season in the Church calendar was not, as far as I remember, remarked upon by anyone in the company although the name of Christ was often on our lips ... These innocuous blasphemings of the holy name were a peculiar feature of the War, in which the principles of Christianity were either obliterated or falsified for the convenience of all who were engaged in it. Up in the trenches every man bore his own burden; the Sabbath was not made for man; and if a man laid down his life for his friends it was no part of his military duties.<sup>8</sup>

Sassoon perceived a certain irony in the way men constantly uttered Christ's name in a war in which he felt Christianity was either absent altogether or falsified so as not to obstruct hostilities. A feeling that Christianity and war were incompatible and that religion was incongruous at the front was commonly held by soldiers, even the formerly devout. Killing and praying could be difficult endeavours to reconcile. Jackson Page, a machine-gunner who served on the Somme front, had been quite a committed Christian before the war but recalled distancing himself from his former religiosity in order to do his wartime job, 'Can one ask Jesus Christ to help one fire a machine-gun? No, then, as I did in November 1915, with regret, but with resolution, one must remove J. C. from one's conscious mind and conscience. Now, once you do this, you get on with the war, and you have finished with your religious core for a very long time'.<sup>9</sup>

Far from being conducive to religiosity, the conditions and general atmosphere that prevailed on the Western Front were often hopelessly unfavourable to the practice of organised religion. During the closing stages of the Somme offensive, the popular *Punch* artist, Frank Reynolds, produced a cartoon that featured a very prim looking padre and alluded to the apparent absurdity of contemplating religion on, or near, a raging battlefield (see illustration 5.1). Reynolds, who served in the Cheshire Regiment during the war and knew something of army life, was not the only observer to comment on the incompatibility of religious worship and the waging of war. As a senior chaplain, Neville Talbot dwelt on



SCENE: *Concert at a Casualty Clearing Station.*

*Padre.* "LANCE-CORPORAL GASCOYNE, OF THE — REGIMENT, JUST IN FROM THE SOMME, WILL SING 'A LITTLE BIT OF HEAVEN.'"

*Illustration 5.1 Punch, 5 September 1916.*

the difficulty of focusing on religion in an environment in which God seemed distinctly absent. He described the problem thus:

[A]t the very front, where all is stripped and laid bare, modern warfare is at times a furnace of horror. Its smoke darkens the heavens, thickening the "clouds and darkness" round about God, and deepening His silence. Its white heat scorches out human confidence in Him. He does not seem to count. There are stars in the darkness of war – stars which are the achievements of man's indomitable spirit. But God-ward there seems sometimes to be great darkness ... Further, war, despite all the easy things said in its praise is a great iniquity. It is, as others have said, hell. As an environment to the soul it is, for all the countervailing heroisms of men, a world of evil power let loose.<sup>10</sup>

In an environment that was often referred to as 'hell' or an 'inferno' religion seemed out-of-place and inappropriate and faith could be difficult to maintain. Private J. Bowles served in Flanders with the Queen's Westminster Rifles and insisted that, contrary to what his regimental padre had said, God and religion seemed remote from the misery and danger of the front:

Before we left England our Chaplain preached several sermons on the effect of danger and suffering on men out there. He said that being constantly in danger of losing one's life made men think of the serious side of life and fly to religion as the only source of comfort. My own experience is quite the contrary ... Men go to their deaths with curses on their lips and religion is never mentioned or thought of. Why is it? I can only put it down to the fact that life out here is one of continual hardship and suffering, that in war there is no place for a God of Love, no time for the softer emotions, and no inclination to worry about a future when the present is a hell that the devil himself would be proud to reign over.<sup>11</sup>

Bowles was not alone in suggesting that it was the devil, not God, who presided over the slaughter on the Western Front. Conditions in France and Flanders varied and were not always appalling,<sup>12</sup> but trench life in busy sectors of the front, with the attendant filth, vermin, and high death toll, could be all but unendurable. During the Third Battle of Ypres C. E. Lyne, a Major in the Royal Artillery, wrote a remarkably descriptive letter to his wife. Making no attempt to down-play the conditions he was living in, he explained that it was not simply the extreme danger and dreadful weather that made the front seem godless; its other-worldly topography added to this impression and made him think of a macabre purgatory:

Here a shattered tree trunk, there a wrecked 'pill box', sole remaining evidence that this was once a human and inhabited land. Dante would never have condemned lost souls to wander in so terrible a purgatory. How weirdly it recalls some half formed horror of childish nightmare. One would flee, but whither? – one would cry aloud but there comes no blessed awakening. Surely the God of Battles has deserted a spot where only devils can reign. Think what it means, weeks of it, weeks which are eternities, when the days are terrible but the nights beyond belief. Through it all the horror of continual shell fire, rain and mud. Gas is one of the most potent components of this particular inferno.<sup>13</sup>

One of the more articulate commentators on the landscape of the Western Front, and Flanders in particular, was the celebrated war artist Paul Nash. Nash joined the Artists' Rifles shortly after the outbreak of war. By March 1917, he had transferred to the Hampshire Regiment and was serving as a subaltern in the Ypres Salient. As a landscape artist, Nash was used to describing rural scenery in prose and poetry and representing it in paintings. Not surprisingly, however, the vistas he observed in Ypres were unlike anything he had ever encountered before. The oil paintings he began producing there towards the end of 1917 portray the Salient as an utterly desolate moonscape that had been stripped of all natural beauty. In paintings like *Void, We are Making a New World* and *The Menin Road* Nash depicts a landscape that has been abused to the extent that it looks less like the Belgian countryside and more like a dark underworld. The art historian Andrew Causey has referred to *Void* (see illustration 5.2) as 'the nearest thing in Nash's work to a statement of hopelessness'.<sup>14</sup> In April 1918, Nash described the scenery of the front at length in a letter to his wife. 'The landscape', he wrote 'is so distorted from its own gentle forms, nothing seems to bear the imprint of God's hand, the whole might be a terrific Creation of some malign fiend working a crooked will on the innocent countryside'.<sup>15</sup>



Illustration 5.2 Paul Nash, *Void* (or *Néant*), 1918, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa.

This apparent absence of God at the front led some soldiers to question whether He existed at all and ask how a supposedly loving and omnipotent deity could allow such awful carnage to take place. Several Anglican chaplains testified to the presence of this sort of doubt among combatant officers and men. Leonard Jeeves paraphrased a common agnostic argument quite well:

‘I don’t believe in God. If there is a God, why should HE allow the War to go on, that’s what I should like to know’. And with that remark the speaker lights *another* fag, and thinks that he has done with God, religion, and everything in connection with the next world, and after a while there are other things which take up his attention, and he forgets the problem which he thus put from him.<sup>16</sup>

It is significant that, in Jeeves’s view, the soldier has not arrived at his conclusion through deep reflection or soul-searching and does not appear to be troubled by it, but rather he seems to accept God’s non-existence as a simple matter of fact. He suggests also that the soldiers who took this view were confident in their unbelief. Geoffrey Gordon, one of a number of Anglican chaplains who worked at the Army Chaplains’ Department HQ at St Omer, saw this type of doubt as being based more on confusion and ignorance than on genuine atheism or theological reasoning. Gordon felt sure that most soldiers believed in God but that in many cases this belief was vague and indefinite and subject to passing doubts which were sometimes raised directly by the experience of war. In an essay written in France he cited the following as an example of the sort of question soldiers sometimes asked him: ‘Why does God allow this suffering to go on so long, when, if as you say He is Almighty, He could stop it at once; above all, why does He allow such a lot of people who aren’t to blame to suffer most?’<sup>17</sup> Another question that, according to Gordon, was frequently discussed was ‘How can God hear our prayers when Germans and Austrians are praying to him for their own victory? Is it not the same God?’

Praying for victory was controversial during the war but victory prayers and hymns were certainly composed and circulated at the front. More militant hymns like ‘Onward Christian Soldiers’ and ‘Fight the Good Fight’ were favoured and new battle hymns were composed:

Not ours, O Lord, to wake the sword,  
Or cannon’s deadly rattle;  
But while we laboured long for peace

Our foes prepared for battle.  
 Be with us, then, and keep us safe  
 From all who sore assail us,  
 For justice, truth, and freedom's sake,  
 Let not thine arm now fail us.<sup>18</sup>

Some soldiers had difficulty with the idea that God could be called upon to aid one ostensibly Christian army in its attempt to annihilate another in a war of attrition. At a personal level, soldiers knew that Germans probably prayed too and asked God for similar things. Why, they reasoned, should the prayers of one individual, or nation, be answered at the expense of the contrary prayers of another individual or nation and, importantly, how could God be drawn directly into such awful slaughter? A Royal Artillery corporal commented on what he saw as the futility of prayer in war between Christians. His dismissive attitude towards the clergy is quite revealing:

Why should God grant me any special favour? The Hun I'm fighting may be calling on him too. It isn't as though I had any great faith in religion, but even if I had, would it divert a bullet? Anyway how can anybody who had to fight believe in God with all the mass killings and with British, French and German priests all shouting that God is on their side? How can I call on God to help me shoot down a man in flames?<sup>19</sup>

There were others who felt that the intense violence of the war was simply an affront to God. The well-known Christian socialist and author, Richard Tawney, served in the ranks of the Manchester Regiment during the war and was severely wounded on the first day of the Somme offensive. While convalescing in England he wrote a compelling account of his experience of combat in which he recalled sniping at German soldiers and feeling 'like a merry, mischievous ape tearing up the image of God'.<sup>20</sup>

Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy was greatly impressed by the character of British officers and men but wondered why some of the bravest, most clean-living, and morally upright soldiers he met in France were not also practising Christians. He put this anomaly down to religious doubt, writing in 1917 that 'a great deal of what we class as moral indifference, and a great deal of the indifference among decent, clean men, is due to religious difficulties which give rise to positive unbelief. There is in the Army of today a great deal of agnosticism disguised as indifference'.<sup>21</sup>

What Kennedy was suggesting was that in some case soldiers were not simply indifferent or uninterested in religion but rather that they gave it a certain amount of thought to begin with but became dismissive when they encountered theological difficulties or paradoxes.

Geoffrey Gordon insisted that soldiers would have been less troubled by doubts if they had received better religious instruction as children and in young adulthood. Yet perhaps the strongest evidence of war's tendency to shake religious faith comes from the testimony of men who had devoted themselves to the Christian ministry and were comparatively well versed in doctrine and theology. While chaplains took no direct part in the killing at the front, many of them witnessed its horror and were exposed to its danger and, not being immune from doubt, they too experienced crises of faith. David Railton was an experienced and popular Anglican chaplain and much of his wartime correspondence is bright and optimistic. Yet during a particularly difficult period at the front in the winter of 1917 he felt his faith in God being tested to the limit by the bloodshed and suffering he encountered daily. The one thing that sustained his faith was the knowledge that Christ too had suffered:

I have been out all day, tramp, tramp, tramp and of course – death and suffering somewhere or other as usual. If our Lord had not suffered on this earth on the cross, I would blaspheme God all day if I believed in God at all. I only believe in God in this war because I believe in Jesus Christ the Crucified. Even then my thoughts – often – would not bear production. How old time people believed in God, I cannot think – I mean people before the time of the incarnation.<sup>22</sup>

Frank Barry, much like Railton, was a young and generally optimistic padre, but he too found that the experience of war tried his Christian faith. In an essay written in 1917 and entitled *Faith in the Light of War* he observed that if exposure to war could raise doubts in men who had chosen to devote their lives to Christianity, the ordinary soldier would find retaining a sense of faith very difficult indeed:

It is untrue – as must be roundly stated from the outset – that war is a reviver of religion. I had at one time a vague idea that it is so, but experience definitely confutes it. Indeed if I may write quite personally, it has had for me the opposite result. It is, for myself at any rate, a constant struggle to keep the spiritual sense alive at all. It is only to be done by very great effort ... if this is so for the padre it is likely to be at least as much so for the soldier.<sup>23</sup>



For Barry, the war had lost any trace of the romance or glamour that it might have originally held and had descended into 'an orgy of monotony'. He felt that the view that war revived religion, which he claimed was 'so popular in pulpits', that is, with the civilian clergy, was based on the association of religion with 'hard times'. He dismissed this as a false but typically British idea and one that rarely survived real exposure to war. Chaplains of other denominations also noticed this tendency for the conditions of war to work against faith and the religious impulse. One Scottish Presbyterian padre was impressed with the comradeship and selflessness of British soldiers but remarked that, 'there is not, and never has been a religious revival, in the usual sense of the term, on the Flanders front, and I am afraid it is true that modern war knocks and smashes any faith he ever had out of many a man'.<sup>24</sup>

Quite apart from the psychological strain of front-line service, the sheer physical and mental fatigue and stress endured by combatants meant that they were often too weary to think about religion or attend the voluntary services that chaplains provided for them. A frequent refrain in the writing of padres who served on the Western Front is that soldiers were unwilling, or unable, to think about anything on more than a superficial level. The nature of life in an institution like the BEF where a man's thinking was often done for him, the exhaustion brought about by front-line service, and, importantly, the threat of death that hung over combatants while in the line, meant that many of them were disinclined to reflect deeply on anything at all, let alone religion. For Oswin Creighton, this general level of intellectual degeneration was one of the worst effects of the war. Writing to his sister in December 1917, he complained that neither officers nor men seemed capable of individual thought:

I wish people at home realised that people out here do not go through any elaborate process that can be called thought. We are intensely conservative, unimaginative, unoriginal, docile people. 'Theirs not to reason why', etc., exactly expresses the attitude of the ordinary officer who, though capable, refuse to think independently. You can only get at the men's attitude by careful observation. They love arguing and will take any side in argument, but are really much the same despite their arguments.<sup>25</sup>

In Neville Talbot's view war, for a lot of soldiers, was a 'muddy business' that rendered serious thought extremely demanding and best avoided. 'War', he wrote, 'is benumbing to spiritual faculties. That is nature's

way of accommodation with war's environment. To feel things much would literally be maddening. To brood about danger, to apprehend or anticipate or philosophise may imperil "nerve". Rather the majority of men carry on, callously, almost gaily, with mental and spiritual faculties if possible inactive'.<sup>26</sup>

A detailed account of the impact of active service on the religiosity of British soldiers appeared in the shape of the *Army and Religion* report, published in 1919. The report, which was edited and compiled by the well-known Scottish Presbyterian theologian D. S. Cairns, drew on a wide selection of statements submitted by chaplains and combatants in 1917 and 1918. Given the considerable depth of insight offered by the various accounts, the report should be considered a key source for those interested in the nature of combatant faith during the Great War. Michael Snape has suggested that Cairns was overly pessimistic in his reading of the material and an obvious shortcoming of the report is that the personal views of ordinary private soldiers are hardly represented at all. The report does nonetheless contain an interesting narrative written by a private in the RAMC. Its content and tone suggest that the writer was a young man. His account of the way he loathed being left alone with his thoughts is quite revealing:

A chap is frightened to think, for it makes him wretched – the thought of what he might have been doing at home *now* – out with the girl, at the pictures or the theatre etc. The job one dreads is to be on guard all night, to stand alone for hours in a shelled village behind the line with the atmosphere of death and destruction around him.<sup>27</sup>

The soldier goes on to describe the different nocturnal sounds a sentry might hear on guard duty and imagines what such a sentry might say the following day: 'He may remark during the course of the day, "It was a hell of a night – there ought to be two for company". He has been forced to think'.<sup>28</sup>

Private Bowles referred above to a disinclination to 'worry about the future'. Dwelling on one's future in a world where that future was distinctly uncertain could prove to be a very stressful exercise and combatants found that in order to cope they had to focus as much as possible on the present. One NCO emphasised this point in a letter to his wife:

The present is our chief concern out here. We live only for that. Day succeeds day, and weeks merge into months, and still we keep slogging away and hope that our efforts will meet with the reward which

urges on to further effort. Many a time we have been absolutely tired out, with heads fit to burst, too tired to sleep, and come up next day again with a smile. It don't pay to pine or worry.<sup>29</sup>

Hervey Allen, a US Army officer who took part in the resumed war of movement in the summer and autumn of 1918, remarked on this tendency of soldiers to live from moment to moment. As he saw it, reflecting on religious issues such as the immortality of the soul was something men did in peacetime, if at all, not on active service:

There is no man so totally absorbed by the present as a soldier. It claims all his attention and he lives from moment to moment in time of danger with animal keenness that absorbs him utterly. This is a happy and saving thing. With time to brood conditions would often seem intolerable. To the soldier, *now* is everything. It is in the piping times of peace and leisure that man has had the time to afford himself the luxury of an immortal soul. When the present world is not engrossing enough, we begin to ponder on another.<sup>30</sup>

Allen's claim that 'time to brood' would make life even more difficult for frontline soldiers echoes Talbot's observation that dwelling on danger imperilled a soldier's nerve.

One front-line soldier who devoted a great deal of thought to religion was Father Hubert Northcott. Northcott was a member of the Community of the Resurrection, the group of socialistic Anglo-Catholics based at Mirfield in West Yorkshire. With his bishop's permission he enlisted as a gunner in the Royal Artillery. He recorded his experiences in regular letters to his Mirfield brethren that were published in the community newsletter *RC*. Northcott was a dedicated and conscientious clergyman who was much dismayed by the apparent indifference of British soldiers to religion. He wondered where all the lay churchmen and servers had disappeared to in the enormous citizen army that was the BEF and concluded that they were 'camouflaged under a mask of indifference'. He felt that much of this indifference was attributable to the rigours of wartime service, 'I now no longer wonder why men are not particularly moved by matters of religion', he wrote in 1916. 'You know what it feels like to be a convalescent after an illness. Every faculty seems dormant save the physical'.<sup>31</sup> Some Anglican commentators had hoped in 1914 that the experience of war would bring about a shift in the psychological focus of British people from the material to the spiritual. They felt this would be most obviously the case with the men who

encountered the war most directly, the soldiers. Anglican chaplains and combatant clergy like Northcott came to realise, however, that front-line service often appeared to have the opposite effect. It heightened the material faculties of the individual to the extent that the spiritual seemed barely relevant.

The everyday world of the average combatant was not conducive to Christian worship and the experience of front-line service, far from bringing about a religious revival, often made soldiers reluctant to embrace the kind of conventional religion that padres dealt in. Instead soldiers tended to adopt what seemed like more logical, less complex, and therefore more appealing philosophies than orthodox Christianity.

### **Emergency religion, fatalism, and superstition**

With experience chaplains noticed that, despite the generally widespread indifference to conventional religious worship that prevailed in the army, men apparently did pray at the front, especially during bombardments and before engagements. In pondering the issue of combatant faith, Neville Talbot argued that while there was no 'articulate revival of religion at the front' there was a certain amount of what he referred to as 'natural religion'. This was based on a craving for security in times of great personal danger. 'It is a very unnatural man' he wrote 'who does not feel ... more inclined to pray when danger abounds and anxiety presses, than at other times'. It was unsurprising, therefore, that otherwise indifferent men came to voluntary services before going into the trenches and that chaplains were 'frequently told of prayer being resorted to under this or that strain of this terrific war'. Talbot had to conclude, however, that while the need for security was understandable and he 'would say nothing disrespectful of it', a religion so closely associated with danger 'was not the Christian religion'.<sup>32</sup> With reference to this apparent rejection of 'emergency religion', Richard Schweitzer has remarked:

Thus a prominent chaplain was disinclined to treat a popular religious response to the war as legitimate. To some extent, clerics were victims of their own contradictory thoughts. The hope for a revival was predicated on the belief that men flock to religion in times of stress, yet when chaplains saw this process happening at the front, they did not deem this form of popular religion worthy of a true Christian.<sup>33</sup>

Anglican chaplains were indeed doubtful of the value of emergency religion, but Schweitzer is wrong to suggest that this indicates a

contradictory point of view. Anglican civilian clergy in 1914 and 1915, and perhaps newly appointed chaplains, hoped that the stress involved in combatant service would make men more open to the kind of conventional Christian ministrations provided by padres. They had hoped, in other words, that the experience of war would draw soldiers back to the Church. Yet a brief period spent at, or near, the front was enough to disabuse most chaplains of this notion and when they encountered 'wind-up' religion they were able to recognise it for what it was, a temporary and quite human response to an extreme situation.

While chaplains took a generally circumspect view of emergency religion, moreover, not all were completely dismissive of it. In a collection of sermons published in 1918 Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy displayed a remarkably contemptuous and unsympathetic attitude to desperate prayer under shellfire.<sup>34</sup> Ernest Crosse, on the other hand, argued that while appealing to God only in times of personal danger was a dubious sort of religion, 'only a foolish person would scoff at the significance of these appeals, which bear witness to man's fundamental belief in God as being something which he never wholly rejects'.<sup>35</sup> Dr David Cairns, the Presbyterian editor of the *Army and Religion* report, took a similar view. For Cairns, although the tendency to pray while advancing into machine gun fire was 'at best a very elementary form of religion ... it is none the less very significant. It means that in the presence of the most terrific display of material force that human history has ever seen men believe that there is an Unseen Power, inaccessible to the senses, which is yet mightier than high explosives, which knows all and which hears prayer'.<sup>36</sup>

The problem with emergency or 'wind-up' religion from the chaplains' perspective was that it was only practised at times of crisis and as such did not amount to a sincere, lasting faith. Turning to God when in mortal danger may have been understandable but resorting to prayer only at such times and being completely irreligious when safe was naturally not the type of faith that padres wanted to encourage. Geoffrey Gordon was critical of the impermanent nature of religion that surfaced only at times of intense need, 'For myself', he wrote 'I have no great admiration for this emergency religion of the trenches. It is based on fear, and fear is a rapidly shifting foundation. Such a religion, strong in the front line, is apt to grow weaker in support, almost to evaporate in billets, and to vanish altogether on a week's leave'.<sup>37</sup> Maurice Ponsonby, an Old Etonian and senior chaplain attached to the 6th Division, was even more critical, linking the temporary piety of some soldiers with medieval superstition. 'This emergency religion', he wrote

'which treats God as a sort of extra to be brought to bear when all else has failed, is simply magic, simply heathenism, a reversion to the dark ages'.<sup>38</sup> Emergency religion was based on the hope that God might act as a guardian angel who could be summoned when needed and protect a soldier from death or mutilation. The difficulty with this approach was that it was not compatible with most soldiers' experience. Crosse referred to this in his unpublished narrative. If God was supposed to act as a guardian angel, he argued, soldiers quickly discovered 'that He was a very ineffectual one'. Experience showed that men who prayed were just as likely to be killed or wounded as men who did not. This discovery had the effect of forcing the front-line soldier to adopt a 'philosophy of life which would harmonise with the facts of his experience'.<sup>39</sup>

The Reverend C. J. Horsley Smith was 41 years old and married with two children when he was posted to the 56th Division in France. In a short, unpublished memoir written in 1930 he commented on what he felt was a very common outlook among soldiers in the BEF:

I should like to say that most men after they had been out some time, found some kind of philosophy of life – either thought out for themselves or borrowed from someone else. It was mostly of the same kind, grim and fatalistic, expressed in such sayings as, 'What will be will be' or 'If a bullet has got your name on it your number is up'.<sup>40</sup>

The evidence suggests that a fatalistic attitude towards life was extremely common among British soldiers. Dr Cairns viewed the emergence of fatalism as 'one of the most interesting and remarkable of all the minor phenomena of the war'.<sup>41</sup> Soldiers were drawn to fatalism because it helped them make sense of their chaotic environment. Death, when it came, often appeared to be quite arbitrary and unforeseeable. Men miraculously emerged from heavy bombardments unscathed while others were killed in relative safety by stray shells or bullets. The very randomness of the killing on the Western Front and elsewhere encouraged soldiers to adopt the view that an individual's fate was preordained. Unexpected deaths were explained by accepting that the deceased soldier's 'number was up'. In a remarkably insightful essay submitted to the *Army and Religion* editorial committee, John Macmurray, a young officer serving with the Queen's Own Cameron Highlanders, reflected at length on the issue of combatant faith. Macmurray, who would go on to become one of the foremost moral philosophers of his time, clearly had a keen understanding of the human condition. He explained that, given the individual soldier's sense of impotence and insignificance

when confronted with the awesome power of modern weaponry, it was unsurprising that men serving at the front became fatalistic:

Nowhere, as in a great army, does a man's littleness and unimportance stare at him so startlingly. Nowhere, as on a battlefield, is there such evidence of the powerlessness of the mightiest human organisation to protect his own small individuality. A millimetre's deflection in the laying of a gun is the difference between life and death to him. He knows how a shell will burst between two men, blowing one to pieces, yet leaving the other unhurt and amazed. He has crouched in holes in the earth with earthy smells in his nostrils, and listened to the hum of a thousand unseen menaces under the stars. What eats into his soul is the knowledge that all this violence is blind ... Is it strange that the child of these conditions should be a thorough fatalist?<sup>42</sup>

Fatalism acted as a useful coping mechanism because it allowed soldiers to defer dwelling on their ultimate fate and focus on the present with a degree of calm, or at least resignation. Also, unlike orthodox Christianity, a casual fatalism required little serious reflection. In fact, the adoption of a fatalistic outlook indicates a decision not to over-analyse one's situation. As such, it suited men who were physically and mentally exhausted. In Geoffrey Gordon's view, fatalism allowed soldiers to attain a level of serenity and become less anxious about their uncertain fates. 'The soldier's belief in God', he wrote 'is often expressed in language which, intellectually, is fatalistic ... "Either your number is up or it isn't – so don't worry yourself"'.<sup>43</sup> By adopting a fatalistic perspective soldiers could forget about the future, safe in the knowledge that, for better or for worse, it was already taken care of. In a letter to his wife Paul Nash insisted that 'there is only one attitude to adopt, that of complete indifference and a rigid fatalism – you are meant to die or not as God will'.<sup>44</sup> According to one lance-corporal who responded to the *Army and Religion* questionnaire, 'Soldiers are fatalists; otherwise they would be madmen'.<sup>45</sup> This suggests that soldiers avoided the unbearable anxiety that obsessing about their death would entail by assuming a fatalistic, 'whatever will be, will be' attitude.

Horsley-Smith was troubled by the fatalism he encountered in British troops, which he saw as a threat to the more high-minded Christian idealism that he believed had been common in 1914. Fatalism, he felt, 'was workable as it had been in other ages, but spiritually it was rather deadly and destructive of those high ideals with which many of our first civilian troops went out'.<sup>46</sup> Other Anglicans agreed that fatalism was a

potentially harmful philosophy and a threat to the established doctrine of the Church. It was seen as an unsound attitude because it denied Christian responsibility and was linked with what were viewed as dubious superstitious practices such as fortune telling, spiritualism, and the carrying of amulets or good-luck charms.

The extent to which British soldiers were superstitious is difficult to gauge but stories of crucifixes and holy statues remaining miraculously untouched while everything around them was flattened by shell-fire were widely circulated and many soldiers carried talismans in the shape of dried flowers, lucky coins, and holy medals.<sup>47</sup> A specially manufactured talisman, the 'Touchwood' charm, was mass-produced in London during the war and its designer claimed to have sold 1.2 million of them by the end of the first year of the conflict.<sup>48</sup> Christian icons and relics were also popular at the front, even among Protestant troops. The nuns of Albert on the Somme reported that English soldiers, few of them Catholic, had asked them for religious medals, crucifixes, and rosary beads.<sup>49</sup> In 1917 Willie Doyle wrote that 'there are few men, no matter what their belief, who do not carry a rosary or a Catholic medal round their necks. I wonder what the non-Catholic padres think of this fearful increase in idolatry!'<sup>50</sup> Popular superstitions could manifest themselves in ways that seemed strange to non-combatant observers. As a war correspondent Philip Gibbs recalled seeing five British soldiers frantically embrace the wooden support beam in a French church after their Captain had said they should be 'safe as houses ... touching wood'.<sup>51</sup> It was also considered unlucky to light three cigarettes from the same match.<sup>52</sup> Writing from France in 1918, Oswin Creighton remarked on the ubiquity of superstitious beliefs in the BEF. His comments suggest that superstition was as prevalent in the officer corps as it was in the ranks:

The average officer absolutely refuses to have three candles alight in the room, or to light three cigarettes with one match (a superstition said to have been invented by Bryant and May's in the days when matches were plentiful). We nearly had thirteen for our Christmas dinner, and much trouble had to be taken to find a fourteenth. The adjutant dropped the salt the other day. 'Damn', he said, and turned very pink and took two pinches of salt and threw them over his shoulder. 'Touch wood' is a daily injunction.<sup>53</sup>

Soldiers exposed to enemy fire, particularly shellfire, were confronted with the fact that, unlike in civilian life, their personal security was



determined by factors that were alarmingly beyond their control. Carrying amulets or good-luck charms that were supposed to bring them safely through the war was an attempt to defy this loss of control. Geoffrey Gordon felt that soldiers' superstition, like their fatalism, was the result of an all too vague belief in God. He felt that if they had a clearer, more doctrine-based vision of divinity, soldiers would understand that God would not 'punish a man for sitting down thirteen to his dinner or being the third to light his fag from the same match'. Ultimately, Gordon concluded that 'the superstitious man must be either a polytheist or a devil worshipper, or, more probably, just a fool'.<sup>54</sup> Yet in dismissing combatant superstition in this off-hand manner Gordon had failed to grasp precisely why unorthodox beliefs were attractive to soldiers on the Western Front.

Concerning superstition and popular piety among French soldiers, Annette Becker has written, in a somewhat more forgiving spirit than Rev. Gordon, 'For the historian there is little difference between these wartime beliefs. They reveal the vitality of these men, their strength of life confronting wartime destruction. In the face of an all too rational but totally incomprehensible modernity, the irrational surged back into vigour'.<sup>55</sup> Fatalism and superstition appealed to combatants because they allowed them to impose meaning on the surreal but very material world of the front and to cope with the loss of control over individual destiny that came with life in the army in general and service at the front in particular. Yet the fatalism of British soldiers does not appear to have been very deep-seated. It did not make men reckless or more inclined to take risks, nor, on the other hand, did it make brave men less likely to rescue wounded comrades under fire.<sup>56</sup> Men used fatalistic language but did not act as if their fate was preordained and inescapable. Fatalism was a coping mechanism, an attitude articulated in phrases like 'you'll get it when your number's up', but it was not a creed.<sup>57</sup> Importantly, moreover, fatalism was often found side by side with an elementary belief in God and a vague Christian piety in the same individual. This was also the case with the various superstitions that were observed at the front. Fatalism, then, despite the disquiet its popularity spread in Anglican circles, did not constitute an alternative faith to orthodox Christianity. As Michael Snape has observed, 'Despite the concern they provoked ... the mishmash of fatalistic sentiments and practices which were so evident in wartime was neither appealing nor coherent enough to amount to anything like an alternative creed'.<sup>58</sup> In order to establish what British soldiers really believed in, and

discover whether they had a set of beliefs that could be called a faith, we must, therefore, look elsewhere.

### **'Old Bill Idealism' and unconscious Christianity**

In the articles he wrote for the *Spectator* and the *Westminster Gazette* in 1915 and 1916 under the pen-name 'a Student in Arms', Donald Hankey came closer perhaps than any other contemporary writer to determining the nature of combatant faith. Before the war, Hankey had been drawn to the industrial working classes because he sympathised with their deprived circumstances and because he felt he could learn something from them. He had, at one time, considered joining the priesthood of the Church of England, and, like many Anglican clergymen, he saw the war as an opportunity to become acquainted with ordinary working class men. Yet unlike most Anglican clergymen, Hankey enlisted in the ranks and served as a combatant. In so doing he felt he would be able to 'live on terms of absolute equality' with ordinary working men. He was later granted a temporary commission as an officer but his experience in the ranks confirmed his suspicion that the key to understanding what the worker, now the soldier, believed in lay not so much in what he said but in his 'actions and the objects of his admiration'. He discovered that rank-and-file soldiers held moral values that were broadly 'Christian' but were rarely viewed as such by the men themselves. Christianity in their minds was something else. 'Here were men', he argued, 'who believed absolutely in the Christian virtues of unselfishness, generosity, charity, and humility, without ever connecting them in their minds with Christ; and at the same time what they did associate with Christianity was just on a par with the formalism and smug self-righteousness which Christ spent his whole life trying to destroy'. Hankey saw this as a tragedy that was compounded by the fact that the chaplains 'as a rule' were unable to draw the connection between the soldiers' behaviour and their beliefs. 'They saw inarticulateness' he wrote 'and assumed a lack of any religion ... they did not grasp that the men really had deep-seated beliefs in goodness'.<sup>59</sup>

Broadly speaking, Hankey was sympathetic to the chaplains' position. He understood that their ministry was an exceptionally difficult one and that, given all the talk of opportunities for the churches at the beginning of the war, they were under a good deal of pressure.<sup>60</sup> He failed to recognise, however, that in working with and observing the mass of British soldiery on the Western Front, many chaplains came to the same conclusions concerning combatant faith as he did.<sup>61</sup> One such chaplain was Robert Keable.

Keable's controversial post-war novel *Simon Called Peter* was his most imaginative, complex, and widely-read meditation on the fate of Christianity in wartime, but many of his views on army life, and the war in general, had already been recorded in a highly coherent collection of essays published in 1919 and entitled *Standing By*. In one of the book's more lucid chapters Keable gives an extended account of a conversation he had with another Anglican chaplain in a dugout at the front. He was closely acquainted with the man he refers to only as 'Jimmy' from his Cambridge days, where the more-experienced padre had been a don before the war. The two men discussed the abundance of literature produced by army chaplains, civilian clergy, and devout laymen on the question, or problem, of religion and the British soldier. 'Jimmy' concludes that while, on the one hand, the emergence of this new genre is encouraging because it indicates a strong desire for much-needed reform in the Church, the absence of the voice of the ordinary soldier in these new books suggests that no real revival is occurring, or is likely to occur. 'The only person' he argues 'who has not written about the religion of Tommy is Tommy. The only person who has not written about the rehabilitation of religion is the person for whom we all want it rehabilitated'.<sup>62</sup> He mentions Donald Hankey but contends that Hankey, being a journalist, is a 'professional prophet' and thus not really representative of the mass of soldiery. Keable is troubled by this and asks his friend what new god the soldiers had found to replace traditional Christianity. He is shocked when his fellow padre replies 'How about Old Bill?'

'Old Bill' (see illustration 5.3) was a cartoon character created by Bruce Bairnsfather, an infantry officer who served on the Western Front. Born into a relatively privileged family with military traditions, Bairnsfather joined the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1905. After several rather unhappy years in the army, he enrolled in a London art college where he developed his talent for sketching and caricature. When the war broke out he rejoined his old regiment and was granted a commission. By the end of November 1914 he was on his way to France in charge of a company of men.<sup>63</sup> For the next six months Bairnsfather endured continuous front-line service. Following the Second Battle of Ypres, in which his battalion lost heavily, he was diagnosed with shell shock and ear damage and sent back to England to recover. It was during this period of convalescence and home-service that he created Old Bill, the character that helped to make him the most-recognised and popular cartoonist of the war.

Old Bill and his pals were composites of regular soldiers that Bairnsfather had encountered during training on the Isle of Wight and



*Illustration 5.3* Bruce Bairnsfather's "Old Bill" – Sensible, Stoic, Brave, Cheerful; in Old Bill and his pals British troops saw themselves at their best. *The Bystander's Fragments From France*, B. Bairnsfather, 1917.

the working class people of Birmingham that he remembered from his pre-war days in the army. The Old Bill cartoons were hugely popular and the magazine they appeared in, *The Bystander*, saw its readership greatly increased during the war.<sup>64</sup> Bairnsfather drew some criticism in the press for the 'slovenliness' of his characters' appearance, yet British troops, officers and men alike, responded enthusiastically to the authenticity of his humorous but realistic depictions of life at the front. In his 1937 memoir *Blasting and Bombardiering*, Wyndham Lewis, who had served with the Royal Artillery during the war, stressed the great value of humour in maintaining British troop morale and insisted that it was really 'Ole Bill à la Bairnsfather' who won the war.<sup>65</sup> Shortly after the Armistice no less a figure than General Sir Ian Hamilton described Bairnsfather as 'a great asset – the man who had relieved the strain of the war, who had drawn a smile from sadness itself by his skill in poking fun at tragedy'.<sup>66</sup> In his analysis of coping mechanisms used by soldiers on the Western Front, Alex Watson emphasises the importance of a type of 'hostile' or gallows humour in helping both German and British

troops endure the stress and anxiety of trench warfare. According to Watson, adopting a comic or absurd view of the frontline world allowed soldiers to address and accept the grim realities of the situations they found themselves in. Humour was therefore 'widely used to reinterpret the environment positively, making it less threatening and thus less frightening'.<sup>67</sup> Bairnsfather's work provides an excellent example of an imaginative reinterpretation of the front as a place that was extremely dangerous but also quite comic.

This combination of realism and humour was greatly enhanced, in the eyes of British troops, by the fact that the soldiers that inhabited Old Bill's world were scruffy but sympathetic reflections of themselves. Other ranks, in particular, recognised themselves in Old Bill and the younger characters, Bert and Alf, who seemed more authentic than the idealised Tommies that appeared in the work of artists like Harry Payne and Richard Caton-Woodville.<sup>68</sup> Writing in the 1960s, former infantry officer Charles Carrington attempted to explain the immense popularity of Bairnsfather's cartoons at the front. 'The spirit of the trenches', he wrote, 'so fatally misinterpreted by romantic patriots at home, was more nearly expressed in the Bairnsfather cartoons than in any literary formulation. The soldier recognized himself and read more meaning into these bold unsubtle drawings than the civilian could identify'.<sup>69</sup> The cartoons were not merely an army phenomenon and Old Bill achieved considerable fame among civilians on the home front during the war, but for serving soldiers he represented a number of admirable and very practical traits. He was phlegmatic, stoical, brave, a good comrade, and, perhaps most importantly, he was possessed of a sense of humour and an ability to survive the rigours of army life and the horror of war. Robert Keable paraphrased his friend's estimation of Old Bill's appeal thus:

Old Bill symbolises what the men like to see in others and want to see in themselves. He stands for a frame of mind that works. A fellow like that goes through this Hell and comes out on the other side, if he's lucky, sane. That's the test; that's what they want. That kind of spirit is a gospel to them. They like to read of it, to see it pictorially, to reach out after it ... Old Bill is as sound [a] philosophy in reality as the ones with more dignified names; analysed, one might say he stands for optimism, humour, bravery, common sense. And the great point is that he is within reach. He is within you. You can work at moulding him inside yourself; you can appeal to this type of man, quote him, develop him; you can pin him up on the wall and admire him. In other religions one calls these things meditation, prayer, worship.<sup>70</sup>

As far as Keable and his friend were concerned the troops believed in Old Bill's spirit, and the qualities he represented, and aspired to possess them themselves. In so far as combatants can be said to have shared a common faith in something, this was it. Old Bill was their religion. Chaplains were often frustrated by how abstract a figure Jesus was to soldiers. Old Bill, and Bairnsfather's other characters, both officers and men, were much more familiar. They were 'real', whereas Jesus was distant and intangible. In addition, no matter how brave and inspiring an individual chaplain might be, he would always find it very difficult to compete with a real-life Old Bill. Both Keable and 'Jimmy' agreed that given the choice of companion on a train journey or visitor while in hospital, the average Tommy would always prefer Old Bill to a regimental chaplain.

The two padres thus felt that while many soldiers did firmly believe in something, it was usually not the Anglican Church or the doctrine it promoted. 'Jimmy' remained optimistic, however, and was convinced that Old Bill, had he known Jesus, would have worshipped him, and died for him. He was certain, moreover, that 'the men who follow Old Bill' were very close to Christian salvation, but that they were unaware of its existence.<sup>71</sup> During his time on the Western Front, Keable was attached to a South African unit and his experience of the frontline was probably limited enough. He was quite familiar with British soldiers, however, and chaplains of all denominations shared the belief that British troops were more Christian than they themselves realised. They marvelled at the qualities of junior officers and men and interpreted them as evidence of an 'essential' or 'unconscious' Christianity. Like Donald Hankey they came to see that while they were uninterested in the conventions and dogma of the churches, soldiers often behaved in a very 'Christian' manner and this behaviour was a reflection of their beliefs.

Charles Doudney, a 44 year-old vicar from Bath and one of the first padres to be killed during the war, was clearly humbled by the extraordinary courage and spirit of self-sacrifice of the soldiers he met in France and interpreted these qualities as evidence of an inner Christianity. Referring to the wounded men he worked with at Rouen he wrote, 'They're so quiet. Surely down at the bottom of it all, under the rough surface and the ignorance, there must be the sense of that same sacrifice that in the same manner was borne on the cross'. This sense that underneath their rough exterior the troops were very close to Christ was confirmed when he was sent to the front. 'One who has not been through it', he wrote 'could never hope to understand what this war is. It is just simply hell on earth but a hell through which moves a race of heroes,

whose bravery and self-sacrifice make one ashamed'.<sup>72</sup> Doudney's sense of awe and humility in the presence of the unconscious Christianity of British soldiers was shared by the Church of Ireland padre James Hannay. In an essay written in 1917 and included in the *Church in the Furnace* collection he wrote:

I resent the talk about the failure of Christianity and the assertion, far too often made, that our soldiers are essentially irreligious ... If indeed it is true that these men are irreligious, then religion is something other than what Christ taught; and many of us will choose ourselves to hear the same reproach, to be sat down along with these men as irreligious in the hope that at last Christ will be found in our company.<sup>73</sup>

For Hannay, soldiers may have appeared irreligious in the conventional sense but their behaviour indicated that they were nonetheless Christian and that was what mattered. In the same volume of essays a senior divisional chaplain, Henry K. Southwell, insisted that it should be obvious to anyone who had personally witnessed, or read of, the heroism and self-sacrifice of soldiers at the front that 'most men are living nearer to God than they or we have realised ... every hour of the day and night men at the front are showing qualities which are absolutely Christ like in their character and in their influence on other men, little though they recognise it themselves'.<sup>74</sup>

Identifying soldiers' experiences too closely with those of Christ was theologically problematic and caused some controversy in Church circles.<sup>75</sup> For very orthodox Christians this imaginative connection between God and man was dangerously close to the ancient heresy of patripassianism. It was a popular view, however, and padres were by no means alone in drawing a parallel between front-line soldiers and the figure of Christ. In laying down his life for his friends, the infantryman was represented as Christ-like in a range of different wartime narratives, including sermons, newspaper articles, poetry, and fine art.<sup>76</sup> Wilfred Owen had considered joining the Anglican priesthood before the war and although he had become critical of the Church of England by the time he gained a commission, he was still concerned with religious issues and used Biblical metaphors in his writing. In a letter to Osbert Sitwell, written in July 1918, he described training troops for service at the front:

For 14 hours yesterday I was at work – teaching Christ to lift his cross by numbers, and how to adjust his crown; and not to imagine

he thirst until after the last halt. I attended his Supper to see that there were no complaints; and inspected his feet that they should be worthy of the nails ... With a piece of silver I buy him every day, and with maps I make him familiar with the topography of Golgotha.<sup>77</sup>

In this instance the front is imagined not as Hell but as Golgotha, where Jesus was crucified on Calvary. Still a place of pain and misery but this time associated with the sacrifice of the Son of God rather than the malevolence of the Devil. One officer serving with a London Regiment was so in awe of the dogged humanity that he witnessed in frontline troops that he felt he could only describe it as godlike:

They have lived the most unnatural of lives – perhaps they have slept in a real bed for 7 days of that time. All this – for what? A bob a day, and a certain indefinable pride of country and a rough idealism. These men are godlike – not in any sentimental meaning of the word. They have no lofty mien, no aloofness from the common herd of men. Their godliness lies in their humanity, the simplicity with which they face the hardship and the dangers of war. Men never endured so much and retained to the end their same outlook.<sup>78</sup>

This is powerful testimony, but it should be remembered that officers and civilians also often referred to the great qualities of British soldiers in completely secular terms without any reference to Christianity. In the fervently patriotic climate that prevailed for much of the war the heroism, selflessness, and camaraderie of soldiers was ascribed to their Britishness probably more often than it was attributed to their underlying Christianity.<sup>79</sup> Unconscious Christianity was a construct. Chaplains, as men who were inclined to view the world in religious terms, naturally interpreted the positive qualities they observed as ‘Christian’ qualities. The constructed nature of the phenomenon does not diminish its significance, however, and many padres were imbued with a sense of optimism and hope by what they perceived to be the fundamentally Christian character of the average soldier.

Thus, while chaplains were often dismayed by the general indifference to conventional religious observance among British troops, they were greatly encouraged by the self-sacrifice, fraternity, charity, and humility of the average soldier, as personified by Old Bill, and viewed these qualities as the manifestation of an unconscious Christianity. In addition, nearly all soldiers seemed to genuinely believe in God, although this belief could be quite vague and occasionally subject to doubt. For



Geoffrey Gordon 'some sort of belief in God' was almost universal among officers and men.<sup>80</sup> Philip Crick insisted that no one who had worked among wounded men in a casualty clearing station could doubt that the British soldier believed in the existence of God.<sup>81</sup> Arthur Gray, a Scottish Presbyterian chaplain who worked with Harry Blackburne, summed up the soldier's vague but real faith in God's existence at an interdenominational conference of chaplains held in 1916, 'He is very ignorant about God and knows not how he may find Him. But not five men in a thousand have any real doubt about His existence.'<sup>82</sup>

The phenomenon of emergency religion was also viewed as evidence of an unorthodox but fundamental belief in God. This popular theism, moreover, was often accompanied by a belief in an afterlife. The *Army and Religion* report was quite clear on this point, claiming that the average combatant's belief in immortality was, like his belief in God, vague but genuine.<sup>83</sup> As one RAMC officer wrote, 'Life beyond the grave is very widely believed in, though in a vague way. It is apparently taken for granted by many that all "good fellows" who die for their country will go to heaven'.<sup>84</sup> According to the report soldiers disagreed about the *nature* of life after death but few questioned the *fact* of it. It is important to remember, however, that belief in the immortality of the soul does not necessarily indicate a belief in Christianity, unconscious or otherwise. In many cases such beliefs may have been more indicative of a psychological refusal, particularly on the part of younger officers and men, to accept death as final in an environment where death was everywhere. A Highland officer alluded to this in his response to the committee:

Get a soldier to face the fact of death theoretically and his bias will come to light, a vague sense of the inherent necessity of an after-life reveals itself. This is not strange. Can the same mind conceive death as an incident in the day's work and as the end of all things? Not in many cases; in young manhood hardly ever?<sup>85</sup>

Combatant faith, as interpreted by experienced chaplains, thus consisted of a basic idealisation of qualities that closely corresponded to Christian virtues, combined with a vague but undeniable belief in God and an afterlife. This was the religion the average soldier already possessed and, as far as many chaplains were concerned, these elements constituted the foundations of orthodox Christianity. The average British soldier, the chaplains argued, was composed of the sort of raw material from which a good Christian could be fashioned. Arthur Gray

urged his fellow chaplains not to become disillusioned by the apparent indifference to religion in the army and to focus on the elemental Christianity that he felt most soldiers possessed:

I am sure that what we must do is to work from what is already in these men that is Christian. Let us consider what they do believe in. They don't believe in Church, or parsons, or pious pretensions, or even in worship. But it is also true that they don't believe in swearing, or lust, or drunkenness, or gambling. They do these things, but they don't believe in them – they are not in their ideal of life.

On the other hand they do believe whole-heartedly in good-fellowship, in being jolly to everybody, in unselfishness, in good spirits, and in charitable judgment. Call these things by their New Testament names – call them brotherhood, loving the brethren, losing your life, bearing others' burdens, rejoicing evermore, charity – and Tommy is 'put off'. But the things themselves he believes in with his whole heart. Believing in them constitutes the religion which he already has.<sup>86</sup>

The challenge for padres, and indeed for all clergymen, was to build on these foundations and make the Christianity that they believed soldiers already possessed less vague and elusive, and more conscious and, importantly, more directly founded on a close relationship with the churches. For Anglican chaplains this meant asking why soldiers did not 'believe in Church or parsons'. Through their daily interaction with men that the civilian clergy rarely had a chance to meet, they were in a position to determine how the Church of England was popularly perceived and assess the reasons why it failed to command the loyalty of so many of its nominal members.

## **Calls for reform**

The last two years of the war saw the publication of a number of essays written by Anglican chaplains serving with the BEF that were critical of the Church of England and the civilian clergy and called for a number of key reforms. In a short essay written while he was stationed in France, Robert Keable claimed that of all the 'religious failures in history it would be hard to find one more tragic and complete than the failure of the Church of England'.<sup>87</sup> Few chaplains would have expressed the problem as dramatically as this but many would have agreed that if the Church was to attract the men then serving as soldiers and survive in the aftermath of the war, some fundamental changes of emphasis would

have to be made. A 30-page pamphlet entitled 'Can England's Church win England's Manhood?' was published towards the end of 1917. It was written by an anonymous padre but can be seen as broadly representative of the views of the Anglican chaplains then serving with the British Army. Written and published at the request of Bishop Gwynne, and approved before publication by 'senior men of wide experience' in the Army Chaplains' Department, the pamphlet was designed to be read by, and circulated among, the civilian clergy in Britain. The author, who writes in the first person plural, makes it clear that he is writing on behalf of his colleagues and, while he takes pains to avoid offending his audience, he does not hesitate to outline the low standing of the Established Church among the mass of men in the army.<sup>88</sup> He explains that, as a result of their experiences, chaplains have become somewhat alienated from their brethren on the home front and have begun to sympathise with, if not to condone, the soldiers' view of the Church.<sup>89</sup> 'We are convinced' he writes 'that, unless great distinctive efforts are made, England's Church will *not* secure the robust and virile influences of England's manhood'.<sup>90</sup>

A key underlying theme in the pamphlet is the need to make Anglican worship and doctrine generally more attractive, and relevant, to the man in the street, now the man in the trench. This is to be done, he suggests, by adopting a 'robust, virile type of preaching – plain, direct, spiritual, which will interest men in the great truths of religion and its practical application to everyday life'. Prayer services are to be 'short and simple' and designed so that the congregation could readily join in. Less emphasis should be placed on ceremony and tradition and more on the practical side of Christianity that idealises character, duty, and 'simple robust goodness'. The impression that soldiers saw organised religion as being at odds with the real world was supported by the interdenominational *Army and Religion* report that appeared in print some two years later. In a chapter entitled 'The Men and the Churches' the grave nature of the problem is quite lucidly outlined:

A constantly recurring note is that these men find the Churches lacking in the spirit of Reality. The doctrinal message is unintelligible. They do not know what it is all about. They have a haunting suspicion that the Church itself is not sure about its own creeds and about the Bible, and that there is therefore something insincere about its testimony. There is as yet not much indication of any reasoned unbelief; but the idea prevails that the Churches are afraid to face the whole truth. It cannot be too clearly realised that this charge, unless it can be met, is fatal.<sup>91</sup>

The churches, in short, were out-of-touch and seen as having little to offer ordinary men. One apparent proof of this was the level of sectarian division between, and within, the different churches that now, in the light of a very real conflict, seemed petty and inconsequential. One infantry officer serving at a base in France wrote that 'the ordinary Englishman is impatient of the divisions between the Churches, because he cannot believe that any theological differences can really matter'.<sup>92</sup>

Although some Anglican padres felt their Roman Catholic counterparts could have adopted a more ecumenical approach to their work, they were generally very pleased with the levels of cooperation and camaraderie between chaplains of different denominations. United church parade services were held to mark the second anniversary of the outbreak of the war, and on a number of other occasions, and from 1916 onwards Anglican and Nonconformist padres cooperated to organise united conferences at which ideas were exchanged concerning their work. In addition, the divisions within Anglicanism itself, between the more sacrament- and ritual-focused approach of the Anglo-Catholics and the Bible-focused approach of the Evangelicals, tended to subside and give way to a generally broad approach. The Chaplain-General insisted that clergymen who were extremist in outlook would not be considered for the chaplaincy. Irrespective of 'whatever school of thought a would-be Chaplain may belong', he wrote to Davidson in 1915, 'he must be willing for the sake of his temporary flock to sink his own personal views and adopt a fair, moderate usage'.<sup>93</sup> Bishop Gwynne adopted a similar stance and demanded that chaplains cater to the needs of soldiers regardless of their personal views. Despite being Evangelical in outlook himself he severely rebuked one chaplain for refusing to hear a soldier's confession.<sup>94</sup> David Railton was unsure about precisely what reforms should be made in the post-war Church but he was convinced that sectarian disputes would have to be resolved if the Church was to attract and retain ordinary men. In January 1917 he wrote:

It is strange how the words 'High', 'Low', 'Broad', 'Catholic' disappear out here. I was at a meeting of very experienced chaplains the other day, and I heard [Harry] Blackburne say that the words were never used, you never hear them on the lips of officers or men. When we come home we shall have to apply the knowledge we have gained here in our work at home. Things will change. At present I am only a student trying to learn how the modern Englishman can be drawn to Our Lord and to his Church in such a way that he will enjoy the

experience. I have not learnt how it can be done yet. So far I have only learnt that our Englishmen do not care a pin whether a man is High or Low, Broad or Catholic, or a Dissenter, whether he gives allegiance to Canterbury, Rome or to General Booth. He just cares to see if a man is genuine, and he will come to a service if it appeals to him and is manly, and not simpering or loud.<sup>95</sup>

That Railton felt that Church services should be 'manly' is significant. The author of 'Can England's Church win England's Manhood' argued that the average man disliked services that were influenced either by extreme ritual or extreme pietism and viewed them as 'emasculating'.<sup>96</sup> A key suggestion made in the pamphlet was that instead of focusing on women parishioners, who often seemed more responsive, an effort should be made by clergymen to approach men on their own terms:

We suggest that clergy hand over more women's work to women, and thus be able to give more time to all kinds of dealings – parochial, social and individual – with men. It is not unnoticed by men that the visits and attentions of the clergy are almost entirely directed to women.<sup>97</sup>

Chaplains feared that the unfortunate result of the clergy's often close relationship with women was that 'religion' tended to be viewed in the minds of men as something feminine and unmanly. Some padres also felt that one of the reasons soldiers failed to identify with Christianity was that the image of Christ that had traditionally been presented to them was weak and emasculated. T. L. B. Westerdale, a Wesleyan chaplain who served on the Western Front, felt that the image of Christ with which the average soldier was familiar was 'often too distorted or ghostly or anaemic to attract him to His side'. He insisted that clergymen should present a 'strong, manly, vigorous, humour-loving, winsome Jesus'.<sup>98</sup> In a sermon he preached shortly after the armistice, Ernest Crosse argued that the truth of Christianity was 'hidden from men's eyes by the clouds of sentimentality which conceal the historic Jesus from our perception. Men habitually thought of religion as something quite apart from their duties as soldiers, and it was the hardest task one had to persuade them of the truth that Jesus embodied precisely those qualities of which we all stood in need'.<sup>99</sup>

Another key argument put forward by chaplains was that the Church should cease to be so obviously allied to the establishment and largely indifferent to the concerns of the working classes. If the Church was

to survive in the twentieth century, it could no longer simply act as an extension of the conservative establishment. Padres differed in their views on socialism but there seems to have been some agreement that the Church had to be more sympathetic to the cause of labour, for example, and not just cater to, and reflect, the views of the privileged classes.

## **Conclusion**

Anglican chaplains attached to the BEF saw themselves as occupying a privileged position among the clergy of their church. They had been given an opportunity to interact with a good proportion of the male population under what were often trying and sometimes traumatic circumstances. They felt they were learning valuable lessons about the declining influence of Anglicanism with ordinary British men and about the direction the Church and clergy needed to take in the post-war period. While they were often dismayed by the widespread indifference to organised religion among soldiers, they remained optimistic that reforms could be made that would respond to this indifference. This sense of optimism stemmed from the common belief among chaplains that the citizen soldiers of the BEF were, despite appearances, essentially Christian. Their 'Christianity' was expressed in their behaviour and in their basic but genuine belief in God and life after death. Thus, although experienced chaplains rejected the idea that war could bring about a religious revival, many of them were confident that soldiers could ultimately be drawn to the Anglican Church. In order for this to happen, however, it was essential that fundamental changes be made. They were keen, moreover, to be at the forefront of the movement to bring about change and determined that their experiences should inform Church reform. Julian Bickersteth expressed his views on the role the BEF chaplains should play in the post-war Church in a letter to his mother written while on retreat at the Chaplains' School in St Omer in June 1917.

What I am becoming more and more convinced of is this, that there is growing up quite distinctly a new band of the younger clergy in the Church of England who have been out here as chaplains and have faced not only the shells and bullets with their men, but also have now the great facts of the deadness of religion permeating our whole national life. These are the clergy who, by God's grace, are going to find some means of waking up the Church at home, not

in any spirit of self-satisfaction, nor with any illusions as to the difficulty of the task before them. Starting with themselves as penitents and seekers for the Truth, they will endeavour, by God's grace, to stir up the Church and rekindle old enthusiasms, cut away the dross and clear the channels for the Holy Spirit of God. This party, if you must call it a party, is neither spikily High Church nor Protestant in the accepted meaning of those terms ... I think you will find the chaplains of the B.E.F. will be a pretty forceful, and yet humble, body of men on return to England. We shall return in a practical prayerful spirit, seeking with wide-open eyes the guidance of the Spirit of God, and determined above all to build upon our own mistakes and failures.<sup>100</sup>

# 6

## Veteran Padres and the Idealism of Fellowship in Post-War Britain

On 5 December 1918 a general election meeting was held in the small town of Tonbridge in Kent. The Labour candidate for the constituency, Jack Palmer, was joined on the platform by one Charles Earle Raven, a former army chaplain and Classics master at Tonbridge School. Raven was the son of a successful London barrister and the product of Uppingham School and Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge. He had excelled academically as an undergraduate and after his ordination in 1909 he returned to Cambridge to accept the position of Dean of Emmanuel College, where he soon established himself as an original and influential theologian. With his background of social privilege and strong association with elite institutions, Raven was quite representative of the generation of Anglican clergy that served as army chaplains during the war. When he addressed the meeting at Tonbridge, however, he went somewhat further than urging those present to support Mr Palmer. 'I am', he declared, 'a member of the working class as I earn my bread with the sweat of my brow. I have seen hundreds of men die in one faith. We are therefore pledged to bring in a new order. If we fail we shall have lied to the dead, and those men will have died in vain'.<sup>1</sup> Raven's initial interest in the plight of the working classes can be traced to ten months spent in Liverpool after his graduation, but the extraordinary identification with the cause of Labour that he chose to express at Tonbridge was the result of his experience as a padre in France.

Raven had made several attempts to enlist as a combatant but was turned down on the grounds of ill health, and eventually gained a temporary commission as an army chaplain in April 1917. He was immediately posted to the frontline at Vimy Ridge. The new padre could not have been sent to a more active section of the British front. A major offensive deploying British and Canadian troops had just been



launched and the Canadians succeeded in taking the ridge at Vimy that had eluded the Allies since 1915.<sup>2</sup> In such a hectic, demanding, and dangerous environment Raven inevitably had a difficult chaplaincy. In academic circles he had been confident and eloquent, yet at the front he constantly feared that the physical cowardice from which he had suffered since childhood would get the better of him.<sup>3</sup> B. K. Cunningham reported to Bishop Gwynne that Raven was 'too highly strung' for work with front-line troops and his letters from this period reveal a lonely and isolated figure.<sup>4</sup> Yet, as a front-line padre, Raven was fully exposed to the realities of trench warfare, being gassed on one occasion and narrowly missing a sniper's bullet on another.<sup>5</sup> This exposure had a lasting influence on him. In the words of his biographer, he 'never ceased to look back on his war-time associations with fighting soldiers as amongst the most formative and inspiring of his life'.<sup>6</sup> Perhaps more than anything else at the front, Raven was impressed by the comradeship and selflessness of ordinary British soldiers, believing that in France he had discovered the 'sanctity of human brotherhood'.<sup>7</sup> Along with an increased sense of empathy for the working classes, Raven's experience of war instilled in him a desire to 'bring in a new order'. A failure to bring about this new order would, he felt, constitute a betrayal of those who had given their lives during the war and mean that they had 'died in vain'.<sup>8</sup>

Charles Raven's response to the war was similar to that of many former Anglican army chaplains. Their experiences imbued them with a highly idealistic sense of solidarity between men of all classes that they were determined to promote in the post-war world. Such men were motivated, like Raven, by the fear that unless British society became more fundamentally egalitarian, and indeed more Christian, those who had survived the war would be guilty of betraying those who had not. The years leading up to and after the Armistice saw the emergence of a number of key initiatives within the Anglican Church that were conceived by, or received strong support from, former army chaplains. These initiatives were designed to reform the Church and to promote greater cooperation and fellowship across the social strata and increased enfranchisement and representation for the working classes.

It would be misleading to suggest that all ex-chaplains were involved in ambitious social projects in the post-war years. Some simply returned to the 'academic or churchy' circles that they had left to serve in the army. Others experienced great difficulty in attempting to readjust to civilian life. One tragic example of this is provided by the case of Cyril Hornby Hall, who had been Vicar of Turnditch, near Derby, when he

was granted a commission to serve as a temporary chaplain in the summer of 1916. He served for two years with the 19th Division in France, where he was severely injured. He was demobilised early in 1919 and in June he took his own life by shooting himself in the head with a German revolver. A verdict of death by suicide during temporary insanity was returned at the inquest.<sup>9</sup> In addition to a number of similarly tragic cases, some of the most dynamic and articulate army chaplains went to work in the dominions after the war, thereby limiting the amount of influence they could exercise in Britain. Neville Talbot was appointed Bishop of Pretoria in 1920 and remained in South Africa until 1933. Ernest Crosse went to New Zealand and settled in Christchurch, where he became headmaster of Christ's College, a prestigious secondary school for boys, while Julian Bickersteth returned to Australia, where he became headmaster of St Peter's College in Adelaide. Llewellyn H. Gwynne had proved himself an eminently capable and popular leader on the Western Front and it seemed likely that he would stay in the Chaplains' Department and possibly succeed J. Taylor Smith when the war was over.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, however, he returned to Khartoum where he remained for the rest of his clerical career. Yet many of the chaplains who returned to Britain did so with a sense of purpose and confidence and an idealistic determination to challenge the traditional social order. Drawing on a number of case studies, this final chapter will examine the extent to which the work of returning chaplains was informed by their experience of war and consider the impact these men had on post-war society.

### **Dick Sheppard, William Temple, and the Life and Liberty Movement**

In August 1914, at the age of 33, Dick Sheppard accepted the living of St Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square. As a large old church in the centre of London St Martin's had a colourful and regal past: Charles II had been baptised there and George I had been one of its wardens. By the time Sheppard's association with it began, however, the church had a very small congregation and was closed for most of the week. As a living, it was perhaps more suited to an elderly vicar whose best days were behind him, not a young, energetic man with ideas. Also, in terms of its interior design and the leanings of the few parishioners who attended services there, it was a decidedly 'Low' church and while Sheppard disliked ecclesiastical labels he was clearly Anglo-Catholic in outlook. Yet, despite these reservations, Sheppard was drawn to the old church

because it was 'big and run-down with room to manoeuvre'. Its size and central location meant that St Martin's had great potential to become a vital force in the parish. As he was not due to be officially instituted until November, Sheppard agreed to spend the three intervening months working as chaplain to Lady Dudley's Australian Hospital in France.<sup>11</sup> This posting was independent of the Army Chaplains' Department, and, in the event, Sheppard spent just a little over two months on the Western Front, yet his experience of war was to have a profound and lasting effect on him.

Although most of his time appears to have been spent in the Australian Hospital, Sheppard did visit the trenches and take part, apparently with his eyes closed, in an infantry attack. In September he wrote to his close friend Cosmo Lang, the Archbishop of York, who had originally been against the idea of his going to France. 'I've sat in a dug-out', he wrote, 'expecting the Germans at any moment all through the night. I've held a leg and several other limbs while the surgeon amputated them. I've fought a drunken Tommy and protected several German prisoners from a French mob. I've missed a thousand opportunities and lived through a life's experience in five weeks'. Working with soldiers under war-time conditions, he explained, had revealed to him the weaknesses of English Christianity and opened his eyes to what he called the 'failures of the ministers of Christ'.<sup>12</sup> In response Lang wrote, 'your letter made me feel that after all you were perhaps right to go. For you have learned lessons which will inspire years of teaching'.<sup>13</sup>

It was while serving as a chaplain that Sheppard formulated his vision for the transformation of St Martin's into a church that would have a progressive ethos and genuinely serve the community. He was extremely, perhaps excessively, committed to his work with wounded soldiers and displayed a characteristic tendency to empathise with the suffering of others. An army doctor who knew him in France recalled how he 'identified himself with every dying man, and in consequence nearly killed himself with fatigue and strain'.<sup>14</sup> He was sent home to England in October, physically and mentally exhausted but determined to put what he had learned as a padre into practice at St Martin's.

A mere 11 people attended his induction ceremony in November but he asked each of them to help him realise the vision he had seen in France. He wanted to be vicar of a church that would never close, would be lighted all night and all day, would welcome people of all classes and encourage them to bring their 'difficulties, trials and sorrows'. He wanted St Martin's to become a home for the community, an institution that would engage, as fully as possible, with ordinary people.

In microcosm, this is what Sheppard wanted for the Church of England and the wider population.

For the remainder of the war he set about transforming St Martin's into a refuge for the people of the parish and the multitudes who passed through the city. The system of privileged pews, whereby the front pews in the church were reserved for the more prominent and wealthy members of the congregation, was abolished. The church was kept well-lit and open at all times with the particular intention of attracting soldiers and other servicemen who, while on leave, would be roaming the city late at night. The crypt was opened and used as a hostel for the homeless and as an occasional air-raid shelter. Daily services, including Eucharist, were given in the church and an informal 'people's service' was introduced on Sunday afternoons.<sup>15</sup>

His work at St Martin's made Sheppard both well known and well liked and in 1916 he was appointed chaplain to the King. In the same year, the Committee on Church and State, which had been appointed by the archbishops in 1914 and headed by Lord Selborne, published its report. The committee recommended the parliamentary establishment of a Church Assembly that would give the power to adopt or reject ecclesiastical reforms directly to the members of the Church.<sup>16</sup> 1916 also saw the emergence of the National Mission of Repentance and Hope. The Mission was, in essence, an attempt by the Church leadership to respond to the spiritual needs of the population in wartime. It was also meant to act as a response to the criticism of Horatio Bottomley, and other prominent commentators, who argued that the established Church was not rising to the particular needs of the crisis.<sup>17</sup> Its inception can be viewed as a recognition on the part of the Anglican leadership that the war presented the Church with a considerable opportunity for evangelisation and that unless a large-scale initiative was organised that opportunity would be missed. The theological message of the Mission was that Britain, with its social and sectarian divisions, was not the nation that God had intended it to be and repentance was therefore necessary. A great deal of manpower and energy was devoted to the Mission throughout the autumn and winter of 1916 and Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy was given the task of bringing its message to the troops on the Western Front. He received mixed reactions, however, and the Mission was generally viewed as a disappointment because it failed to capture the popular imagination, its message really only reaching those who were already devout.<sup>18</sup>

Early in 1917, Sheppard met with his friend William Temple, then Vicar of St James's, Piccadilly and heavily involved in the Mission, and

proposed that they form a 'ginger group' of their own for the purpose of bringing about genuine reform in the Church. This group soon became the Life and Liberty movement. The movement was inspired by the recommendations of Lord Selborne's report and by what they saw as the profound limitations of the National Mission. The first Life and Liberty conference was held in St Martin's vicarage at the end of March. Those in attendance agreed that the abuses in the organisation and administration of the Church 'militated against its witness and stultified its message'.<sup>19</sup> The movement was soon to adopt the attainment of self-government for the Church of England through the establishment of an assembly, as per Lord Selborne's recommendations, as its main objective.<sup>20</sup> The first public statement issued by the group was published as a letter to the *Times* on 20 June. The language used told of new beginnings and regeneration:

Amid the ruins of the old world, the new world is already being born. In the ideas of reconstruction now being formed, there is hope of a new and better era. The Church has felt, and to some extent imparted, the new impulse into the National Mission. It has in altogether new ways realised its responsibilities and its impotence at the present time to discharge them ... A vigorous forward movement just now may revive waning enthusiasm and hopes, retain for the service of the Church the eager souls who now doubtfully watch it, and, by combining these result in real reform ... Those who are promoting this movement are convinced that we must win full power to control its own life, even at the cost, if necessary, of disestablishment and of whatever consequences that may possibly involve.<sup>21</sup>

The letter was signed by William Temple who was described as Chairman, Dick Sheppard and F. A. Iremonger who were described as Honorary Secretaries, and six others, including Louise Creighton, the wife of the late Bishop of London, Mandell Creighton, and mother of Oswin, who was then serving on the Western Front. The ethos of the movement, as well as some of its goals, were outlined in a pamphlet simply entitled 'Life and Liberty', which was written by Temple and published later in the year. In the pamphlet Temple went a good deal further than he had been prepared to go in the letter to the *Times*. He began by tackling the controversy of the lavish Episcopal palaces and high incomes enjoyed by the Church hierarchy and made a direct reference to the working classes, suggesting that working men and women found it difficult to identify with an organisation that distributed its wealth so unevenly.

Temple's idealised view of the solidarity of the working classes was a common feature of Christian socialist rhetoric:

The thing that strikes the more thoughtful members of the working-classes as a scandal is not so much the existence of these incomes and palaces in themselves, but rather the contrast between the large emoluments at one end of the scale and the miserable pittance at the other. The strong sense of solidarity and membership in a single body, which is the outstanding moral quality of the working-class, creates a wonder how the more highly paid officials of the Church can themselves tolerate a system which so abominably starves their colleagues.<sup>22</sup>

Temple went on to attack what he viewed as the arbitrary and wholly undemocratic manner in which clergymen were appointed to parochial livings. He was also very critical of the fact that senior clergymen spent so much time in the daily administration of the Church that they were unable to devote due attention to Church policy and, above all, spiritual guidance. While he praised the skill with which Randall Davidson handled his duties he felt that the fact that the entire Anglican Church, at home and abroad, seemed to pivot on the shoulders of just one man was a major institutional flaw.

Life and Liberty, then, was not simply a clerical pressure group. At its most idealistic it amounted to an attempt by the junior Anglican clergy to wrest control of the Church of England from Parliament and the bench of bishops and transform it into a more inclusive, more democratic, even socialistic, institution that would appeal to all British people regardless of class. The Church historian Leslie Paul has referred to the movement as an attempt to 'free the Church from too complete identification with the Establishment'.<sup>23</sup> Of the three figures at the heart of the group, Sheppard, Temple, and Iremonger, only Sheppard had served as a chaplain at the front, and while it had a profound personal influence on him, his chaplaincy was both short-lived and unofficial. In its early stages, however, the movement received much support from the Anglican chaplains then serving on the Western Front and elsewhere. In early July 1917, the Church of England chaplains of the 7th Division in France wrote to Temple to offer him their encouragement and to praise his efforts to confront the inadequacies of the Church and its hierarchy:

No matter what type or party we belonged to of old, we are now all haunted by the fear that the Home Church cannot see, and will not

rise up to meet, the needs which have shocked each of us on entering, as ministers of Christ, this huge intermingling of all sorts and conditions of our countrymen.<sup>24</sup>

Some ten months later the editor of the *Chaplains' Bulletin*, Canon C. S. Woodward, argued that the success of the movement was dependent on the interest and cooperation of the laity and encouraged his fellow padres to mobilise the support of officers and men in the army and to keep themselves abreast of developments by reading the 'Life and Liberty' pamphlets authored by Temple and Sheppard.<sup>25</sup> In February 1918, Neville Talbot wrote to his father, the Bishop of Winchester, to urge him and his brother bishops to take Life and Liberty seriously and allow the more junior clergy to tackle the problems of the Church. By 1918 Talbot was a very experienced senior chaplain who clearly felt qualified to speak on behalf of padres as a group:

We younger men, through no merit of our own, but thanks to Kaiser William II, have been thrown out of the old peace grooves and conditions. We are in temporary independence. Are we going to be absorbed again under the old weight and the old entails, into the position of talking, discussing and conferring about vital problems without the power to translate the results into corporate action? So, before we come back, make a fundamental change. Act on the Life and Liberty appeal. I feel that the Church is kind of ditched like an old vehicle without wheels. So, put wheels on the bus.<sup>26</sup>

Harry Blackburne, one of the most prominent of the BEF padres, spoke at the first public Life and Liberty meeting, which was held in the Queen's Hall, West London on 16 July. Tom Pym sat on the platform with Blackburne as a member of Council. Pym, a close friend of Dick Sheppard's, was deeply committed to the ideals of Life and Liberty. At a chaplains' meeting in France in January 1918 he had announced that after demobilisation he would refuse to take a position that was paid for by Church funds until the Church was either disestablished or independent enough to reform abuses. He urged other chaplains to join him in this refusal. If they had strength in numbers, he argued, they could pool their resources and carry out work without being paid by the Church. The scheme was entitled 'Plus and Minus' and euphemistically known as 'Pam'. After much discussion and debate at a special conference in March 1918, leading BEF chaplains rejected the scheme on the grounds that it would prove counter-productive. Pym was bitterly disappointed

but determined to personally honour the pledge of refusing Church endowment.<sup>27</sup>

Maude Royden, by this time a leading figure in the women's movement and a Christian pacifist, also spoke at the first public meeting. In her speech she insisted that the Church should no longer be content to simply represent 'the Conservative party at prayer'. She went on to urge those in Labour and the women's movement to come into the Church and by so doing serve an even greater cause than that of their own particular interest group.<sup>28</sup> The outspoken support for the movement of a leading feminist like Royden was an indication of its progressive nature and the extent to which it represented a departure from the more conservative National Mission and a break from the traditional Anglican alliance with the Conservative Party. William Temple, chairing the meeting, insisted that genuine reform could only be achieved if the Church first secured 'full power to manage its own life'. It was therefore decided that the movement should concentrate all its energies on obtaining freedom from Parliament.<sup>29</sup> This was to be attained through a steady campaign to which, it was hoped, the archbishops would lend their support. Archbishop Davidson was unhappy with what he saw as a negative portrayal of his leadership by the movement. He was also reluctant to force the issue of Church autonomy, either personally in the House of Lords or through his political contacts, at a time of national crisis. He was prepared, however, to recognise the need for a greater degree of Church freedom from parliament. He had after all appointed the Committee on Church and State that had recommended the formation of an assembly, and the notion of an assembly had been welcomed by many, though not all, of the bishops who attended a special meeting at Lambeth in May 1917.<sup>30</sup> The Life and Liberty campaign, fought through pamphlets, newspaper articles, and parliamentary speeches ultimately led to the passing of the Enabling Act of 1919 and the formation of the National Church Assembly.

Anglican padres who had been disappointed with the National Mission saw in the Life and Liberty movement a reform initiative that they could identify with and be inspired by. The conservative Dean of Durham, Herbert Hensley Henson, was staunchly opposed to any changes that might lead to disestablishment and was therefore highly critical of Life and Liberty. He was nonetheless able to recognise the considerable popular appeal that the movement commanded. Writing in the 1940s he recalled the manner in which many chaplains had placed themselves squarely behind the movement. 'The war', he wrote, 'had brought into prominence a considerable number of the younger clergy,



who had gained in the course of their military service a dislike of the restrictions imposed by normal ecclesiastical discipline ... They formed the backbone of the "Life and Liberty Movement" which was organised to 'force the pace' of the agitation for autonomy'.<sup>31</sup> The movement was not led by chaplains but it had the potential to become a focus for their discontent and impatience with a Church that they felt had lost touch with large sections of the population, lacked decisive leadership and was, in many ways, hampered by its established status. Yet there were some quite vocal chaplains who felt that the movement did not go far enough and who would have preferred more action and less rhetoric. Oswin Creighton, despite, or perhaps because of, his mother's involvement in the Life and Liberty campaign, was quite dismissive of it. In a letter written in 1917 he expressed grave doubts about the movement's ability to respond to the spiritual needs of the men then serving as soldiers. He wrote in the first person plural, indicating that he felt he was expressing the views of a number of chaplains:

Well, how are we going to fill these empty stomachs with the food that will really satisfy? The Creeds, ministry of women, Prayer Book reform, *Life and Liberty*, the whole caboodle have all gone overboard as far as we are concerned. We don't really care about any of them ... We are sick – this is my point – sick to death of *abstractions*. We are learning that it is only human beings that count, and that if the Christian religion is to prosper on earth, it can *only* be by Christians understanding and serving their fellow men. Discussions, conferences, inquiries etc. simply do not interest or move us.<sup>32</sup>

Charles Raven also took a sceptical view of the reform movement, although, unlike Creighton, he voiced his opinions publically. In an article that was published in *The Challenge* shortly after the Armistice he openly doubted the sincerity of those calling for reform:

All these reports and committees and movements – one doesn't know what lies behind them. Are they the expression of a genuine purpose and a widespread desire for change? Or are they simply 'feelers' put forward by a few picked men without serious hope of action for a generation or two?<sup>33</sup>

Part of the perceived problem with the Life and Liberty movement was that, in order to make it appealing to as broad a group as possible, its leaders chose to compromise some of its most idealistic principles.

Church self-government was seen as a prerequisite to genuine reform, yet in focusing on this alone the movement moved away from a number of the goals that had been central to its initial rhetoric; more equitable distribution of Church wealth, a less bureaucratic hierarchy and, importantly, the creation of a more inclusive Church that would appeal not just to the more privileged sections of society but also to the working classes. Through the passing of the Enabling Act the movement succeeded in achieving its primary objective. Once this had been achieved, however, the momentum to gain the reforms that had seemed so important in 1917 slowed right down. Dick Sheppard himself became increasingly disillusioned with Life and Liberty and in time came to see it as representing precisely the sort of institutionalism and 'churchiness' that the movement had been founded to overthrow. He was particularly unhappy with the assembly that the movement helped to create which, by turns, 'disappointed, disgusted and infuriated him'.<sup>34</sup> Throughout the early 1920s he focused instead on St Martin's and during the period the church became 'one of the most famous centres of social work in London'.<sup>35</sup> Rather than concern themselves with bureaucratic change, many returning chaplains chose, like Sheppard, to channel their energies into the type of social initiatives and pastoral work that they felt would genuinely promote a spirit of fellowship and draw the Church and the working classes closer together. The most successful and well known of these was the Toc H movement.

### **P. B. Clayton, Talbot House, and the Toc H Movement**

Philip Byard Clayton attended St Paul's public school in London and later graduated, with a first class degree in Theology, from Exeter College, Oxford. He was ordained in 1909 and was working as a curate at St Mary's in Portsea when the war broke out.<sup>36</sup> He was a popular and extremely capable young curate whose friends affectionately called him 'Tubby'. In the spring of 1915, at the age of 29, he was granted a temporary commission as a 4th class chaplain and posted to the Base Hospital at the coastal village of Le Tréport. Clayton's first tour in France as a padre was brief but successful. At the end of the summer he was replaced by a more senior chaplain and returned to England. In November, however, he was recalled to France and interviewed by Bishop Gwynne. Gwynne had originally intended to attach him to a regiment but at the request of his old friend Neville Talbot, who was then Senior Chaplain to the 6th Division, he was sent to the Ypres Salient. Clayton was unsure

what Talbot had in mind for him but wrote to his mother that he hoped 'please God, to find better work to do than mere parades and funerals'.<sup>37</sup> He need not have worried; the work he was to carry out at Ypres, and especially in the small town of Poperinghe, would prove to be more rewarding than he could possibly have imagined and the international movement that this work gave rise to would ensure that he became a household name in Britain.

Neville Talbot wanted to organise a special rest house and chapel for the officers and men of his division somewhere near Ypres and thought that Clayton would make an excellent house chaplain. The intention was to offer front-line soldiers a place where they could attend prayer services, relax in informal surroundings, and spend the night for a small fee. The building chosen for the enterprise was a crumbling mansion in Poperinghe, a small town about ten miles west of Ypres. The owner, a wealthy brewer named Coevoet Camerlynck, intended to move to a less exposed region and while he refused to sell the house he agreed to allow the BEF to rent it for the duration of the war. The town was close enough to the front-line to be bombarded, many of its inhabitants had fled, and the rear wall of the house itself had been partially torn away by shellfire.<sup>38</sup> Yet it was precisely this proximity to the line that made Poperinghe an ideal location for a soldier's club. As the major support centre for Ypres, the town had to be passed through by troops on their way to, and returning from, the trenches in the Salient. Guy Rogers was stationed in Poperinghe in 1916 and reported constantly meeting new people, 'It seemed as if half the British Army must have found their way some time or other to the Ypres salient'.<sup>39</sup>

Towards the end of 1915 a company of Royal Engineers repaired the shell damage at the rear of the house and well-to-do civilians were soon donating objects and ornaments to decorate the house and transform it into a club. Among the items received were two pianos and a selection of tablecloths and curtains. The club was originally to be named Church House, but this was decided against on the grounds that it might prove alienating to soldiers and, in the end, it was christened Talbot House in memory of Neville's brother Gilbert Talbot, a popular young officer who had been killed at the front in July 1915.<sup>40</sup> In time it became known by its signaller's abbreviation, 'Toc H'.

The daily running of the house was taken over entirely by Clayton, and from the outset he endeavoured to create an atmosphere of egalitarian informality and fellowship into which anyone, irrespective of rank or creed, could enter and be received as a friend. Toc H was not an officers' club, nor was it reserved for other ranks. Nor indeed was it limited

to soldiers; sailors who were visiting the front on leave from Le Havre and Rouen occasionally spent the night there. It was, as the sign outside the door indicated, an 'Everyman's Club'.<sup>41</sup> The notices that Clayton put up around the house were friendly, humorous and deliberately non-institutional. The padre's own room was on the first floor and above the door the Dante-esque legend 'All Rank Abandon Ye Who Enter Here' was inscribed. The room was often the scene of high-spirited parties at which both officers and men mixed with unselfconscious ease.<sup>42</sup> The emphasis on fellowship and mutual respect between the ranks was exemplified in the close, interdependent relationship Clayton had with his batman, Pte Arthur Pettifer. In the context of the strictly hierarchical British Army much of this was extremely progressive. Harold Lovell, an Anglican chaplain from the West Indies who often visited the house, later recalled the unique atmosphere of the place, 'There was no rank at Talbot House. You never knew whether you were rubbing shoulders with a General or a "Tommy". There was no stickiness about it at all. That was largely due to Tubby's influence over the whole thing'.<sup>43</sup> The uncommon atmosphere that 'Tubby' instilled in the House had the effect of making those soldiers who visited Toc H feel less like cogs in a machine and more like men. Raucous concert parties were held in a hall adjacent to the main house. And for three years on 6 December, the feast of St Nicholas, soldiers hosted garden parties for the few local children that remained in the town and the very humanising sound of children's laughter contrasted briefly with the rumble of the not-too-distant guns.<sup>44</sup>

Perhaps Tubby Clayton's greatest triumph at Poperinghe was the successful reconciliation of the spiritual and the social elements of his work. This was achieved through daily services given in the chapel he set up in the attic of Talbot House, the now legendary upper room. An old carpenter's bench that had been found in the garden served as an altar and the walls were decorated with hangings from the Bishop of Winchester's private chapel. In a deliberate attempt to bring the padre and his congregation closer together, the chapel was furnished with neither communion rail nor pulpit.<sup>45</sup> From its inception early in 1916 the chapel attracted large and enthusiastic congregations. On Easter Sunday 1916 there were ten celebrations of Holy Communion in the chapel, from 5.30 in the morning until after midday, each one overflowing with communicants. Soldiers of all ranks later recalled, often in very moving prose, the solace they found in the upper room. Lord Cavan, the Corps Commander for the Ypres Salient and a cousin of Clayton's, visited the upper room alone in the Spring of 1916 and prayed for courage. In the

late 1940s James Bennet, who had served as an infantry sergeant during the war, remembered his experience of Toc H:

Thirty years ago, I was lonely and afraid, and felt that I had not a friend, until I opened the door of the Upper Room, one Sunday, because I heard singing, and I nearly closed the door again because the room was full, but someone saw me, and said 'Don't go away, come right to the front' which I did, and then I found a friend ... By his persuasion I was confirmed in the Upper Room. And spent two happy days in the Old House, and in that Garden where all was Peace in the midst of war.<sup>46</sup>

When Archbishop Davidson visited the Western Front in May 1916 he presided over a conference of chaplains that took place in the garden of Talbot House and later confirmed about 40 soldiers in the upper room. This simple chapel, and the services held there, were a key part of the healing, restorative power of the House. Writing in the 1930s Clayton estimated that some 100,000 officers and men had attended services in the upper room during the three years that he ran Talbot House, while no fewer than 800 men were confirmed there and 50 baptised.<sup>47</sup> Among those who later recalled attending services in the upper room were soldiers who went on to be ordained in the Anglican ministry in the years after the war. Hundreds of officers and men approached Clayton during the war to give him their names and pledge that if they survived the war they would take this as a sign that they should endeavour to join the Anglican clergy. Clayton put these names on a register and, after the Armistice, attempted to locate as many of them as possible to encourage them to take steps towards fulfilling their vocation.<sup>48</sup>

In addition to his work at Talbot House, Clayton visited Ypres at least once a week to minister to what he called his 'forward flock', the artillery units stationed in the front-line town. From the late summer of 1916 he was unofficially attached to the 141st Battery of the Royal Garrison Artillery. It was largely in recognition of this work in the gun pits, often carried out under heavy shell fire, that Clayton was awarded the Military Cross in January, 1918.<sup>49</sup> On 21 May 1918, Clayton was forced to close the house in the face of the German advance during the Ludendorff offensive. He reopened it in September and remained in Poperinghe until early in 1919. He spent much of that first year of peace teaching at the Ordination Test School at Knutsford in Cheshire, yet he found the time in April to visit his cousin, Dick Sheppard, and relate to him his plans for bringing the mission and spirit of Talbot House to the

heart of London. Dick responded with characteristic enthusiasm and agreed to help Clayton raise the money to set up a hostel in a central location in the capital. Before the end of the year a hostel with a chapel and rooms for the running of a club was established in Kensington Square in West London. This was known as Toc H Mark I. By the end of the following year other houses had been set up elsewhere in London, Southampton, and Manchester. By 1922 there were over 40 provincial branches in Britain and Toc H had evolved into a nationwide movement with Archbishop Davidson and General Plumer acting as Presidents and Arthur Pettifer, the Earl of Cavan, and Countess Grovesnor acting as vice-presidents. On 14 December of that year King George V signed the Royal Charter for Toc H to become an association, with the Prince of Wales as its patron. The movement continued to grow throughout the twenties and thirties and by the outbreak of the Second World War it had become an enormous federation with branches all over the world.

In the wonderfully lyrical opening chapter to *Plain Tales From Flanders*, Clayton refers to Talbot House as 'the house that love built'.<sup>50</sup> Put simply, the movement that sprang from the original house began as an attempt to foster, in its individual members and in the wider community, the highly idealised spirit of Christian love and fellowship that the founding members felt they had experienced in Poperinghe during the war. This ideal of fellowship was, and continues to be, put into practice through meetings involving prayer and free discussion and, importantly, through various forms of social work. The four main aims of the movement were enshrined in its charter in 1922 and read as follows:

1. To preserve amongst men and to transmit to future generations the traditions of fellowship and service manifested by all ranks during the Great War, thereby encouraging its members, through the common Christian life of the Association, to seek God, and helping them to find His will and to do it.
2. To encourage amongst members the desire to perform, and to facilitate the performance of, all kinds of social service for the benefit of all ranks of society.
3. To promote amongst all people a wide human interest in the lives and needs of their fellows and to foster in every man a sense of well-being of his fellow man.
4. To mitigate by habit of mind and word and deed the evils of class-consciousness and to endeavour to create a body of public opinion free of all social antagonisms.<sup>51</sup>

The Toc H movement, always endeavouring to be inclusive, was non-political, and this, in part, accounts for its success. Its ethos was strongly, even militantly, egalitarian, however, and its founding members viewed class bias or overt class-consciousness as an 'evil'. They felt that by attempting to recreate the unique atmosphere of the original Talbot House, in which human relations were formed and maintained without regard to social standing, they could exert a practical and positive influence on the post-war world. Talbot House and the Toc H movement were arguably the greatest successes to emerge from the Anglican chaplaincy during the Great War. Neither of them, moreover, would have been possible without the vision of P. B. Clayton. Yet his work, and his contribution to the Church, did not end with Toc H. In the immediate aftermath of the Armistice he played a key role in a scheme that was to mark a major turning point in the modern Anglican ministry.

### **The Service Candidates Scheme and the Test School at Knutsford**

As the war entered its second year, and it became clear that the conflict was going to continue for some time, the issue of vocations to the Anglican ministry became one of real concern. Anxiety in Church of England circles about the clear decrease in men taking Holy Orders pre-dated the war, but as students in training for ordination joined the forces *en masse* in 1914 and 1915 the question became particularly pressing.<sup>52</sup> During the war years there was an estimated fall off in ordination candidates of approximately 500 per annum, with the result that, by the Armistice, about 2000 new candidates were required to get clergy numbers back to their pre-war level.<sup>53</sup> In April 1915 *The Challenge* printed an article that called for mass recruitment from the armed forces of officers and men for the Anglican ministry. The author envisioned new theological colleges filled with veterans from socially diverse backgrounds who had been united in, and strengthened by, their experience of war.<sup>54</sup> The first steps towards making this vision a reality were taken at Talbot House. As mentioned above, from the earliest days of the House officers and men who felt they had a vocation were encouraged to give their names to Tubby Clayton, thereby pledging that if they survived the war they would put themselves forward as candidates for ordination.<sup>55</sup> Several hundred soldiers made this gesture of commitment and Archbishop Davidson was duly informed. In February 1918 the Archbishop publicly made a solemn promise that no service candidate for the ministry would be prevented from taking Orders for financial

reasons.<sup>56</sup> In so doing, Davidson had made the uncharacteristically bold step of committing the Church of England to paying for the education of a proportion of its own clergy, thus officially accepting the principle that more men without means should be ordained. When this promise was made widely known throughout the Army it was decided that Clayton's now substantial list should be transferred to Bishop Gwynne's headquarters at St Omer. Other lists from other quarters were then added to it and by the Armistice some 2000 names had been collected. The final list contained an extremely diverse group of men, representing every trade and profession in the massive citizen army. Importantly, two thirds of those on the list were NCOs or privates.<sup>57</sup> A proportion of these were 'gentlemen rankers' and some of the candidates from both groups were students who had shelved their studies to join up, but many of them were men for whom, under different circumstances, a university education and ordination would have been out of the question for financial and social reasons.

Immediately after the Armistice, in the period before demobilisation, J. V. Macmillan devised, with Tubby Clayton's assistance, a scheme that led to the establishment of two Ordination Test Schools in France.<sup>58</sup> Macmillan had been a chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury and as a padre had served on Bishop Gwynne's staff at St Omer, where he acted as a liaison between Davidson and Gwynne.<sup>59</sup> The men on the lists were combed out of their units and sent to the schools according to their rank. The rankers' school was set up in the former Lewis Gun Instruction School at Le Touquet under the direction of Frank Barry. The officer's school was located in Radinghem, near Fauconberges, and run by Neville Talbot's brother, Edward, who was then attached to the RAF.<sup>60</sup> The schools were designed to test candidates' suitability for Holy Orders and to prepare them for further training for the ministry. At the rankers' school it was discovered that many of the soldiers gathered there were in need of a certain amount of preliminary education before they could be sent on to universities and a specially picked group of chaplains lectured them on various subjects including history and Greek. The scheme received the backing of the Adjutant-General and was recognised as part of the general effort for preparing troops to resume civilian life, in which chaplains played a key role. Archbishop Davidson visited the men's school in January 1919 and reiterated his promise of financial support.

As demobilisation got under way, it became clear that the men's school would have to be moved to England and that the burden of housing and educating the service candidates would have to be transferred from



the Army to the Church. The total number of candidates at this stage, February 1919, was 1935, of whom 1000 were still required to take an ordination test.<sup>61</sup> Tubby Clayton was sent over to England to find a suitable location for the new school. After some searching, and with the help of the Home Office, the county gaol at Knutsford in Cheshire was chosen. The gaol, which during the war had held German prisoners of war, Irish republicans, and conscientious objectors, was in a state of advanced disrepair and needed some work before it could be used to accommodate men who were not actually in custody. Clayton welcomed the challenge and was genuinely thrilled that the scheme, which he felt would lead to a more inclusive ministry, was steadily progressing. He was fascinated by Knutsford and saw the imposing prison as, in itself, 'something of a test of sincerity and a valuable deterrent against snobbery'.<sup>62</sup> Frank Barry was to be principal of the school, and while he was a little less enthusiastic about the dank, foreboding building than Clayton, he threw himself eagerly into his work. Mervyn Haigh, an army chaplain who had served in Africa during the war, joined him on the staff. In common with many of his fellow padres, Haigh, who later became the Bishop of Winchester, had interpreted the camaraderie of the army, and the obliging nature of its soldiers, as an ideal of Christian fellowship that should, as far as possible, be reproduced at home among civilians. On returning to England he had written:

Wherever I had gone in East Africa I could feel sure that if I met and needed help from any officer or private, white or coloured, in the allied forces, that help would, if possible, be forthcoming ... It is practical brotherhood such as that, though of a much richer and deeper quality, that the Church exists in part to exhibit and to further in the world. Up to a point it succeeds in so doing, but still to a very limited extent.<sup>63</sup>

The money needed to refurbish and run the Knutsford Test School came, as promised, from the Central Church Fund and the prison was soon made comfortable and provided with a full teaching staff. In addition to F. R. Barry, Mervyn Haigh, and P. B. Clayton, the staff was made up of a dedicated team of army chaplains who had taught at Le Touquet and a number of civilian clergy, including Canon F. C. N. Hicks who was then principal of Bishop's College in Cheshunt. The vice-principal was Frank Sykes, known affectionately as 'Psycho', a Cambridge graduate who had twice been mentioned in despatches while serving as a padre in France. Prayer and Bible study, as well as Evensong and Matins were

very much a part of life at Knutsford but no theology was taught. The students, many of whom had no more than primary education, were instead instructed in history, English literature, natural science, and Greek or Latin, in order to prepare them for matriculation and further education at university.<sup>64</sup> 450 demobilised servicemen, including candidates from the officers' school who were still required to take the test, entered the school in March 1919. By the end of the following year about 600 men had passed through the school or were still in residence there. Ultimately, over a three year period and with the financial backing of the Church, some 675 men received training at Knutsford. No fewer than 435 of these men were eventually ordained.

A total of £378,000 was drawn from the Central Church Fund and used to pay for the education of former servicemen.<sup>65</sup> Of that overall figure, £250,000, a considerable sum in the early 1920s, was given directly to Knutsford.<sup>66</sup> The influx of new clergy that this finance brought about certainly helped the Church to keep clergy numbers up and deal with the vocation crisis. Importantly, the chaplains who worked at Knutsford and were most familiar with its students were convinced that the scheme also marked a major turning point for the Church of England and the beginning of a more representative, less socially exclusive ministry. Frank Barry, in particular, was at pains to emphasise the impact of the pioneering experiment at Knutsford:

It was in fact the *beginning of the end of the class-ministry* in the Church of England. It had largely been taken for granted before the war that the Ministry was a profession for gentlemen and that it would be drawn, almost exclusively, from the Public Schools and the ancient universities ... Randall Davidson's 'pledge' changed all that. All the professions would soon have to find out that a wider social structure was necessary. But it was the Church that first learnt the lesson and took steps to put it into practice. Years before the State intervened, the Church set up educational ladders, thus making it possible to recruit its Ministry from all classes and all sections of society, with immense gain to its representative character.<sup>67</sup>

It is possible to make too much of the school at Knutsford and its contribution to the social make-up of the Anglican ministry; Alan Wilkinson has written that, contrary to Barry's view, the ministry was still dominated in the 1970s by Oxbridge men.<sup>68</sup> It should also be remembered that similar schools for the training of poor ordination candidates had been run on a smaller scale at Kelham and Mirfield since

before the war. The fact remains, however, that the school, born of the idealism of Anglican padres, made it possible for hundreds of men to take Holy Orders who would not otherwise have done so. A number of Knutsford men, moreover, rose to positions of considerable influence in the Church. Perhaps the most celebrated alumnus was John Leonard Wilson. Wilson had served as a private in the Durham Light Infantry during the war and, after a remarkable career in the Church, he was appointed to the see of Birmingham in 1953.<sup>69</sup> At least three other Knutsford men went on to become bishops – Ambrose Reeves (Johannesburg), Harold Beardmore (St Helena), and George Clarkson (Pontefract).<sup>70</sup> The programme at Knutsford can also be viewed as the fruition of the Church's pre-war desire to open up the ministry while also improving the standard of ordination training.

Knutsford closed in 1922 as the number of service candidates dwindled and the Church Assembly decided it was no longer expedient to keep it open. A smaller school, for civilian candidates, was opened at Hawarden in Flintshire in 1926.<sup>71</sup>

### **David Railton, the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, and clerical support for Labour**

At the end of August 1916, as the men of the Northumberland Fusiliers prepared to go into the line on the Somme front, David Railton wrote:

Last night as soon as the storm came [the Colonel] gave up his tent for the men. The result is that all the officers are more crowded as some of their tents also were given up and we all mess under an awning. The men love him for it. Why are people so much less sacrificing in peace time? If the wounded working man (soldier) can be taken out for motor rides by all sorts of well-to-do people, why can they not do the same week in and week out for the injured factory man? If a colonel, a gentleman – can give up his tent in a storm for the soldiers, why can't a gentleman of any like position give up any luxuries for some injured workmen? Some do but it is far rarer in peace time than at present. I hope such great things from this war. I can almost see a new England. Of course it will only be in exact proportion in which we follow our Lord.<sup>72</sup>

In this gesture of officer solidarity with the men in the ranks, Railton saw the potential for building a more socially equitable and Christian society. As he gained experience at the front, he became intimately

acquainted with the realities of war and during his three years in the BEF he encountered considerable human misery and suffering. Yet, like so many other chaplains, Railton was moved by the spirit of camaraderie and brotherhood that he often witnessed in France and Belgium and remained optimistic that the war would engender, among those who fought in it, a classless sense of fellowship and common purpose that might survive in the post-war world.

Railton was deeply troubled by the enormous human cost of the war and as a padre he had become familiar with the grief of bereaved civilians who had lost sons, husbands, and brothers. While pondering the grave of an unknown Scottish soldier near the front in 1916, he had a vision of how one unidentified body could be transported to England and used to symbolise all of the fallen.<sup>73</sup> Unusually, Railton omitted to mention this vision in his letters to his wife but the idea stayed with him over the next number of years. In August 1920 he wrote to Dean Herbert Ryle of Westminster and proposed that the body of an anonymous soldier should be disinterred in France or Belgium and laid to rest in Westminster Abbey. He also suggested that the Union Jack that he had used at burial and prayer services on the Western Front should be used to cover the coffin. The concept of a public tomb for an unknown soldier was not entirely new. Plans were already under way in France for the reinterment of a *soldat inconnu* at the Arc de Triomphe and a *Daily Express* journalist had suggested that an unknown soldier be buried in Whitehall. Yet the suggestion that a soldier who might have come from any background should be buried in the company of dead kings and other great men in Westminster Abbey, which was no less than the 'parish church of the British Empire', was quite new and not a little controversial.

Dean Ryle responded with some enthusiasm to Railton's letter and agreed to sound the proposal out in Church circles. The Anglican hierarchy liked the idea, in part because the Cenotaph, designed by Edward Lutyens and soon to be made a permanent fixture in Whitehall, was a deliberately non-religious monument. Lutyens wanted to create an unencumbered edifice onto which people could 'inscribe their own thoughts, reveries, sadnesses' and his monument features no cross or Christian iconography, merely the words 'The Glorious Dead'. This absence of religious symbolism in Lutyens' work attracted criticism from Christian commentators.<sup>74</sup> The *Church Times* took a dim view of the secular nature of the memorial and denounced the overwhelming public response to Lutyens' original wood and plaster Cenotaph as 'a cult' and 'Cenotaphaltry'.<sup>75</sup> The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, conceived

of by a clergyman and destined to be located on consecrated ground, was far less ambiguous in its symbolism. An imaginative and fitting memorial tomb in the Abbey would allow an Anglican church, and thereby *the* Anglican Church, to become a focus for the bereaved of the nation. George V, to begin with, was very much against the idea on grounds of taste and because he felt that such a public interment ceremony might reopen the wounds of the war among the civilian population which he felt, more than a little prematurely, were already beginning to heal. Lloyd George, on the other hand, was warmly in favour of the plan and gave it his support. A famously shrewd judge of public opinion, the Prime Minister saw the value in a gesture that validated the sacrifice of every one of the hundreds of thousands who had fought and died.

A committee chaired by Lord Curzon was duly set up to oversee the selection of the body of an unidentified soldier and its transportation from France to England and to organise the ceremony, which, it was agreed, should take place that November. Those involved went to great lengths to ensure that the identity and rank of the soldier would remain unknown and the anonymous remains of a British soldier were selected in France.<sup>76</sup> On 11 November, after the unveiling of the new permanent Cenotaph in Whitehall and a solemn two minute silence, there was a traditional Anglican Prayer Book burial service in the Abbey and, once Railton's union flag had been removed, the body was interred. It had been agreed that the shrine should be referred to as the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior. The term 'warrior' was used so that the buried soldier could also represent the sailors and airmen who had lost their lives in the war.

The Unknown Warrior was given the sort of military honours usually reserved for a Field Marshall, including a 19-gun salute from artillery pieces in Hyde Park. The coffin he was laid in was made from an oak tree that had once stood in Hampton Court and a sword from the King's private collection was attached to the lid, along with the simple wording 'A British Warrior who fell in the Great War 1914 to 1918 for King and Country'. George V overcame his initial reservations and acted as chief mourner at the ceremony.<sup>77</sup> The public response to the interment of this anonymous soldier was nothing short of phenomenal. Crowds thronged the route from the Cenotaph to the tomb and over 40,000 people had passed through the Abbey by the time the doors were closed at 11 pm; thousands more were left outside. In the weeks following the ceremony people came from all over the UK to pay tribute to the dead. On Sunday 21 November, ten days after the original ceremony,

the Abbey was opened to the public for just two hours, yet in that time approximately 10,000 pilgrims filed past the Tomb.<sup>78</sup>

On the day after the ceremony, the *Times* attempted to explain the broad appeal of the Tomb: 'The Unknown Warrior whose body was to be buried may have been born to a high position or to low; he may have been a sailor, a soldier or an airman; an Englishman, a Scotsman, a Welshman, an Irishman, a man of the Dominions, a Sikh, a Ghurkha. No one knows. But he was one who gave his life for the people of the British Empire'.<sup>79</sup> Railton had originally suggested that the grave be known as the 'Tomb of the Unknown Comrade' because he felt this sounded 'warmer and friendlier'. Also, and importantly, the term 'comrade' denotes fellowship and solidarity, which Railton viewed as crucial elements of the symbolism of the Tomb and of the British war experience. Writing in the early 1930s, he emphasised the egalitarian symbolism of the shrine, 'No one knows the "Unknown Warrior's" rank, his wealth, his education or his history. "Class" values become vanity there. He may have been wealthy, or one whose home was in a slum. He may have been a Public School boy, or a gypsy'.<sup>80</sup> The bereaved of the nation, who numbered in millions, and particularly those whose departed loved ones had no known grave, could imagine that it was their son, husband, or brother lying in the Abbey.

The Tomb of the Unknown Warrior was thus designed, like the cenotaph, to be as classless and inclusive as possible and to represent unity rather than exclusion or division. This goes some way towards explaining the overwhelming public response to it. There was considerable bitterness, however, among those unemployed ex-servicemen who felt that more attention was being devoted to the dead than the living. On Armistice Day 1921 thousands of unemployed men marched towards the Cenotaph wearing pawn tickets in the place of medals.<sup>81</sup> Railton himself was acutely aware that the act of remembering the dead would be hollow and meaningless, even insulting, if efforts were not also made to improve the lot of those who had survived the war. During the war, he had genuinely identified with the ordinary private soldier and had pledged, 'If God spares me I will spend half my life getting their rights for the men who fought out here'.<sup>82</sup> In the 1980s his son, Andrew, born shortly after the war, recalled the effect the war had on his father:

He had great sympathy and understanding for those in distress. Though he rarely talked about his war years as a padre, there is no doubt that his experiences in the trenches had had a profound effect on him. As a parish priest he devoted much of his time to visiting

poorer parishes, not to get them to go to church, but to bring them hope and encouragement.<sup>83</sup>

By conceiving of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, David Railton had helped to place the Anglican Church, which had received quite sharp criticism from certain quarters during the war, at the centre of the post-war process of mourning and commemoration. He nonetheless felt that greater efforts had to be made to bring the Church and the people of the nation closer together. It was this conviction that led to his active involvement in the Labour movement and, for a period of two years, he left his 'comfortable living' as vicar of St John the Baptist Church in Margate to work for the Industrial Christian Fellowship.<sup>84</sup> He was also closely involved in a very revealing but largely forgotten gesture of clerical solidarity with the Labour Party.

On 13 March 1923 Railton and another former army chaplain, Charles Bernard Mortlock, joined a small group of clergymen who made their way to the House of Commons to meet with the Labour Party leadership. The group was led by the Canon of Peterborough, Frederick Lewis Donaldson, the well-known Christian socialist who had led the Leicester workingman's march to London in 1905 and had famously said that 'Christianity is the religion of which Socialism is the practice'.<sup>85</sup> The purpose of the meeting was to present Ramsay MacDonald and a number of other Labour MPs with a memorial signed by no fewer than 510 clergymen of the Church of England and the Episcopal Church in Scotland. The text of the memorial congratulated the MPs on having become, for the first time, the official opposition to the Government and pledged the support of the clergy in what the signatories viewed as a common social project:

Our particular calling, with its pastoral experience, gives us direct knowledge of the sufferings and deprivation, mental, moral and physical, to which millions of our fellow citizens are subjected in our present social and industrial order, and to find remedy for which is the chief purpose and aim of the Labour movement.

It is, therefore, a matter of great satisfaction to us that this increased opportunity is now open before you in the great assembly of the nation, and we shall support actively, in whatever ways are legitimately open to us, the efforts you assuredly will make for the spiritual and economic emancipation of the people.<sup>86</sup>

Donaldson himself had long been a supporter of the cause of Labour and was closely involved in the movement's transition from pressure group

to parliamentary party. Other individual clergymen had, in common with Charles Raven, lent vocal public support to the party and Christian socialism had been a growing force in the Anglican Church for over 30 years. Nor was the 1923 document the first memorial of its kind. In 1906, Donaldson had organised the circulation of a similar petition. The earlier memorial was signed by 165 clergy and presented to the Labour leadership on the occasion of the Party's success in the general election of 1906.<sup>87</sup> Such a public gesture of clerical solidarity with the working classes was still extremely significant. The text of the memorial is more progressive than radical and signing was not necessarily an indication of militancy yet, as Gerald Kennedy has observed, 'signing was not the sort of public gesture an Anglican clergyman at that time could afford to make without thought'.<sup>88</sup> The names on the list were not all those of obscure curates, moreover, and represented quite a broad cross-section of clergy, including eleven future bishops, no fewer than three of whom were former chaplains with distinguished service records. Of the 510 names on the list, a total of 80, or 16 per cent, had seen service as army chaplains during the war, a further five served with the RAMC, and five had fought as combatants.<sup>89</sup> Given that the approximately 3000 Anglican clergymen who served as chaplains during the war made up just 12 per cent of the total number of Anglican clergy in the UK, ex-padres are overrepresented in the memorial. The decision of each of these clergymen to sign the document may not be directly attributable to their wartime experience, but the memorial nonetheless indicates a significant move towards Labour on the part of the generation of clergy that had served during the war. By signing the memorial David Railton and others felt they were making a very clear statement; the old pre-war social order was unjust and in need of fundamental change and Anglican clergy had a role to play in the movement for reform.

Another former padre who was keenly aware of the meaninglessness of commemoration in the absence of an effort to reconstruct the nation for which so many had died was Tom Pym. 11 November 1923 was the first year that the anniversary of the Armistice fell on a Sunday and Rev. Pym was asked to preach at the evening service at Westminster Abbey. In his sermon he offered the congregation his views on the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior and spoke at length about the debt that was still owed to those who had given their lives in the war:

This place in which tonight we worship and the grave of the unknown round which we pray form the centre and shrine of that tribute of remembrance which is today being paid by millions of our



people to the honour of those who gave their lives for us. The grave is more than a memorial to the many whose bodies were laid to rest unrecognised ... To all who can possibly help in any way the graves of the fallen should be a very sharp reminder of the needs of the living. Of the former comrades of that unknown warrior there are still 5,000 ex-officers unemployed, and no less than 35,000 *disabled* ex-service men, able and willing to work, for whom no honourable means of livelihood has yet been found ... We do no honour to those we commemorate today if we refuse to face the truth. But we dishonour them as much if we lose faith or hope.<sup>90</sup>

Pym clearly interpreted the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior not just as a memorial to the dead but also as a reminder to the living to repay their debt to the fallen by building a better, more just society. And, for Pym, this was not empty rhetoric, for he had himself been attempting, albeit in quite a localised manner, to promote equality and fellowship since the end of the war.

Thomas Wentworth Pym had a distinguished record as an army chaplain. He received his commission just seven weeks after the outbreak of the war and by December 1914 he had arrived in France. In 1916 he was promoted to the position of Brigade Chaplain and the following summer he was made Deputy Assistant Chaplain-General, a post that carried the rank of Lieutenant Colonel.<sup>91</sup> At about the time of his second promotion he was awarded the DSO for his work as a senior chaplain. He was a popular padre who got on well with rank-and-file soldiers and had a very close relationship with his batman, Pte Charlie Bridgeman, a young mechanic from Birmingham. Bishop Gwynne was also extremely fond of him, believing him to be not only one of the best chaplains, but one of the best men, he had ever met.<sup>92</sup> During his time in the BEF he contributed an essay to *The Church in the Furnace* collection and co-authored, with Geoffrey Gordon, a book on the war entitled *Papers from Picardy*.

Pym's pre-war pastoral work in London slums and at Wandsworth Prison meant that, unlike most men of his class, he had some appreciation of the vast differences in standards of living across the social strata. This perhaps made him a little more circumspect than other chaplains about the task of turning wartime camaraderie into post-war fellowship. Shortly after mobilisation he accepted the position of Head of Cambridge House, the university settlement house in Camberwell, South London. Students and faculty from Trinity College, Cambridge, had established the house in 1889 as a base from which Cambridge

undergraduates and alumni could get involved in social work in what was then a very deprived part of South London. Since its inception the head of the house had always been an Anglican clergyman. As the post was paid for by Cambridge, Pym felt he could accept it and still uphold his wartime vow to refuse a Church stipend until reforms had been made. The schemes Pym initiated in Camberwell included the foundation of a mixed social club for young men and women and the opening, in September 1920, of the Cambridge House Library and Bookshop. The latter scheme was an experiment in adult education that proved to be very popular with young adults who had left the school system after primary education. In July 1921 the first issue of the *Cambridge House Bulletin* was issued. The *Bulletin* was designed to inform those interested in current affairs and focused particularly on news relating to labour and industry. In 1924, Pym began an investigation into the effects of bad housing on the health and character of local people.<sup>93</sup>

Through his work at Cambridge House, Pym was able to practise the social message he preached and encourage greater familiarity and cooperation between people from very diverse backgrounds. He recognised that relatively affluent, privileged men and women had a good deal to gain by working for, and among, working-class people and always encouraged new members of staff to make friends in Camberwell. He also worked hard to develop and maintain links between Cambridge and Camberwell, often bringing groups of students to South London to introduce them to its inhabitants so that they could become in some way familiar with aspects of working class life. Part of Pym's mission was to implant a disadvantaged area of South London in the consciousness of an elite university.

Pym was not the only ex-chaplain to work in a socially deprived district of London, or indeed the only one to become head of a university settlement. The head of Oxford House, Bethnal Green, was E. P. Woolcombe. During the war Woolcombe had been attached to the Artillery School of the First Army on the Western Front and was mentioned in despatches.<sup>94</sup> Also working in the East End was John (or St John) Groser. Groser, who was 26 when he received his temporary commission, proved to be a very capable and generally popular chaplain who strongly identified with rank-and-file troops. By 1918, however, he had come to believe that the war was being unnecessarily prolonged and was beginning to find it difficult to support the allied cause.<sup>95</sup> On being demobilised he spent some time in Cornwall where he met the Vicar of Thaxted, Conrad Noel. Noel, one of the most controversial Anglican clergymen of the period and founder of the militantly socialist Catholic Crusade, was a key influence

in Groser's early career and the development of his radical attitude.<sup>96</sup> In 1921 C. G. Langdon, himself a former army chaplain, appointed Groser to the curacy of St Michael's Church in Poplar, East London. Langdon was a committed socialist, as was Groser's fellow curate, Jack Bucknall. In the Poplar of the early 1920s, which had been hit severely by the economic depression that set in after the short-lived post-war boom, Groser found a ready audience for his views.

Combining a socialistic reading of the Bible with outspoken criticism of factory owners, slumlords, and archaic Poor Law legislation, the young curate attracted large crowds to the street corners from which he preached.<sup>97</sup> In addition to regular preaching and organising public meetings and demonstrations, Groser was involved in practical social work and started a series of study groups to inform and educate local people. His obvious sincerity and eloquence appealed to ordinary East Enders, but his radical preaching marked him out as a potentially dangerous agitator and he clashed repeatedly with his diocesan bishop, A. F. Winnington-Ingram. In 1925, Langdon, under pressure from conservative parishioners, dismissed Groser from his curacy. By this stage, however, Groser was in demand as a public speaker and he went on to play an active role in supporting the workers during the General Strike of 1926. His very public identification with the strikers led to his being brutally assaulted by police outside Poplar Town Hall.<sup>98</sup>

Few former chaplains took as radical a position as John Groser, or indeed Tom Pym. Many were highly critical of the established social order, but were content to work within it, and careful not to isolate themselves from it, while advocating fellowship and cooperation between the classes. Groser, on the other hand, insisted on complete solidarity with the working classes, irrespective of the sensitivities this stance offended. His radicalism can be explained, at least in part, by his somewhat underprivileged background and his association with the Community of the Resurrection at Mirfield. His militancy was also informed, however, by his belief that the war was prolonged at the expense of the most disenfranchised and vulnerable sections of society.

### **G. A. Studdert Kennedy and the Industrial Christian Fellowship**

The Industrial Christian Fellowship (ICF) was an Anglican organisation formed in 1919 through the amalgamation of the Christian Social Union and the Navy Mission Society, an evangelical group that worked with manual labourers, founded in 1877.<sup>99</sup> The essential aim of the Fellowship

in its earliest phase was to promote greater cooperation between organised religion and organised labour by propagating the message of what was known simply as 'the Fifth Report'. The National Mission of Repentance and Hope was, as we have seen, largely deemed a failure by both clergy and laity. It did, however, give rise to the Life and Liberty movement, which, despite its shortcomings, achieved a certain amount of reform. Importantly, it also prompted the archbishops to form committees tasked with compiling reports on various social issues. The fifth of these, drafted by Charles Gore and Richard Tawney among others, dealt with *Christianity and Industrial Problems* and has been referred to as 'one of the finest and most important expressions of Christian opinion on social and industrial affairs ever produced by the Church of England'.<sup>100</sup> For a document that had official backing from the Archbishops the report was quite radical. It was clearly critical of the existing social order and the unequal distribution of the nation's wealth, and was strongly supportive of industrial workers, who, the authors insisted, should be granted a 'living wage' and 'adequate leisure time'.<sup>101</sup>

The ICF between the wars was not a radical organisation and indeed its influence and success can be attributed to its broad, apolitical ethos. It was certainly viewed as progressive, however, and it attracted some of the more radical Anglican clergy and laity. One contemporary observer insisted that while the movement was quite moderate in its views and methods, it was nonetheless groundbreaking, 'The Fellowship' he wrote, 'proclaims no fixed economic theories which might alarm the more diffident, and at the same time has a more direct contact with the rank and file of labour than any other Church movement since early Christian Socialism'.<sup>102</sup> Some of the most capable and dynamic of ex-chaplains either worked for the ICF or lent it their public support, including David Railton, Frank Barry, F. B. Macnutt, Tom Pym, Guy Rogers, and Charles Chavasse. Dick Sheppard was president of the movement for a period in the early 1930s and Charles Raven was also a strong supporter. The figurehead of the movement, moreover, and its official spokesperson, or 'messenger', in the 1920s was perhaps the most famous army chaplain of the war, Geoffrey Anketell Studdert Kennedy.

By the war's end Studdert Kennedy was well known both in the army and among sections of the civilian population as a charismatic, plain speaking padre with a message. During his brief involvement with the National Mission in the autumn of 1916 he addressed at least 15,000 soldiers over a period of ten days. In addition, the five books of poetry and prose that he had published during the war, under the name 'Woodbine Willie', meant that thousands of soldiers and civilians who

had never heard him speak were nonetheless familiar with his forceful rhetoric. *Rough Rhymes of a Padre*, a collection of verse published in a cheap pocket edition in 1918, sold over 30,000 copies in its first few weeks.<sup>103</sup> His poetry from this period gives some insight into his political and religious outlook. In common with other padres, notably David Railton, Studdert Kennedy identified increasingly with a suffering Christ as opposed to an omnipotent, unknowable and impassable Old Testament God.<sup>104</sup> After the Armistice, he began to view war as wrong and unchristian and looked back on his own conduct during the war years with some ambivalence. His sermons and poetry from the early 1920s contrast starkly with his indignantly patriotic and often jarringly bellicose wartime talks. On Armistice Day, 1921, he spoke in the Central Hall, Westminster. 'If they killed your husband' he told the congregation '– in Christ's name, forgive. They were mad. I was mad – crazy. We got decorated for doing things that we did when we were mad'.<sup>105</sup>

In 1919 Studdert Kennedy, now much in demand as a preacher and public speaker, was made a chaplain to the King and returned to St Paul's, Worcester, the parish he had left to join the Chaplains' Department in 1915. He had been appearing on ICF platforms around the county since the end of the war and in the summer of 1921 he was asked to become Messenger (or chief spokesperson) of the organisation. In the same year he published *Democracy and the Dog Collar*. The book was dedicated to 'The working men of Britain who were soldiers once' and provided a no nonsense account of the mutually antagonistic relationship between the Church and organised labour.<sup>106</sup> In 1922 he was appointed Rector of the Church of St Edmund King and Martyr on Lombard Street in London. There were no parochial obligations attached to the living and he was free to devote most of his time to his work for Fellowship. From this point until his early death in 1929, he worked tirelessly for the ICF.

Studdert Kennedy was very much in sympathy with the working classes and devoted his post-war career to bringing the workers into closer communion with the Church. He also readily accepted that Church reform and societal change were overdue. During the 1920s his preaching persona was that of the worker's friend just as his wartime persona had been that of the soldier's friend. He was no socialist, however, and his eccentric mannerisms and plain speaking hid quite an obedient Anglican.<sup>107</sup> He rejected socialism as anti-Christian and consistently refused to ally himself with the Labour Party. He did not, for example, sign the Donaldson memorial to the Labour leadership with which David Railton and others were associated. The term 'Fellowship' is the key to Studdert Kennedy's message in the post-war years. In his

view, war between labour and capital in Britain would have been as catastrophic as the war between Britain and Germany. Studdert Kennedy certainly became more pacifistic and anti-war in his views as the 1920s progressed and the speeches he gave towards the end of his life were marked by expressions of personal guilt about the war. His death in 1929, however, meant that he would never take part in the pacifist movement of the early 1930s, a movement that was heavily influenced by his friend and fellow ICF Council member, Dick Sheppard.

### **Dick Sheppard, Charles Raven, and British Pacifism**

Dick Sheppard's personal charisma, energy, and sense of mission had ensured that, during the war, the people attending services at St Martin's had swelled from a mere handful of parishioners to packed congregations, often numbering over 1200 and made up of people from all walks of life and all parts of London. By the mid-1920s, moreover, Sheppard had become a national celebrity as a result of his pioneering radio services. Broadcast live from St Martin's by the BBC, these services were controversial but hugely popular, attracting tens of thousands of listeners each month. Persistent health problems forced Sheppard to resign his living at St Martin's in 1926 but his distinctively warm, avuncular preaching style had already made him a household name and guaranteed a large readership for his first major book, *The Impatience of a Parson*, published in 1927.<sup>108</sup> The book was highly critical of the Church of England and expressed some quite radical views. It also marked Sheppard's first public reference to pacifism when he argued that the Church should be 'obliged to outlaw all war and to demand from its members that they should refuse to kill their brethren'.<sup>109</sup> Two years later, in a letter to the well-known writer and artist, Laurence Housman, he declared 'I am now a pacifist'.<sup>110</sup>

Over the following number of years Sheppard spent a good deal of time with leading figures of the pacifist movement. On Armistice Sunday, 1933, he was deeply moved by a pacifist sermon preached in New York City by Harry Emerson Fosdick, a Presbyterian minister who had served as a padre in the US Army during the war. In October of the following year, Sheppard, in what was to become a milestone in the history of British pacifism, wrote an open letter to the press. The letter referred to the urgency of the international situation and the increased tendency towards violence of the Fascist and Communist movements, and expressed Sheppard's conviction that war was 'not only a denial of Christianity, but a crime against humanity, which is no longer to be

permitted by civilised people'.<sup>111</sup> None of these sentiments were particularly new. What was new, however, was the appeal that Sheppard made towards the end of the letter. He called on men who shared his pacifist outlook to make a gesture of commitment by sending him a postcard indicating their willingness to 'renounce war and never again, directly or indirectly ... support or sanction another'. The terms of the pledge were borrowed from the New York sermon that had inspired him the previous year. Given the absolute rejection of war that Sheppard was proposing, the response he received was overwhelming. Within two days of the appeal 2500 postcards supporting the pledge had arrived at the address provided at the end of the letter. In total, over 50,000 people sent postcards or in some way endorsed the pledge.<sup>112</sup> Sheppard was surprised but encouraged by this public support for pacifism, and while the publication of the letter had merely been an attempt to quantify anti-war sentiment in Britain, he now realised that the huge response to his appeal merited the foundation of a new peace organisation.

The new body started life in July 1935 as the Sheppard Peace Movement and although it was soon renamed the Peace Pledge Union (PPU), Sheppard remained its driving force and the cause of its wide appeal. Sheppard, who had served as Dean of Canterbury and was now Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, gave the movement much needed respectability, and his charm and energy attracted a number of celebrated literary, intellectual, and political figures. Bertrand Russell, Aldous Huxley, Siegfried Sassoon, and Vera Brittain joined well-known labour leaders like George Lansbury and Ellen Wilkinson in their support for the PPU.<sup>113</sup> Such influential support made the PPU perhaps the most prestigious pressure group in Britain and at its peak it claimed over 100,000 members.<sup>114</sup> PPU meetings were held throughout the country and in April 1937 Sheppard led a torch-light procession to Lambeth Palace to present a statement condemning war to his old friend Cosmo Lang, then Archbishop of Canterbury. The ensuing meeting led to the formation of the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship, which remains the main witness for pacifism within the Church of England. Sheppard and other PPU figures had planned a major peace procession as an alternative to the traditional Armistice Day ceremony in November. He was to die, however, after a long battle with chronic asthma, before the event could take place. Both disciples and critics mourned his passing and tens of thousands of Londoners turned out to watch his funeral cortège proceed from his beloved St Martin's to St Paul's Cathedral.

Dick Sheppard had been by far the most well known clergyman associated with the pacifist cause, but he was not the only one. Charles Raven,

whom Sheppard had known since 1916, joined him in his vehemently anti-war stance. In the years after he addressed the election meeting at Tonbridge, Raven accepted a country living in Surrey, became editor of *The Challenge*, and, in 1920, agreed to work as a joint-secretary for the ambitious interdenominational Conference on Politics, Economics, and Citizenship (COPEC). The notion that such a gathering should take place was first mooted by William Temple at the end of 1919. One of the central aims of the conference was to focus Christian minds on the issue of how Christian principles and beliefs, and God's word, should be applied to modern social problems. It was a vast undertaking, and one that required considerable energy and commitment of its organisers. Twelve commissions were set up, 200,000 questionnaires were sent out and later processed at 75 centres, and all of the year 1923 was devoted to studying the replies and producing reports.<sup>115</sup>

The conference finally took place at Birmingham Town Hall from 5 to 12 April 1924, with some 1500 delegates attending. Those present represented an extraordinarily wide range of backgrounds and political and religious outlooks, the gathering being both interdenominational and international, although Roman Catholic clergy withdrew after attending the preliminary sessions.<sup>116</sup> William Temple chaired the conference with consummate skill and messages of greeting were sent by the King and the Prime Minister.<sup>117</sup> Raven addressed the delegates several times and visitors were impressed with his 'spiritual power'. The Archbishop of the Church of Sweden described the young cleric as the 'soul' of the conference.<sup>118</sup> COPEC, notwithstanding the Catholic withdrawal, was a triumph of ecumenism and intellectual and spiritual discourse, and, through the literature it produced, the conference can be viewed as the great contribution of the organised churches to the debate on post-war reconstruction. Importantly, in this context, during a discussion on the issue of 'Christianity and War', the delegates passed the then controversial motion that 'all war is contrary to the spirit and teaching of Jesus Christ'. The letters written to the *Times* by those present, including Raven, in an attempt to clarify this statement make it clear, however, that the motion was intended to be *pacifistic* and not unconditionally pacifist.<sup>119</sup> The statement nonetheless marked a clear desire among junior clergymen to distance themselves from the bellicose statements that some church leaders had made during the Great War.

While Raven had clearly done an efficient job in organising COPEC, he later looked back on the conference with some disappointment. He felt that the Christian ethics and theological interpretations of biblical texts that were used to discuss the social issues of the 1920s had not been



modern or radical enough. Tellingly, he used a military metaphor to sum up what he viewed as the main shortcoming of the enterprise. 'We had relied upon selected biblical texts rather than any relevant theology ... Like Haig at Cambrai we were using men on horseback against barbed wire and machine guns'.<sup>120</sup> In the summer of 1924 Raven became a canon of Liverpool Cathedral and over the following number of years he drifted away from social activism and quietly withdrew his support for the Labour Party. He chose instead to concentrate on his academic, administrative, and pastoral work. By the end of the decade, however, a new sense of idealism, encouraged in part by the anti-war and disenchanting novels and memoirs that began appearing from 1928, induced him to embrace pacifism and become an active member of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. The popularity of the work of Remarque, Graves, Sassoon, and others seemed to Raven to indicate a change of public mood that might allow for the championing of peace in a way that would have been unthinkable during the war and difficult in the decade that followed it.<sup>121</sup>

The Fellowship of Reconstruction had originally been formed in 1914. During the war its members advocated a loosely defined but distinctly Christian form of absolute pacifism but stopped short of publicly calling for a halt to hostilities. Its methods were quietist and as an organisation it focused more on establishing links between members and encouraging pacifist solidarity than on active resistance to the war. After the Armistice the Fellowship became international and its membership grew accordingly. By the early 1930s growing support for pacifism saw the British branch gain a number of prominent new members including Raven and Herbert Gray, the former Presbyterian padre who had organised the interdenominational chaplains' conferences with Harry Blackburne during the war.<sup>122</sup> Raven's biographer has suggested that he was drawn to pacifism for the same reason that he was drawn to socialism; he wanted to promote reconciliation between classes, races, and sexes. Yet in order to do this successfully he felt that the risk of war, which he viewed as the primary threat to all forms of reconciliation, should be eliminated.<sup>123</sup> Of all the pacifist, or pacifistic, organisations that were active in the inter-war period, the Fellowship of Reconciliation appealed to Raven perhaps because it was the most overtly Christian and the one most interested in discovering a theological basis for defending the absolute rejection of war. He joined the Fellowship in 1930, became its chairman in 1932, and from 1945 until his death 20 years later he was its esteemed president.<sup>124</sup>

Raven's first notable contribution to the pacifist cause came in the form of a book entitled *Is War Obsolete?* Published in 1935 and based

on a series of lectures given the previous year, the book is a flawed but passionately argued anti-war polemic. It was followed in 1937 by an essay entitled *The Religious Basis of Pacifism*, which was a more specifically theological discourse on the issue. Raven never achieved the fame, or notoriety, of Dick Sheppard, but through his chairmanship of the Fellowship, through his writing and public speaking, and in his occasional acts of public protest, he emerged as the leading Christian intellectual of the inter-war peace movement.<sup>125</sup> In common with Sheppard, moreover, Raven lent pacifism an air of respectability and moral and intellectual integrity. He thus helped the movement to distance itself from some of its 'crankier' elements and gain a broader base of support.

The uncompromisingly pacifist position adopted by Sheppard and Raven was inspired by a similar impulse to that which had spurred them, and other ex-chaplains, to become involved in social projects – the desire to create a better, more Christian society. As far as these men were concerned, genuine social reform could only be guaranteed in a world free from war. Yet their pacifism, and that of their supporters, was also informed by a growing sense of alarm at the worsening international situation in the 1930s. The Japanese invasion of Manchuria in 1931, the Italian-Abyssinian War, German re-armament and the reoccupation of the Rhineland, the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, and, crucially, the inability of the League of Nations to prevent any of this occurring, all reinforced the fear that another major conflict was a possibility. The treaties of Locarno, signed in 1925, marked a groundbreaking, but perhaps overly ambitious, attempt to establish a diplomatic rapprochement between Germany and the allied powers. The agreement made concerning the limits of Germany's western borders at Locarno paved the way for German entry to the League of Nations the following year.

John Horne has referred to what occurred at Locarno as an experiment in 'cultural demobilisation'.<sup>126</sup> This was essentially an attempt to dismantle aggressive wartime cultures and overcome memories of war in the interests of moving forward in a mutually beneficial spirit of peace and reconciliation. Studdert Kennedy's tireless attempts to promote dialogue and agreement between capital and labour in the 1920s can be interpreted as a sort of internal cultural demobilisation. Importantly, however, Studdert Kennedy's work to promote Fellowship in Industry was inspired as much by the fear of what a real conflict between these two groups would entail as by his memories of the Western Front. Equally, in the cases of Sheppard and Raven, their promotion of pacifism, which, importantly, did not begin until the 1930s, was informed by a combination of their experience of the Great War and their fear of

a future war. Advances in the field of weapons technology meant that a future war had the potential to be more devastating, especially to civilians, than even the Great War had been. The new capability of military aeroplanes to cause mass civilian death by aerial bombardment, as revealed during the Spanish Civil War, stimulated the growth of pacifist feeling in Britain and elsewhere. Martin Ceadel has argued that inter-war pacifism was informed more by fear of the future than memory of the past. 'Pacifism', he maintains, 'owed more to the bomber than to Passchendaele'.<sup>127</sup> In the case of Raven and Sheppard, who consistently referred to their own experiences of war, however, it appears to have involved a combination of memory and dread. Their fear of a future war was informed by their experiences on the Western Front, experiences that allowed these former chaplains to speak out against war with the confidence of men who knew what they were talking about.

## Conclusion

It should be stressed that veteran padres were not alone in their desire for societal reform and mutual cooperation in post-war Britain. The wish to see some good result from the great evil of the war was shared by a whole range of influential reconstructionist commentators including government ministers, intellectuals, economists, town planners, agriculturalists, and civilian clergy.<sup>128</sup> The well-known journalist, politician, and social historian, J. L. Hammond, had served as an officer in the Royal Artillery before working for the wartime Ministry of Reconstruction. In 1918 he wrote that war was 'full of guidance and instruction' and claimed that the experience of conflict had taught British people that 'there is no such word as impossible, and that resolution and imagination can surmount difficulties thought insuperable'.<sup>129</sup> Other writers used similar rhetoric, and as the war came to an end there was a sense of eager impatience to put lessons learned during the conflict into practice. The feeling among soldiers and civilians that they had participated in a great struggle to save the nation was widespread and led to a pronounced sense of confidence and entitlement among the masses, which was reflected in more popular demands for reform.<sup>130</sup> Soldiers in particular, both officers and men, felt that they were owed a degree of gratitude by the nation they had so valiantly defended. Lloyd George sensed this and, during his election campaign in December 1918, he famously promised the returning veterans and their families a land 'fit for heroes to live in'. In pushing for reform and promoting ideals of fellowship chaplains were thus part of a much larger movement for

post-war reconstruction. As clergymen, however, chaplains felt their experience of war had been particularly instructive.

In considering the work former Anglican army chaplains undertook in the aftermath of the war, and throughout the inter-war period, two key aspects of their war experience must be taken into account. The first is their greatly increased familiarity with working-class men. For those chaplains who did not work in slum parishes or university settlements before the war, the industrial worker or manual labourer could be very alien figures. The experience of army service brought large numbers of clergy into contact with a very significant section of the male population that they may not otherwise have become acquainted with.<sup>131</sup> For many chaplains this new familiarity led to an increased sympathy for the working classes and a genuine interest in working-class welfare. A clear change in social outlook can sometimes be observed in the wartime correspondence of individual padres. Julian Bickersteth provides a good example. In November 1914, while he was still working in a secondary school in Melbourne, Bickersteth wrote to his parents expressing disappointment at the lack of patriotism, and gratitude, of the Australian working classes, a group he appears to have had little real awareness or understanding of:

Of the patriotism among the better classes there is no doubt whatsoever, but the working classes, who form of course the great majority here, are too much inclined to think of their own pockets and their probable losses. You see, under Socialist legislation they have been taught to think only of themselves and their own wages and gains. The Empire doesn't mean much to them beyond some kind of far-away abstract idea, which very few of them realize alone enables them to enrich themselves and be prosperous, and legislate free of outside interference. It will take a very long time to teach them anything higher and nobler.<sup>132</sup>

Writing from the Western Front almost four years later Bickersteth displayed a markedly more sympathetic attitude towards working-class men and revealed a personal disdain for the societal inequalities that were reflected in the hierarchical structure of the British Army:

I slept on till lunch time – being very tired. Think of the difference between myself, let us say, and a man in the Line who has no opportunity of going back to rest and must stay on without sleep day or night in a battle zone. But even my little excursions put me into closer touch with the suffering of the infantry than was possible for

the Staff Officers, who could only think of how far we had advanced or the success or failure of this or that attack. Returning from the battlefield always makes me unhappy – because I see so clearly the cleavage between those who direct operations and those who carry them out. This is as true in civilian life, of that I am sure. The employer of Labour, however sympathetic, can never really appreciate the sweat of the men, let us say, in the iron foundry, until he lives their life. A visit to the foundry is as much use to initiate him in the feelings and attitude of the worker as a Staff Officer's hurried and periodical walk round the trenches is. I assure you Socialism or socialistic ideas grow apace in such an atmosphere as that which I have lived in recently.<sup>133</sup>

This increased familiarity with men of a different social class was coupled with an appreciation of the qualities displayed by such men and the realisation that, in spite of the rigid class divisions in the army, men from diverse backgrounds could work together in a spirit of fellowship.

The second aspect of the chaplains' experience that had a bearing on the nature of their post war work was the personal witness they bore to the enormous death toll in places like Gallipoli and the Western Front. This first-hand experience of the horror of war fired some of the more conscientious chaplains with a determination that the debt that was owed to the dead should be paid by the living by making Britain worthy of the sacrifice of so many lives. By the early 1930s, the sense that the war had achieved few of the things that people hoped it would achieve, combined with genuine disenchantment, and alarm, brought on by the economic depression and German, Italian, and Japanese rearmament and aggression, gave rise to a pacifist movement in which former Anglican padres played a central role.

The social initiatives and different movements for reconciliation and progress that former Anglican chaplains became involved in after they returned to Britain from the various fronts were all in some way informed by their experience of war and, importantly, although some projects were more successful than others, they can all be said to have made a wider impact. The Life and Liberty movement, for all its shortcomings, had a major effect on the clergy and laity of the Church of England. It led directly to the Enabling Act and the establishment of the Church Assembly, which respectively freed the Church from its constraining link to Parliament and granted the Anglican laity a voice in its management. The school for service candidates at Knutsford exerted a key influence on the social make-up of the Anglican clergy and allowed the Church to progress towards the standardisation of clerical training without excluding large sections of the

population from the ministry. Toc H was by far the most well known of the Anglican inter-war social movements and remains a major global organisation for the promotion of fellowship and cooperation in society that still incorporates P. B. Clayton's 'Four Points' in its mission statement. David Railton's inspired meditation on loss and mourning led to the creation of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, which, in the 1920s, allowed the Church of England to distance itself from some of the wartime criticism it had received, and play a central role in the national mourning process. The Tomb continues to be incorporated into Remembrance Day ceremonies. On one level Studdert Kennedy's work with the Industrial Christian Fellowship can be viewed as a failure as relations between capital and labour remained consistently poor throughout the economically depressed years of the inter-war period. Yet his message of Christian fellowship in industrial relations clearly brought about a greater degree of understanding between the representatives of organised religion and the representatives of organised labour. The ICF still exists today as an organisation that, through sponsored events and literature, endeavours to encourage individuals 'to deepen their understanding of God's purpose in the world of work'.<sup>134</sup> Dick Sheppard and Charles Raven made significant contributions to the peace movement of the 1930s and while pacifist hopes were dashed by the outbreak of war in 1939, organisations like the Fellowship of Reconciliation and the Peace Pledge Union laid the foundations for the modern British anti-war movement. Again, both of these associations remain active, the PPU being a major international organisation that regards its founder with some pride.<sup>135</sup> The work of Tom Pym and John Groser attracted less national recognition than that of some of the other ex-chaplains but both of these men exerted significant local influence in East and South London.

Finally, it should be emphasised that despite indecisive leadership and some occasionally quite vocal criticism of the Anglican civilian clergy during the war years, the Church of England in the 1920s was neither stagnating or in a state of decline. On the contrary, church membership actually increased in the years immediately after the Armistice and remained reasonably healthy throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>136</sup> That Anglicanism continued to be relevant to many British people in the years after the war can be attributed, at least in part, to the energy and dynamism of the clergy that had served as chaplains during the war years. The different projects that ex-padres focused their energies on can be viewed as their creative engagement with the war and, viewed collectively, this work represents a significant contribution not just to Church life but also to society in inter-war Britain.

## Conclusion: Why The Myth?

When war broke out in Europe in 1914 the leadership of the Church of England, and Anglican leaders throughout the world, endorsed the decision of the British government to intervene. The support of Church leaders for the war often went beyond mere tacit approval and prominent Anglican clergymen became actively involved in recruitment and demonstrated a willingness to use bellicose rhetoric and paint the war in terms of an apocalyptic struggle between good and evil. This ecclesiastical response to the war was accompanied by a common interpretation of the conflict as a great opportunity for the Church to revive religious commitment in Britain and recover a lost spiritual authority. Despite their advocacy of the war, however, most Anglican bishops refused to sanction the enlistment of junior clergy in 1914 and 1915. Under such circumstances, many Anglican clergymen felt that their best course of action was to gain a temporary commission as an army chaplain. Yet, on joining the army, new chaplains quickly discovered that indifference to organised religion was widespread among officers and men, and that a number of factors, relating to their own socio-cultural backgrounds and the harsh realities of army life and trench warfare, made the task of reversing, or assuaging, this indifference, exceptionally difficult. In spite of the numerous obstacles they encountered, however, many Anglican chaplains established good relations with the officers and men of their units and created a valued role for themselves within the army on active service; something that both ordinary soldiers and the military authorities increasingly acknowledged as the war progressed.

With time, many Anglican chaplains came to be not only well liked by fellow officers and ranking soldiers but also genuinely respected. These padres often learned to their dismay, however, that it was

difficult to convert this popularity and respect into a loyalty to the church they represented, let alone a genuine interest in it. This difficulty notwithstanding, some of the more experienced padres remained greatly encouraged by what they interpreted as the essentially 'Christian' qualities of British soldiers. This unconscious Christianity, they felt, constituted the raw material from which true Christians could be fashioned. The sense that they were in the privileged position of being able to witness and interpret the nature of combatant faith gave chaplains the confidence to openly criticise the Anglican hierarchy and demand the sort of reforms that would make the Church a more inclusive, less alienating organisation for the mass of ordinary British men, whatever their class backgrounds.

The overwhelming majority of the Anglican chaplains who served with the British Expeditionary Force were university graduates from relatively privileged backgrounds. Crucially, their wartime experience presented them with an opportunity (as many had hoped it would) of interacting with the men of the industrial working classes, a section of the British male population that, in their capacity as civilian curates and vicars, they rarely got a chance to interact with. Military service thus allowed these clergymen to become familiar with a group about which they were often socially and professionally quite ignorant. Chaplains' impressions of the working-class men they met at the front, moreover, were often extremely positive. As the special correspondent for the *Times* observed during the crisis of the Ludendorff offensive in March 1918, '[The padres] have found that the English working-man is a much finer and stronger type than well-to-do folk had ever imagined, and they have had to deal with battalions which are a microcosm of the nation'.<sup>1</sup> This familiarity led to a sense of sympathy with the working classes that some of the more dynamic Anglican padres were determined to act on when they returned to Britain. A genuine sense of solidarity with working-class men, combined with a determination to improve post-war society by promoting greater fellowship between different social strata and interest groups, saw former padres founding, or becoming actively involved in, a number of ambitious social projects and organisations. The most well known of these was the Toc H movement. Importantly, service on the Western Front and elsewhere had also exposed padres to the destructive horrors of modern warfare and imbued them with a determination to make post-war Britain worthy of the sacrifice of so many lives. For Dick Sheppard and Charles Raven, this first-hand experience of war prompted very active involvement in the pacifism of the 1930s.



In strictly military terms, Anglican chaplains, and indeed chaplains of all denominations, had a good war record. The military authorities almost unanimously endorsed their work, and while the commentary of junior combatant officers and men was less unanimous, much of it was nonetheless very positive. At the very least, significant numbers of Anglican padres were capable of the sort of physical courage and heroism that were recognised on active service as the standards by which officers were measured both by their peers and other ranks. In addition, the work that some former Anglican padres embraced in post-war Britain suggests that they were able to learn from their experiences and make a genuine impact on the lives of civilians in peacetime. In light of this, the undeniably bad press that Anglican chaplains received in the post-war literature seems unwarranted and biased.

Robert Graves and the other post-war critics portrayed Anglican chaplains as ineffectual, cowardly, out-of-touch, and unprofessional. This overwhelmingly negative representation is a myth. Yet myths do not materialise of their own accord. What remains to be done is to look briefly at some of the reasons for the origin and perpetuation of this myth.

To begin with, some Anglican chaplains clearly conformed to the negative post-war stereotype. Bishop Gwynne kept a close eye on the clergy in his charge and was quite ready to dismiss padres who were very obviously unsuited to active service chaplaincies. Just four months after his promotion in the summer of 1915, Gwynne wrote to Archbishop Davidson and assured him that, 'I never hesitate to have men recalled to England and since I have been about a dozen have gone home'. Blatantly incompetent or ineffectual chaplains are thus likely to have been few in number. Yet the pressure to adapt to the culture of the officers corps, or to make themselves attractive to ordinary soldiers, may have led some padres to try and distance themselves from their clerical vocation and assume an air of false worldliness. Regarding one new chaplain he encountered at St Omer, B. K. Cunningham remarked, '[He] poses as a man of the world, "the good fellow", I wonder if he is more'.<sup>2</sup> This was precisely the sort of weakness identified by C. E. Montague and according to Brophy and Partridge padres with worldly pretensions were generally 'despised and disliked' by rank-and-file troops. Geoffrey Studdert Kennedy, probably the most well know army chaplain of the period, was certainly viewed by his peers in the BEF as a charismatic and powerful speaker, and he seems to have been popular in the post-war civilian world. Yet his insistence on speaking in a contrived Irish accent and using soldiers' slang suggest that he was keen to present

himself as being quite different to the average Church of England priest.<sup>3</sup> Transcripts of sermons he preached to troops reveal his wartime pulpit rhetoric to have been at best naive and sentimental and at worst crudely nationalistic and belligerent.<sup>4</sup> Studdert Kennedy's patriotism may have been perfectly natural and well intended, but chaplains who chose to frame the war in stridently righteous terms arguably embodied non-combatant clerical belligerence at its worst. Anti-German aggression on the part of men who were never required to fight, who chose a non-combatant role, and who had preached a message of love and reconciliation in peacetime, must have been extremely jarring to the officers and men who served in the killing fields of the Western Front and elsewhere. Stephen Louden has highlighted some of Studdert Kennedy's more nationalistic sermons and argued that he was a 'paradigmatic' example of an Anglican army chaplain.<sup>5</sup> Joanna Bourke has cited the same material as evidence of the wartime clergy's willingness to 'suborn their role of providing genuine moral leadership to the needs of the military'.<sup>6</sup> Far from being representative of Anglican padres, however, Studdert Kennedy seems to have been quite atypical in his occasionally aggressive public advocacy of the war. Most Anglican chaplains seem to have been convinced of the rightness of the British cause, yet they also appear to have been increasingly uncomfortable with the stance of the civilian clergy, and other commentators on the home front, who were outspoken in their support for the war while playing no direct role in it. As we have seen, the tension between the civilian Church and clergy and the clergy-in-uniform had become quite acute by 1917. In addition, there were clearly some Anglican chaplains who had no interest in promoting a bellicose message at the front. In a diary entry written during the Battle of Arras in the spring of 1917, Oswin Creighton, one of the more articulate of the Western Front padres, was quite unequivocal in his refusal to encourage a gospel of hate or to act as a mouthpiece for the government, the press, or the military:

We are always being taught to hate the Germans, and to refuse to think or speak of peace. We are told about our glorious cause, till it simply stinks in the nostrils of the average man. We all know we have got to fight as long as we wear the uniform, and have thereby committed ourselves to slaughtering as many Germans as possible. But I, for one, and I tell the men exactly the same, utterly refuse to hate the Kaiser or any of them, or to believe that I am fighting for a glorious cause, or anything that the papers tell me. But if man learns to live a little more on the words coming out of God's, and not Northcliffe's,

ecclesiastics', politicians', or any one else's mouths – the war does not really matter.<sup>7</sup>

And while Studdert Kennedy's wartime ministry may be viewed with some cynicism, it is difficult to be cynical when considering the war records of men like Theodore Bayley Hardy, Noel Mellish, Mervyn Evers, or less obviously heroic figures like P. B. Clayton, Neville Talbot, Frank Barry, and Tom Pym. These clergymen were deeply committed to their ministries and seem to have genuinely inspired the officers and men with whom they served.

Despite the work of these and other dedicated chaplains, however, one bad padre could turn a man, and by extension his comrades, against the entire Chaplains' Department. Officers as well as men judged padres by their experiences and could be quite unforgiving in their assessments of non-combatants with little or no training. As one officer who served on the Western Front reflected in his wartime diary:

Let it be said at once that to a lay officer, the 'padre's' work appears to be perhaps most difficult of all. He comes out here with, as a rule, but little experience of men or of the world. Perhaps he was a curate before the war, with nothing but a good education, a knowledge of parish work, and his own intelligence, to equip him for duties in France. Here he has to start afresh, and can only hope to be successful by the most careful and patient study of the soldiers' character, and by using the greatest amount of tact at his disposal in his dealings with them. The officers whom he meets and with whom he lives, are just as 'difficult' as the men. They are even more critical, if anything, and less tolerant of personal idiosyncrasies.<sup>8</sup>

Combatants, in other words, did not suffer fools gladly. This attitude was compounded by the role of rumour at the front. Once a negative reputation had been gained it was difficult to shake off. This was as true for staff officers as it was for chaplains. The policy that prevented chaplains from freely entering the frontline in the earliest stages of the war lingered in some units until well into 1916, and the general uncertainty about the precise role of the chaplain in wartime clearly did a great deal of damage. The conflicting messages circulated by Henry Southwell and Nevil Macready on the eve of the Somme offensive undoubtedly caused confusion and while some chaplains insisted on accompanying their men into the line from the outset, the belief clearly persisted in certain quarters that Anglican padres were barred from the trenches.<sup>9</sup>

This mistaken belief allowed a myth to develop that Anglican chaplains were not willing to experience the horrors of trench warfare. This, coupled with the fact that most of them were representatives of the Church of England, which was unfaltering and outspoken in its support for the war, subsequently relegated Anglican chaplains to the level of staff officers, civilian profiteers, and white-feather girls in the minds of the more disillusioned and anti-establishment of the war writers.

It should also be emphasised that although chaplains, of all denominations, were prepared to share the dangers and discomforts regularly endured by combatant officers and men, they nonetheless enjoyed quite a privileged, protected status on active service. This privileged status, which was paralleled by the patently sheltered position of the civilian clergy, caused inevitable resentment among officers who enjoyed no such protection. In Robert Keable's semi-autobiographical novel *Simon Called Peter* the protagonist, padre Peter Graham, occasionally hears combatant officers make the remark, 'I shall be a padre in the next war'.<sup>10</sup> What these officers were implying was that, by comparison with combatant officers, chaplains somehow 'had it easy'. There is a definite element of truth in this. As David Railton admitted in September 1916, 'Of course we chaplains do little compared to the other officers'.<sup>11</sup> Chaplains were not usually obliged to expose themselves to danger and even when they did enter the trenches and go forward during engagements, they were never required to kill the enemy. They also had considerable control over their own movements and enjoyed a good deal of freedom at the front. Combatant officers did not. According to Keith Grieves, C. E. Montague spent no more than three weeks in the front-line during his service with the BEF.<sup>12</sup> Graves, Chapman, Sassoon, Benstead, Brophy, Partridge, Richards, and Coppard, on the other hand, all experienced prolonged exposure to the dangers and discomforts of front-line service. Four of these men were decorated for gallantry, and at least three of them were wounded, Graves and Chapman severely so. As private soldiers, Brophy, Partridge, Coppard, and Richards were also subjected to the rigorous discipline and harassment by superiors that came with serving in the ranks. It is perhaps understandable that men who had been so harshly tested had little time for the clergy-in-uniform who, in their view, escaped the worst of the Western Front. It should be remembered, however, that although chaplains clearly occupied a privileged position when compared with combatant officers, they were not immune to the effects of war. We have seen that Anglican padres often proved themselves willing to share the risks to which combatants were regularly exposed and, given the relatively small size of the Chaplains'

Department, a significant number of padres were killed or wounded. In burying the dead and corresponding with soldiers' relatives, moreover, chaplains had to deal very directly with the human cost of industrialised warfare.

In addition to their sheltered status as clergy-in-uniform, notions of class acted as an alienating factor between Anglican chaplains and the predominantly working-class men to whom they were trying to minister. Chaplains generally downplayed their military rank and encouraged men to refer to them as 'padre' rather than 'captain', but in the case of Anglicans, the social milieu from which they emerged placed them clearly among the officers. The absence of a similar class-cultural obstacle in the case of Roman Catholic padres simply highlights the difficulties experienced by Anglicans. It should be made clear, however, that although Roman Catholic padres belonged to a less socially exclusive ministry, most of them did not come from working-class backgrounds, and many of them were associated with elite schools and religious institutions.

Another accusation levelled at Anglican padres by their post-war critics is that they lacked a professional sense of purpose and usefulness. This is strongly suggested in the work of Montague, Chapman, and Benstead. Given the uneven levels of training received by clergy in pre-war Britain and the traditional prioritisation of social grooming over professional aptitude in the ministry, it is not surprising that some Anglican padres came across as gentlemen first and clergymen second. To the average British officer, and most of the critics were officers, it may have seemed that, in terms of background, education, and ability, there was little to distinguish these clergy-in-uniform from themselves, except the protection they enjoyed as non-combatants. This, along with the absence of any special training for padres for much of the war, understandably made them seem like amateurs. Again, the apparent professionalism of Roman Catholics highlights an Anglican weakness. Despite the shortcomings in their training, however, many Anglicans found a professional place for themselves in the units to which they were attached and, as we have seen, they were repeatedly decorated for their work.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Anglican padres' war experience was the opportunity it gave them to observe, and comment upon, the nature of combatant faith. When discussing the religious and secular beliefs of ordinary British soldiers even the most prosaic of chaplains' memoirs has a tendency to become compellingly eloquent. Some of the more sensitive among them, such as Neville Talbot and Oswin

Creighton, were obsessed with what was going in the minds of their men. Richard Schweitzer, Michael Snape, and, in the French context, Annette Becker, have all examined combatant religious faith during the Great War, and gone some way towards determining just how religious soldiers were in the conventional sense. The case of Anglican chaplains adds significantly to this literature. From the chaplains' point of view, soldiers outwardly rejected Christianity, yet their selflessness, their courage, their strong sense of brotherhood, and, not least, their sense of humour in adversity, suggested that inwardly, or unconsciously, they embraced Christian ideals. While many soldiers would not have recognised their behaviour as Christian, they held and admired values that, from the padres' perspective, were very close to those of self-professed Christians. Robert Keable thought that this idealism was embodied in the figure of Bairnsfather's 'Old Bill' who was popular with ordinary soldiers because, in essence, he was a reflection of themselves at their best. For Keable, as far as British soldiers could be said to have believed in anything, they believed in themselves, or at least an idealised version of themselves as represented by Old Bill. A variation of this vision of combatant faith was shared by a number of experienced Anglican padres.

Both Graves and Montague maintained that, as a result of their many flaws, chaplains missed out on a potential religious revival in the BEF. While Neil Allison has highlighted the existence of revival-like phenomena in certain British Army units during the war, it seems quite clear that no mass religious revival, or renewal of Anglicanism, took place on the Western Front or in any other theatre.<sup>13</sup> But this was always an unrealistic expectation, and most chaplains soon abandoned the notion. We have seen that a range of factors ensured that life on active service, especially in France and Belgium, was not conducive to religious worship, particularly for soldiers who were largely indifferent to conventional religion in the first place. Yet while chaplains were unable to bring about a mass revival they were, in many cases, able to learn valuable lessons about organised religion and the failures of the Anglican Church. These lessons were put to good use by the padres and ex-padres who were active in Life and Liberty, the school for service candidates at Knutsford, the Toc H movement, the creation of the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior, the Industrial Christian Fellowship, the Peace Pledge Union, and the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Each of these initiatives made an impact on post-war society. The less celebrated work of former army chaplains like Tom Pym and John Groser was also influential, albeit more locally.

Thus, although Anglican chaplains failed to bring about a religious revival, this should not be the only measure of their achievement. They received little or no training for much of the war, and their ministry held a variety of inherent difficulties that even the most dynamic and committed clergyman would find challenging. Yet they ministered honourably and often effectively to men in extreme conditions, many of them were recognised, both officially and unofficially, for their valuable service, and at least some of them drew on this experience when they engaged in campaigns for reform both within the Church of England and in British society and politics more widely in the decades after the war.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. With reference to the 'before, during, and after' structure of *Goodbye to All That*, Samuel Hynes has argued that the book should be viewed not as a war memoir but as 'a record of historical change in England during the first three decades of [the twentieth] century'. Samuel Hynes (1992) *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Pimlico), p. 427.
2. Martin Seymour-Smith (1995) *Robert Graves, His Life and Work* (London: Bloomsbury), p. 67.
3. Robert Graves (1929) *Goodbye to All That* (London: Jonathan Cape), p. 242.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 243.
6. Jay Winter (2006) *Remembering War* (London: Yale UP), p. 124.
7. Brian Bond (2008) *Survivors of a Kind: Memoirs of the Western Front* (London: Continuum), p. 9.
8. Michael Snape (2008) *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department, 1796–1953* (Suffolk: Boydell), p. 358.
9. Paul Fussell (1977) *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: OUP), pp. 203–8.
10. Robert Graves (1930) *But It Still Goes On* (London: Jonathan Cape), p. 15.
11. Robert Graves (1950) 'Answer to a Religious Questionnaire', *Partisan Review* 17, p. 133.
12. Guy Chapman (1965) *A Passionate Prodigality* (London: MacGibbon & Kee), p. 117.
13. *Ibid.*, p. 117.
14. Cyril Falls (1989) *War Books: An Annotated Bibliography of Books About the Great War* (London: Greenhill), p. 108.
15. F. J. Harvey-Darton (1931) *From Surtees to Sassoon* (London: Morley & M. Kennerley), pp. 142 and 144.
16. Charles Edmonds (aka Charles Carrington) (1929) *A Subaltern's War* (London: Peter Davies), p. 196. Carrington's remarks on the veteran writers, a group to which he himself belonged, are particularly cogent and insightful.
17. C. E. Montague (1940) *Disenchantment* (London: Chatto & Windus), p. 86.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 87.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 88.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 99.
21. Siegfried Sassoon (1999) *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* (London: Faber & Faber), p. 299 and (2000) *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber & Faber), p. 195.
22. Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, p. 173.
23. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
24. Jane Leonard (1988) 'The Roman Catholic Chaplaincy', in David Fitzpatrick (ed.), *Ireland and the First World War* (Dublin: Trinity History Workshop), p. 10.



25. John Bourne (2003) 'The British Working Man in Arms', in H. Cecil and P. Liddle (eds), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experience* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword), p. 336.
26. Brian Bond, *Survivors of a Kind*, p. 75. Bond outlines several reasons why although quite a number of rankers' memoirs may have been written few were published. For other examples of published memoirs written by ranker veterans of the British Army, see Patrick MacGill (1916) *The Great Push: An Episode of the Great War* (London: H. Jenkins); John Lucey (1938) *There's A Devil in the Drum* (London: Faber & Faber); Norman Cliff (1988) *To Hell and Back with the Guards* (Braunton: Merlin); and I. L. Read (1994) *Of Those We Loved* (Edinburgh: Pentland).
27. Brian Bond, *Survivors of a Kind*, p. 83.
28. Frank Richards (1933) *Old Soldiers Never Die* (London: Faber & Faber), pp. 85–6.
29. *Ibid.*, pp. 301–2.
30. Brian Bond, *Survivors of a Kind*, p. 83.
31. George Coppard (1999) *With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* (London: Cassell), p. 72.
32. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 72.
34. *The Times*, Obituary of John Brophy, 15 November 1965.
35. J. Brophy and E. Partridge (1930) *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier, 1914–1918* (London: Scholartis), p. 148. Interestingly, in the much revised 1965 edition, entitled *The Long Trail*, the authors gave a different historical explanation for the use of the word by British soldiers: 'This word was adopted by the Army from the Portuguese in India during the eighteenth century'. J. Brophy and E. Partridge (1965), p. 161.
36. National Archives, WO 339/66179, War Office File, C. R. Benstead.
37. E. B. Osborn, as quoted in an advertisement for the novel, *The Times*, 17 January 1930.
38. C. E. Benstead (1930) *Retreat: A Story of 1918* (London: Methuen), p. 87.
39. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
40. *Ibid.*, p. 312.
41. Robert Graves, *But It Still Goes On*, pp. 32–3.
42. *Church Times*, 14 February 1930.
43. *The Guardian*, 17 January 1930.
44. *Times Literary Supplement*, 6 February 1930.
45. C. E. Benstead, *Retreat*, p. 289. In an attempt to prove that there are some good clergymen at the front, one of the main characters in the book, Captain Cheyne, cites 'that fellow who's running that rest-house in Poperinghe'. This is clearly a reference to P. B. Clayton and Toc H.
46. See 'Padres and the War: Rev. P. B. Clayton on Heroes who had Faith', *Daily Herald*, 21 January 1930; 'Let Us Come to Grips with Retreat', *Evening Standard*, 30 January 1930; and 'War Books Without Honour', *Daily Telegraph*, 7 February 1930.
47. *Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1930.
48. *The Daily Telegraph*, 5 March 1930.
49. *Daily Telegraph*, 3 March 1930. Mellish, who had been awarded the Victoria Cross in 1916, initially praised Benstead for the authenticity of his prose.

In the wake of the publication of the signed statements from Benstead's former comrades, however, he wrote to the *Daily Telegraph* to denounce what he referred to as the 'insult' that lay behind the text of the book.

50. An extensive collection of press-clippings that relate to *Retreat*, including both positive and negative recollections of padres from veterans of the Western Front, can be found at the Royal Army Chaplains' Department Museum Archives at Aldershot. I am grateful to David Blake for allowing me to view this material.
51. *The Evening Standard*, 5 March 1930.
52. *Times Literary Supplement*, 5 May 1921; and Hugh Cecil (2008) introduction to *Retreat: A Story of 1918*, Charles Benstead (South Carolina: SCUP), p. xx.
53. Alan Robinson (2008) *Chaplains at War: The Role of Clergymen during World War II* (London: Taurus), p. 50.
54. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
55. Hugh Cecil (1995) *The Flower of Battle: British Fiction Writers of the First World War* (London: Secker & Warburg), p. 156.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 154–5.
57. *Ibid.*, p. 156.
58. Ernest Raymond (1922) *Tell England: A Study in a Generation* (London: Cassell), p. 130.
59. Ernest Raymond (1988) *The Story of my Days: An Autobiography, 1888–1922* (London: Cassell), p. 177.
60. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
61. *Ibid.*, pp. 182–3.
62. Hugh Cecil, *The Flower of Battle*, p. 5; and Jenny Macleod (2004) *Reconsidering Gallipoli* (Manchester: MUP), p. 159.
63. Examples of memoirs written by former Anglican chaplains include George Birmingham (1918) *A Padre in France* (London: Hodder & Stoughton); P. B. Clayton (1929) *Plain Tales from Flanders* (London: Longmans); Harry W. Blackburne (1932) *This Also Happened on the Western Front* (London: Hodder & Stoughton); Guy Rogers (1956) *A Rebel At Heart* (London: Longmans); Frank Russell Barry (1970) *Period of My Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton); and Martin Andrews (1974) *Canon's Folly* (London: Joseph).
64. See Jane Leonard, 'The Catholic Chaplaincy', p. 10; J. G. Fuller (1990) *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press), p. 156; Tom Johnstone and James Hagerty (1996) *The Cross on the Sword, Catholic Chaplains in the Forces* (London: Geoffrey Chapman), pp. 107 and 112; Stephen Loudon (1996) *Chaplains in Conflict* (London: Avon), p. 47; Joanna Bourke (1999) *An Intimate History of Killing* (London: Basic), p. 272; Richard Holmes (2005) *Tommy* (London: Harper), pp. 508 and 514; Richard Schweitzer (2005) *The Cross and the Trenches* (London: Praeger), p. 173; and Alan Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p. 26.
65. Patrick Porter (2005) 'New Jerusalem; Sacrifice and Redemption in the War Experiences of English and German Military Chaplains', in Pierre Purseigle (ed.), *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Leiden: Brill), pp. 101–32.
66. Michael Snape (2005) *God and the British Soldier* (London: Routledge), pp. 86–7.
67. Davidson Papers, LPL, vol. 345, f. 329.

68. Keith Simpson (1985) 'The British Soldier on the Western Front', in Peter Liddle (ed.), *Home Fires and Foreign Fields* (London: Brassey's Defence Publishers), pp. 135–6.

## 1 The Church of England, the European War, and the Great Opportunity

1. Michael Macdonagh (1935) *In London during the War* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode), p. 9 and *The Manchester Guardian* and the *Times*, 3, 4, and 5 August 1914.
2. Niall Ferguson (1999) *The Pity of War* (London: Penguin), pp. 174–211; Adrian Gregory (2008) *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 9, 13 and 14. See also Cyril Pearce (2001) *Comrades in Conscience: The Story of an English Community's Opposition to the Great War* (London: Francis Boutle), p. 25 and Catriona Pennell (2008) 'A Kingdom United: British and Irish Responses to the Outbreak of War', Ph.D. Thesis, Trinity College Dublin.
3. *Church Times*, 14 August 1914.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Hugh McLeod (1996) *Religion and Society in England, 1850–1914* (London: Macmillan), pp. 59–70.
6. John Wolffe (1994) *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland 1843–1945* (London: Routledge), pp. 78 and 82.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 83, and Jeffrey Cox (1982) *The English Churches in a Secular Society* (Oxford: OUP), pp. 48–50, and David Thompson (2006) 'Popular Religion and Irreligion in Countryside and Town', in S. Gilley and B. Stanley (eds), *World Christianities c. 1815–c. 1914* (Cambridge: CUP), p. 197.
8. John Stevenson (1984) *British Society 1914–'45* (London: Lane), p. 271.
9. Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches ...*, p. 25.
10. Hugh Macleod (1974) *Class and Religion in the Late Victorian City* (London: Croom Helm), pp. 23–35 and Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches*, pp. 22–3. Cox cites the example of the London borough of Lambeth, where less than 10 per cent of the largely working-class population attended a morning church service on a particular Sunday in 1902.
11. Peter Borsay (2006) *A History of Leisure, the British Experience since 1500* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan), p. 206–7.
12. Tony Mason (1980) *Association Football and English Society, 1863–1915* (Sussex: Harvester Press), pp. 3 and 138–48 and Stuart Mews (2003) 'Religion 1900–1939', in Christopher Wrigley (ed.), *A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 474.
13. Albert Marrin (1974) *The Last Crusade* (North Carolina: Duke University Press), p. 30.
14. F. M. L. Thompson (1988) *The Rise of Respectable Society* (London: Fontana), p. 140.
15. John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, p. 78.
16. F. M. L. Thompson, *The Rise*, p. 141.
17. Thomas W. Laqueur (1976) *Religion and Respectability, Sunday Schools and Working Class Culture, 1780–1850* (London: Yale University Press), pp. 74

- and 239–41. For an in-depth examination of the significance of the Sunday School movement in British social history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Keith Snell (1999) 'The Sunday-School Movement in England and Wales: Child-Labour, Denominational Control and Working Class Culture', *Past & Present*, 164, pp. 122–68.
18. Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, p. 26.
  19. Keir Hardie (1996) cited in Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SCM), p. 132.
  20. Kenneth O. Morgan (1967) *Keir Hardie* (Oxford: OUP), p. 36.
  21. Most senior Church of England bishops received substantial annual incomes; in 1914 the Bishop of London's official income was £10,000, the Archbishop of York's £9000, the Bishop of Durham received £7000 and the Bishop of Winchester £6500. *Crockford's Clerical Directory*, 1914.
  22. Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, p. 43.
  23. Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches*, p. 91 and S. C. Williams (1999) *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c. 1880–1939* (Oxford: OUP), pp. 54–86.
  24. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 60.
  25. *Ibid.*, pp. 59–60.
  26. Peter Parker (1987) *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London: Constable), p. 99.
  27. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 19.
  28. Stephen Spinks (1952) *Religion in Britain since 1900* (London: A. Drakers), p. 23.
  29. *Ibid.*, p. 25.
  30. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
  31. Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War*, pp. 159 and 178.
  32. Brian Stanley (2006) 'The Outlook for Christianity in 1914', in S. Gilley and B. Stanley (eds), *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities c. 1815–c. 1914*, p. 597.
  33. F. A. Iremonger (1948) *William Temple: His Life and Letters* (Oxford: OUP), p. 20.
  34. For a comprehensive overview of the volunteerism that helped build the New Armies in 1914 and 1915 see Clive Hughes (1985) 'The New Armies', Ian Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds) *A Nation in Arms: A Social History of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: MUP), pp. 100–25.
  35. *The Standard*, 5 September 1914.
  36. *Times*, 20 September 1914.
  37. *The Record*, 9 October 1914.
  38. E. S. Woods and F. B. Macnutt (1933) *Theodore, Bishop of Winchester: Pastor, Prophet and Pilgrim* (London: SPCK), p. 56.
  39. *Church Times*, 21 August 1914.
  40. Robert Lee (2006) 'Class, Industrialization and the Church of England: The Case of the Durham Diocese in the Nineteenth Century', *Past & Present*, 191, pp. 175–6 and Stewart Mews (2004), 'Clergymen, Gentlemen and Men: World War I and the Requirements, Recruitment and Training of the Anglican Ministry', *Nederlands voor Kerkeschiedenis*, 83, pp. 435–36.
  41. Margaret Blunden (1980) 'The Anglican Church during the War', in Peter Warwick (ed.), *The South African War* (Harlow: Longman), pp. 279–80.

- Edward Lee Hicks, who was to be appointed Bishop of Lincoln in 1910, publicly criticised British aggression in South Africa in January 1900. At the time he was a canon of Manchester Cathedral and the Manchester Transvaal Peace Committee published a sermon he gave on the subject. See *The Mistakes of Militarism: A Sermon Preached in the Cathedral Church at Manchester, 21 January 1900* (Manchester: Wm. Hough & Sons, 1900). In October, 1901, Charles Gore, then just about to be appointed to the See of Worcester, wrote an open letter to the *Times* deploring the death rates in British concentration camps. See *Times*, 28 October 1901.
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  43. J. Horne and A. Kramer (2001) *German Atrocities: A History of Denial* (London: Yale University Press), p. 185.
  44. Alan Kramer (2008) *Dynamic of Destruction* (Oxford: OUP), pp. 13–14. For examples of press reports on the ill-treatment and murder of European clergy at the hands of German soldiers, see *Times*, 4 and 16 September, *The Manchester Guardian*, 13 August and 16 October 1914, and *The Standard*, 18 and 21 August 1914.
  45. Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War*, p. 46.
  46. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 16.
  47. Harnack, Herrmann, Eucken, Deissmann et al., 'Appeal to Evangelical Christians Abroad', reproduced in H. S. Holland et al. (1914) *To the Christian Scholars of Europe and America: A Reply from Oxford to the German Address to the Evangelical Christians* (London).
  48. G. K. A. Bell (1935) *Randall Davidson* (London: OUP), pp. 741–2.
  49. *Ibid.*, p. 780.
  50. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 54.
  51. Bernard Walke (1935) *Twenty Years at St. Hilary's* (London: Methuen), pp. 110–14.
  52. G. K. A. Bell (1952) *Randall Davidson*, 3rd edn (London: OUP), p. 740.
  53. Davidson Papers, LPL, Vol. 341, f. 234.
  54. Editorial, *Church Family Newspaper*, 22 September 1914.
  55. Editorial, *Church Times*, 25 September 1914.
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  57. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 35.
  58. A. F. Winnington-Ingram (1940) *Fifty Years' Work in London, 1889–1939* (London: Longmans), p. 110.
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  61. Richard Free, cited in *The Standard*, 3 September 1914.
  62. Rev Prescott Darcie, cited in *John Bull*, 19 September 1914.
  63. *The Guardian*, 20 August 1914.
  64. A. F. Winnington-Ingram (1917) 'Missionary Work the Only Final Cure for War', *The Potter and the Clay*, p. 40.
  65. *Ibid.*, p. 51.
  66. George Russell (1917) *Basil Wilberforce – A Memoir* (London: John Murray), p. 163.

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71. Duff Crerar (1995) *Padres in No Man's Land; Canadian Chaplains in the Great War* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press), p. 29.
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73. Stewart J. Brown (1994) "'A Solemn Purification by Fire": Responses to the Great War in the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, 1914–19', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 45 (1), p. 84.
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92. See, for example, *The Guardian*, 20 August and 10 September 1914, *The Church Times*, 9 October 1914, and *Times*, 21 January 1916.
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94. For a detailed account of the work of British army chaplains on active service from the Crimean War to the South African War, see Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, pp. 100–74.
95. *Times*, 25 September 1914.
96. *Morning Post*, 12 October 1914.
97. IWM 80/22/1, Canon E. C. Crosse, TS 1919, p. 3.
98. *The Record*, 24 August and 2 October 1914.
99. *The Guardian*, 19 November 1914. *The Church Times* had cited very similar figures on 2 October. The figure for the Church of England included Anglicans from Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.
100. *The Standard*, 5 October 1914.
101. *Church Times*, 2 October 1914.
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103. J. E. Edmonds (1932) *Official History of the War, 1916*, Vol. II (London: Macmillan), p. 134.
104. John Smyth (1968) *In This Sign Conquer* (London: Mowbray), p. 157.
105. Stephen Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict*, p. 42.
106. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 343, ff. 106–7, Rev W. Conybeare to Randall Davidson.
107. *Ibid.*, f. 111.
108. *Ibid.*, f. 120 [Davidson to Lavinia Talbot].
109. Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, pp. 185–6 and Alan Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p. 22.
110. For personal recollections of interviews with the Chaplain-General, see Ernest Raymond, *The Story of My Days*, p. 59 and Guy Rogers (1956) *A Rebel at Heart*, (London: Longmans, Green & Co.), p. 92.
111. See Chapter 2.
112. Rabbi Michael Adler, cited in Maurice Whitlow (1938) *J. Taylor Smith, Everybody's Bishop* (London: Lutterworth), pp. 100–1.
113. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 343, ff. 121–2, Davidson to Taylor-Smith, 1 February 1915.

114. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 343, f. 204, Michael Furse, 'Memorandum: Church of England Chaplains at the Front'.
115. J. E. Edmonds, *Official History*, p. 135.
116. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 343, f. 168, Davidson to Bp of Manchester, March 13 1915.
117. *Ibid.*, ff. 289–90, minutes of 'Conference Held at Lambeth Palace on Monday, July 19 1915'.
118. Lord William Henry Grenfell, 1855–1945, well known and respected public servant and former Liberal MP (under Gladstone). His two eldest sons died on active service in the same year the Committee was formed. One of them was Julian Grenfell, war-poet and winner of the DSO.
119. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 343, ff. 323–4, Davidson to Lang, 30 July 1915.
120. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 343, ff. 263–5, 'The Position of Church of England Chaplains Abroad – Account of situation with regard to Anglican Chaplains at the Front' written in July 1915 by A. H. Balleine C.F. for the Bishop of Wakefield, for whom he had formerly served as resident chaplain. In France Balleine served with distinction at base hospitals and camps at Rouen and Boulogne and was twice mentioned in despatches, Gwynne's War Book p. 229.
121. L. H. Gwynne, War Diary – Gwynne Papers, CMS Archives, Birmingham, SACC 18/F/1.
122. Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross*, p. 63.
123. J. E. Edmonds, *Official History*, p. 135.
124. See, for example, *The Scotsman*, 5 and 10 July 1915.
125. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 131.
126. Julian Bickersteth (1995) *The Bickersteth Diaries* (London: Leo Cooper), p. 67.
127. Dora Pym (1952) *Tom Pym – A Portrait* (Cambridge: W. Heffer & Sons), p. 58.
128. F. R. Barry (1970) *Period of My Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 58.
129. Davidson Papers LPL, Vol. 343, f. 309, Davidson to Bishop Talbot of Winchester, 20 July 1915.
130. Randall Davidson in G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson*, p. 783. Brigadier-General George Fowke was the senior Royal Engineers officer in the BEF. He was attached to the headquarters staff and by 1916 he had been appointed 'Engineer-in-Chief'.
131. *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War*, HMSO, London, 1922, p. 190.
132. Randall Davidson, 'The Clergy and the War', *Church Times*, 11 September 1914.
133. Davidson Papers, LPL, vol. 344, f. 4, Davidson to Edward Talbot, 4 October 1915.

## 2 A Portrait of the Edwardian Clergy

1. Morgan's original study was not published but its findings were summarised in Leslie Paul (1964) *Deployment and Payment of Clergy* (London: Church Information Office), p. 283. See also David Morgan (1969) 'The Social and



- Educational Background of Anglican Bishops – Continuities and Changes', *British Journal of Sociology*, 20(3), p. 298.
2. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 36.
  3. This is an approximate date.
  4. Davidson Papers, LPL, vol. 344, f. 88.
  5. *Statistics of Military Effort of the British Empire During the Great War* (London: War Office), 1922.
  6. F. W. B. Bullock (1976) *A History of Training for the Ministry, 1875–1974* (London: Home Words), p. 21.
  7. T. Elliot (1976) 'Review of the Period 1875–1974', in F. W. B. Bullock, *A History*, p. xvii.
  8. Robert Lee (2006) 'Class, Industrialization and the Church of England', p. 169.
  9. A. Tindal Hart (1970) *The Curate's Lot – the Story of the Unbeneficed Clergy* (London: John Baker), p. 172. See also A Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, p. 68.
  10. *The Nineteenth Century*, London, June 1899, p. 1024.
  11. T. Elliot, 'Review', p. xvii.
  12. Hugh Macleod, *Religion and English Society*, p. 14.
  13. Tindal Hart, *The Curate's Lot*, p. 174.
  14. F. W. B. Bullock, *A History of Training*, p. 76.
  15. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
  16. *Ibid.*, p. 49.
  17. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
  18. See Chapter 4.
  19. Cited in F. W. B. Bullock, *A History*, p. 58.
  20. Stewart Mews (2004) 'Clergymen, Gentlemen and Men: World War I and the Requirements, Recruitment and Training of the Anglican Ministry', *Pastor Bonus*, 83, p. 442.
  21. Adrian Hastings (1986) *A History of English Christianity* (London: Collins), p. 68.
  22. *Ibid.*, p. 70.
  23. F. R. Barry, *Period of My Life*, pp. 21, 23, and 40.
  24. F. R. Barry (1964) *Mervyn Haigh* (London: SPCK), pp. 57–8.
  25. William Purcell (1971) 'Birth of A Rebel', in Kenneth Brill (ed.), *John Groser* (London: Mowbray), p. 4.
  26. Gwynne's War Book, p. 250.
  27. Robert Lee, 'Class, Industrialization and the Church of England', pp. 175–6.
  28. J. R. de S. Honey (1977) *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the Victorian Public School* (London: Millington), p. 264.
  29. Peter Parker, *The Old Lie*, p. 45. William Temple, the future headmaster of Repton and Archbishop of Canterbury, won a Balliol scholarship in 1900 while attending Rugby.
  30. Paul Deslandes (2005) *Oxbridge Men: British Masculinity and the Undergraduate Experience* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press), p. 40.
  31. F. R. Barry, *Period of My Life*, p. 64.
  32. F. W. Dillistone (1975) *Charles Raven* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 59.
- The 'sheltered' nature of the undergraduate experience was reinforced by the fact that women played virtually no role in student life. Cambridge from 1881 and Oxford from 1884 permitted female students to avail of

- much of the same teaching and to sit some of the examinations provided for male students. Yet female undergraduates resided and received much of their instruction in separate women's colleges, Girton and Newnham in Cambridge and Somerville and three other colleges in Oxford. When female students did attend lectures in other colleges they were expected, during this period, to be accompanied by a chaperone. Women were not placed on an equal footing with men in Oxford until 1920 and in Cambridge not until 1947. In this respect Trinity College, Dublin, was ahead of its English counterparts, allowing female students to take degrees from 1904 on. See J. V. Luce (1992) *Trinity College Dublin, The First 400 years* (Dublin: TCD Press), p. 117.
33. J. A. R. Pimlott (1935) *Toynbee Hall, Fifty Years of Social Progress 1884–1934* (London: Dent), p. 11.
  34. John Oliver (1968) *The Church and Social Order* (London: Mowbray), p. 21.
  35. Hugh McLeod (2000) 'Anticlericalism in Later Victorian and Edwardian England', in Nigel Aston and Matthew Cragoe (eds), *Anticlericalism: 1500–1914* (Sutton: Stroud), p. 207.
  36. Pat Thane (1996) *Foundations of the Welfare State* (London: Longman), p. 23.
  37. Tresham Lever (1971) *Clayton of Toc. H.* (London: J. Murray), p. 20.
  38. Thompson, *Bureaucracy and Church Reform*, p. 165.
  39. For an account of the development of the Oxford Movement and an examination of the output of some of its key figures, see Rune Imberg (1987) *In Quest of Authority: The 'Tracts for the Times' and the development of the Tractarian leaders, 1833–1841*, (Bromley: Chartwell-Bratt).
  40. (1987) *Keble College* (Derby: English Life Publications), p. ii.
  41. Balliol College, for example, enjoyed a reputation for producing brilliant intellectuals. In the years before 1914, however, it was also known as a college where 'drunkenness and rowdiness were prevalent'. F. H. Brabant (1949) *Neville Stewart Talbot* (London: SCM), p. 47.
  42. For an account of the influence that some these theologians exerted on Trinity College and the wider University, see Christopher N. L. Brooke (ed.) (2004) *A History of the University of Cambridge, Vol. IV* (Cambridge: CUP), pp. 134–41.
  43. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 126.
  44. Two chaplains who were neither educated nor ordained in Britain, Ireland, or the dominions were also included in the 'Dominion' category and excluded from Chart 2.2. William James Bell was ordained in Bombay in 1902 and commissioned as a temporary chaplain in 1915. Frederick Gowenlock was born and received his secondary education in the UK but was ordained in Missouri in 1912. In 1915 he was appointed curate of St George's Church in Kingston, Jamaica. In 1916 he gained a combatant commission in a West Indian regiment and served as a combatant in the BEF before gaining a temporary commission as a chaplain in 1917.
  45. Two of the Mirfield graduates were placed in the 'Other University/College' category as they took Arts degrees at Leeds during their time with the Community of the Resurrection.
  46. T. Elliot, 'Review', p. xix.
  47. Accounts of the rise and influence of the Christian Socialist Movement in the modern Church, and varied analyses of the movement's appeal, can be

- found in E. R. Norman (1976) *Church and Society in England, 1770–1970* (Oxford: Clarendon), pp. 221–78; John Oliver, *The Church and the Social Order*, pp. 1–22; and Stephen Mayor (1967) *The Churches and the Labour Movement* (London: Independent Press), pp. 165–241. For an absorbing narrative history of Christian Socialism from the mid-nineteenth century to the 1990s, see Alan Wilkinson (1998) *Christian Socialism: Scott Holland to Tony Blair* (London: SCM).
48. Alan Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p. 76.
  49. John Oliver, *The Church and the Social Order*, p. 5.
  50. Alan Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p. 45.
  51. Stephen Mayor, *The Churches and the Labour Movement*, p. 221.
  52. E. R. Norman, *Church and Society in England*, p. 224.
  53. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
  54. *Times*, ‘The Church and the Unemployed’, 26 December 1905.
  55. Alan Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p. 62. William Temple was the only prominent member of the Union to openly support the Labour Party. On being appointed Bishop of Manchester after the War, however, he publicly withdrew his support.
  56. W. Eager (1953) *Making Men, the History of Boys Clubs and Related Institutions in Great Britain* (London: University of London Press), p. 382. Eager was a resident of the Oxford and Bermondsey Club before the Great War and became Warden of the Club in the inter-war period.
  57. Dora Pym, *Tom Pym – A Life*, p. 42.
  58. Charles Gore (1913) *Property: Its Duties and Rights, Historically, Philosophically and Religiously Regarded* (London: Macmillan), p. vii.
  59. *Ibid.*, pp. xvi–xvii.
  60. W. Cunningham (1910) *Christianity and Social Questions* (London: Duckworth), p. x.
  61. W. Cunningham in E. R. Norman, *Church and Society*, p. 222.
  62. Stephen Mayor, *The Churches and*, p. 224.
  63. *Ibid.*, p. 225.
  64. Alan Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p. 42 and p. 75.
  65. John Oliver, *The Church and the Social Order*, p. 10.
  66. Charles Gore, cited in Alan Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p. 66.
  67. W. Temple (1918) *The Chronicle of Convocation* (London) p. 350.
  68. F. A. Iremonger (1948) *William Temple* (Oxford: OUP), p. 87.
  69. Alan Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p. 54.
  70. Edward Norman, *Church and Society*, pp. 231–2.
  71. Hugh Macleod, *Religion and Society*, p. 19.
  72. H. H. Henson (1942) *Retrospect of an Unimportant Life* (London: OUP), p. 155.
  73. J. Garnett, ‘Lux Mundi Essayists (act. 1889)’, in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online edn, OUP, May 2006 (hereafter *ODNB*).
  74. H. H. Henson, *Retrospect*, p. 156.
  75. Adrian Hastings, *A History*, p. 81.
  76. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
  77. Hugh McLeod, ‘Anticlericalism’, p. 206.
  78. H. H. Henson, *Retrospect*, p. 157.
  79. Adrian Hastings, *A History*, p. 77.

80. *Ibid.*, p. 76.
81. Hugh McLeod, *Religion and Society*, p. 111.
82. Noel was a theological radical, a staunch socialist, a member of the British Communist Party, an ardent admirer of the Soviet Union, and a public supporter of Irish Republicanism. It is highly unlikely that a clergyman with these credentials would have been allowed to function in the Church of Ireland.
83. Guy Rogers, *A Rebel at Heart*, pp. 49–51.
84. R. B. McDowell, *The Church of Ireland*, p. 58.
85. *Ibid.*, pp. 14–15.
86. L. C. B. Bardsley, Letter to Deputy Chaplain-General, Gwynne's War Book, p. 1.
87. H. Maynard Smith (1926) *Frank, Bishop of Zanzibar* (London: SPCK), p. 10.
88. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
89. Stephen Sykes (2003) 'The Basis of Anglican Fellowship', *Journal of Anglican Studies*, 1, 2, p. 10.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
91. *Times*, 4 December 1913, and H. H. Henson, *Retrospect*, p. 159.
92. F. B. Macnutt (ed.) (1917) *The Church in The Furnace, Essays by Seventeen Temporary Church of England Chaplains on Active Service in France and Flanders* (London: Macmillan), pp. 175–212.
93. Gwynne's War Book, p. 195.
94. P. Pare and D. Harris (1965) *Eric Milner-White 1884–1963, A Memoir* (London: SPCK), p. 12.

### 3 The Anglican Clergy-in-Uniform

1. F. P. Crozier (1930) 'Army Chaplains' Usefulness', *Daily Mirror*, 25 April.
2. Briand Bond, *Survivors of a Kind*, pp. 113–25.
3. Robert Graves, *But It Still Goes On*, p. 41.
4. E. C. Crosse, IWM Archives, 80/22/1, 'The History of the Chaplains Department in the War, 1914–1918: Section 1 "With an Infantry Brigade at the Front"', unpublished typescript, p. 5; hereafter Crosse TS.
5. Frank Ballard (1916) *Christianity after the War* (London: C. H. Kelly), p. 6.
6. Donald Hankey (1916) *A Student in Arms* (London: Andrew Melrose), p. 50.
7. Neville Talbot (1916), *The Challenge*, 25 August.
8. J. M. Stanhope-Walker, in Michael Moynihan (ed.) (1973) *People at War* (Newton Abbot: D & C), p. 58.
9. F. R. Barry, *Period of my Life*, p. 57.
10. Philip. T. Crick, 'The Soldier's Religion', in *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 360.
11. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 343, f. 144, G. K. A. Bell, memorandum to Randall Davidson.
12. Frank Russell Barry, *Period*, p. 56.
13. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 129.
14. E. C. Crosse TS, p. 7.
15. George Birmingham (1918) *A Padre in France* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 52.

16. David Raw (1988) *"It's Only Me", A life of the Rev. Theodore Bayley Hardy* (London: Peters), p. 22.
17. Julian Bickersteth, *Bickersteth Diaries*, p. 81. Bickersteth was unimpressed with Davidson's address to the assembled group and dismayed at the preponderance of moustachioed Low Churchmen at the gathering.
18. John Smyth, *In this Sign Conquer*, p. 198.
19. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 151.
20. Harry Blackburne, *This also Happened*, p. 114.
21. F. R. Barry, *Period*, p. 58.
22. H. C. Jackson (1960) *Pastor on the Nile* (London: SPCK), p. 161.
23. Julian Bickersteth, *Bickersteth Diaries*, p. 171.
24. F. R. Barry, *Mervyn Haigh*, p. 43.
25. Davidson Papers, LPL, vol. 345, f. 52, Armstrong-Hall to Davidson, 12 December 1917.
26. Everard Digby (1917) *Tips for Padres: A Handbook for Chaplains* (London: Gale and Polden), pp. 5, 11, and 21.
27. *The Chaplains' Bulletin*, No.1, October 1917.
28. Gwynne's War Book, p. 273.
29. B. K. Cunningham (1947) cited in J. H. Moorman, *B.K. Cunningham – A Memoir* (London: SCM), p. 103.
30. R. Langley Barnes (1939) *A War-Time Chaplaincy* (London: Mowbray), p. 7.
31. Rev. E. V. Tanner, 'An Army Chaplain's Work in War-Time', TS copy, Amport House Archives.
32. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, pp. 139–40.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 142. For an interesting account of the general change in attitudes that finally brought about the abolition of compulsory church parades see Jeremy Crang (2005) 'The Abolition of Compulsory Church Parades in the British Army', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56(1), pp. 92–106.
34. E. V. Tanner TS, p. 3.
35. Major R. S. Cockburn, IWM 12148 P258, War Diary. p. 123 (30 May 1918).
36. E. C. Crosse TS, p. 22.
37. An Army Chaplain (1917) *Can England's Church Win England's Manhood* (London: Macmillan), p. 45.
38. *Church Times*, 8 November 1914.
39. Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, pp. 84–5.
40. Richard Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 297.
41. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 229.
42. Crosse TS, p. 18.
43. Evers Papers, LCL – GS 0531.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 27.
45. Railton Papers, 4760 IWM 80/22/1.
46. Gwynne's War Book, p. 38.
47. Mellish Papers, LCL GS 1088, TS memoir pp. 58–9.
48. Dora Pym, *Tom Pym – A Portrait*, p. 46.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 46.
50. E. C. Crosse TS, p. 28.
51. Raven Papers, LCL – GS 1329, to Burgess, 3 June 1917.
52. *Ibid.*, 29 July 1917.

53. Okeden Papers, IWM, 90/70/1, Carl Parry Okeden to May Okeden, 7 April 1918.
54. Oswin Creighton (1916) *With the Twenty-Ninth Division in Gallipoli* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.), p. 33.
55. *Ibid.*, p. 33.
56. *Ibid.*, p. 34. A battalion of infantry in the British Army consisted of approximately 1000 men.
57. Examples of such texts include Charles Ardent Du Picq's *Etudes sur le Combat* and Jean Colin's *Les Transformations de la Guerre* (1911), which was translated into English in 1912. For a revealing examination of the dissemination of military texts between European and North American states before the war, see Christopher Bassford (1991) *Clausewitz in English: The Reception of Clausewitz in Britain and America, 1815–1945* (Oxford: OUP), Chapter 10.
58. David Englander (1997) 'Morale and Discipline in the British Army', in J. Horne (ed.) *State Society and Mobilisation in Europe during the First World War* (Cambridge: CUP), p. 126.
59. Duncan Blair (1954) 'Leaves from the Journal of a Scottish Padre in the First World War', *Chaplains' Department Journal*, 57(8), p. 46.
60. J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture*, p. 114.
61. John Keegan (1976), *The Face of Battle* (London: Cape), p. 274.
62. G. R. Fitzroy (1917) *Notes for Young Officers* (London: Foster & Gordon), p. 8.
63. A. L. J. Shields (1940) *A Chaplain on Service* (London: SPCK), p. 15.
64. Oswin Creighton (1920) *Letters of Oswin Creighton: C. F., 1883–1918* (London: Longmans), p. 202.
65. J. G. Fuller, *Troop Morale*, p. 102.
66. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
67. H. W. Blackburne (1932) *This Also Happened on the Western Front* (London: Hodder & Staughton), p. 60.
68. H. W. Blackburne (1917) 'A Chaplain's Duties', in *Chaplains in Council* (London: Edward Arnold), p. 38.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 145.
71. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
72. *Ibid.*, p. 271.
73. *Ibid.*, p. 81.
74. *Yorkshire Post*, 27 September 1917 and Gwynne's War Book, p. 289.
75. Evers Papers, LC – GSO531, Mervyn Evers to Mildred Evers, 8 September 1916.
76. Harry Blackburne, *Chaplains in Council*, pp. 47–8.
77. Gwynne's War Book, p. 304.
78. *Ibid.*, p. 5.
79. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
80. *Ibid.*, p. 142.
81. *Ibid.*, p. 104.
82. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
83. J. E. Edmonds, *Official History*, p. 136.
84. John Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer*, p. 165.
85. George Coppard, *With A Machine-Gun to Cambrai*, p. 72.

86. Chaplain Neville Talbot was particularly active in this capacity. See F. H. Brabant, *Neville Stuart Talbot*, pp. 59–60 and Edward Madigan (2008) “‘The Life Lived’ versus “Balaam’s Ass’s Ears”: Neville Stuart Talbot’s Chaplaincy on the Western Front”, *The Journal of the Royal Army Chaplains’ Department*, 47, pp. 14–16.
87. Harry Blackburne, *This Also Happened*, p. 8.
88. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 96.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 97.
90. David Englander, ‘Discipline and Morale’, p. 140.
91. For a personal account of the close relationship between Haig and Duncan, see G. S. Duncan (1966) *Douglas Haig as I Knew Him* (London: George Allen & Unwin).
92. Douglas Haig, 28 June 1916, from excerpt reproduced in Davidson Papers, vol. 344, f. 146.
93. Evers papers, LCL – GS 0531. Notice circulated to Church of England Chaplains from Fourth Army HQ, 23 June 1916. Personal copy of Mervyn Evers.
94. According to Edmonds the clarifying order was issued on the ‘eve of the Somme offensive’.
95. J. Edmonds, *Official History*, p. 137.
96. Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, p. 242.
97. Cited in R. J. Northcott (1941) *Pat McCormick* (London: Longmans), pp. 45–6.
98. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, pp. 67–82.
99. Haidee Blackburne (1955) *Trooper to Dean* (Bristol: Arrowsmith), p. 51.
100. Harry W. Blackburne, *This Also Happened*, p. 63.
101. Gary Sheffield and John Bourne (2005) *Douglas Haig, War Diaries and Letters, 1914–1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson), p. 13.
102. F. R. Barry, *Period*, p. 60.
103. Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man’s Land*, p. 115.

#### 4 The Ministry of the Trenches

1. D. L. Rowlands, IWM Archives, 93/20/1. From letter written in February 1918 to his future wife while serving in France with the 15th Battalion Durham Light Infantry (64th Brigade, 21st Division).
2. J. R. Skirrh papers, IWM Archives 99/53/1, unpublished memoirs, p. 105.
3. J. M. Winter, ‘Army and Society’, in I. F. W. Beckett and H. Simpson (eds), *A Nation in Arms*, p. 194.
4. John Benson (1989) *The Working Class in Britain, 1850–1939* (London: Longman), pp. 151–3 and David Silbey (2005) *The British Working Class and Enthusiasm for War 1914–1916* (London: Frank Cass), pp. 63–5.
5. Gary Sheffield (1996) ‘Officers-Man Relations, Discipline and Morale in the British Army of the Great War’, in H. Cecil and P. Liddle (eds), *Facing Armageddon: The First World War Experienced* (London: Pen & Sword), pp. 413–17.
6. Keith Simpson, ‘The British Soldier’, p. 142.
7. Stephen Graham (1919) *A Private in the Guards* (London: Macmillan), p. 255.

8. Donald Hankey, a soldier-journalist who wrote influential articles for the *Spectator* and the *Westminster Gazette* until his death in 1916. His articles were posthumously published in a volume entitled *A Student in Arms* (his pen name).
9. Neville S. Talbot, *Thoughts*, p. 3.
10. M. Linton-Smith, 'Fellowship in the Church', in F. B. Macnutt (ed.), *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 110.
11. Hugh McLeod, 'Anticlericalism', p. 203.
12. F. R. Barry, *Period*, p. 78.
13. E. C. Crosse TS, IWM p. 6. A Bath bun is a sugar-coated yeast bun studded with candied fruit and currants or golden raisins, believed to have originated in the English town of Bath in the eighteenth century.
14. Hugh Cecil, *The Flower of Battle*, p. 164 and Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 133.
15. Hugh McLeod, 'Anticlericalism', p. 211.
16. *Derby Evening Telegraph*, 19 May 2003.
17. Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, pp. 85–6.
18. Robbie Roberts (1983) in Michael Moynihan, *God on Our Side* (London: Secker & Warburg), p. 143. According to Brophy and Partridge, 'The term "Sky Pilot" was originally nautical slang but had become a general euphemism for a chaplain as early as the 1890s', *The Long Trail*, p. 181.
19. James O. Hannay, *A Padre in France*, p. 282.
20. E. C. Crosse TS, p. 4.
21. James O. Hannay, 'Man to Man', in F. B. Macnutt (ed.), *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 336.
22. Gary Sheffield (2000) *Leadership in the Trenches* (London: Macmillan), p. 80.
23. Mellish Papers, LCL GS 1088, TS memoir, p. 7.
24. Everard Digby, *Tips for Padres*, p. 3. Examples of these contracts can be seen in numerous War Office files in the National Archives, Kew.
25. Micheal Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, p. 184.
26. Railton Papers, IWM Archives 4760 80/22/1.
27. E. Digby, p. 4, 'The Fourth Class Chaplain's pay is 10s. a day, plus an allowance of 1s. 9d. a day for rations'.
28. E. C. Crosse TS, preface, p. ii.
29. J. W. Fortescue (1920) *A History of the British Army* (London: Macmillan), vol. 10, p. 205 and Douglas Gill and Gloden Dallas (1985) *The Unknown Army* (London: Verso), p. 13.
30. Keith Simpson, 'The Officers', in I. F. W. Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds) *A Nation in Arms*, p. 65.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 79.
32. Gary Sheffield (2002) *Forgotten Victory* (London: Review), p. 148.
33. *Ibid.*, p. 147. William Robertson provides a striking exception to this rule. Born in very humble circumstances in Lincolnshire in 1860, at the age of 16 he enlisted as a private in the 16th Lancers. In the decades that followed his intelligence, skill, and determination allowed him to progress through the ranks and enter the officer corps. During the Great War he served as Quartermaster General and Military Advisor to the Government. In 1920 he was promoted to the rank of Field Marshall.



34. Keith Simpson, 'The Officers', p. 83.
35. Clement Atlee (1954) *As It Happened* (London: Heinemann), p. 43.
36. Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, p. 147.
37. For an analysis of social stratification in the British Army during the war, see especially John Bourne, 'The British Working Man in Arms', in High Cecil and Peter Liddle (eds), *Facing Armageddon*, pp. 336–52.
38. Raven Papers, LCL – GS 1329, to Burgess, 10 October 1917.
39. Oswin Creighton, *Letters*, p. 169.
40. Pte. A. Surfleet, IWM Archives, unpublished war diary, p. 3.
41. Norman Demuth, cited in Max Arthur (2002) *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, pp. 165–6.
42. Capt. W. Bell, IWM Archives, pp/mcr/269.
43. Compiled from war book in Gwynne Papers, CMS Archive, University of Birmingham, Acc 18/21.
44. The Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George (or CMG) is a British award for chivalry that was first instituted in April 1918. It was awarded to very high-ranking officers such as Major-Generals, Brigadier Generals, and Colonels and to Senior Chaplains who nominally held these ranks.
45. (1922) *Statistics of the Military Effort of the British Empire during the War* (London: HMSO), p. 560.
46. As the wording of the original warrant stated that the MC should be granted for 'Distinguished and Meritorious Services' a number of officers received the award in 1915 and 1916 for meritorious services behind the lines in circumstances where they were not under fire or in direct danger. Due, however, to a strong feeling in the army that the award would lose its prestige unless it was awarded only for gallantry under fire, orders were given on New Year's Day 1917 to restrict the award to 'the fighting personnel of brigades, divisions, corps and army troops, together with certain auxiliary services associated in battle with these formations'. Fourth class chaplains, who held the military rank of captain and fell into the 'auxiliary services' category, were thus eligible for the award. See P. E. Abbott and J. M. A. Tamplin (1971) *British Gallantry Awards* (London: Guinness Superlatives), p. 211.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
48. Gwynne's War Book, p. 26.
49. *Ibid.*, p. 60.
50. Guy Rogers, *A Rebel at Heart*, p. 112.
51. Rev. Kenneth Anderson, as quoted by Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer*, p. 166.
52. Raven Papers, LCL – GS 1329, to Burgess, 3 June 1917.
53. *Ibid.*, p.166.
54. G. A. Studdert Kennedy, from a letter to Hardy's daughter, Mary, cited in W. E. Purcell (1962) *Woodbine Willie* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 118.
55. E. C. Crosse, IWM Archives 80/22/1, from TS of preamble to narrative describing the heroism of Maurice Peel that was later published as an article in the *Toc H Journal*, May 1946, vol. xxiv, No. 5.
56. William D. Geare (1918) *Letters of an Army Chaplain* (London: Wells Gardner, Darton & Co.), p. 38.
57. P. Middleton Brumwell, *The Army Chaplain*, p. 38.
58. Peter Howson, 'Deaths Among Army Chaplains, 1914–1920', in *Journal for Army Historical Research*, Spring, 2005 – for another insightful deconstruction

- of statistics relating to chaplains deaths, see Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*, pp. 171–2.
59. The preface for the 1920 edition of *Crockford's Clerical Directory* gives a figure of 112 Anglican deaths, a hard-bound publication from 1920 entitled *Roll of the Army Chaplains who Gave Their Lives in the Great War* lists Anglican 118 chaplains, in April 1919 the Army Chaplains' Department sent a memo to Lambeth Palace that recorded 100 chaplains as having died during the conflict, while John Smyth gives a figure of 88 in the official history of the Department, *In This Sign Conquer*.
  60. J. M. Winter (1985) *The Great War and the British People* (London: Macmillan), pp. 72 and 91.
  61. IWM Archives, pp/mcr/269 – italics inserted.
  62. William Daniels, cited in Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, p. 138.
  63. Julian Bickersteth, *The Bickersteth Diaries*, p. 228.
  64. Tom Pym in Dora Pym, *Tom Pym – A Portrait*, pp. 123–4.
  65. Alfred O'Rahilly (1920) *Father William Doyle* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.), p. 150.
  66. *Times*, 12 September 1916.
  67. *The Times History of the War*, Vol. VIII, 1916, p. 313.
  68. *Times*, 25 March 1918, 'ad majorem Dei gloriam' – 'to the greater glory of God'.
  69. *Times*, 5 February 1919.
  70. *Ibid.* and Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 345., f. 329.
  71. For examples of very positive coverage of Anglican chaplains' work in the national and regional press, see *The Daily Sketch*, 20 June 1916, *The Manchester Dispatch*, 6 October 1916, *The Manchester Guardian*, 26 December 1916, *The Daily Mail*, 23 February 1917, *The Morning Post*, 30 May 1917, *The Salisbury Times*, 9 June 1917, *The Staffordshire Sentinel*, 18 June 1917, *The South London Press*, 17 August 1917, and *The Bristol Times and Mirror*, 1 February 1918.
  72. Gary Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 81.
  73. Harry Blackburne (1939) *Clergy in War-Time* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 10.
  74. See Chapter 2.
  75. Gwynne's War Book, p. 293.
  76. J. M. Winter, *The Great War and the British People*, p. 82.
  77. Burgon Bickersteth, *The Bickersteth Diaries*, p. 169.
  78. David Raw, "It's Only Me", p. 34.
  79. Sassoon Papers, IWM 9059 P444, Cottrill to Sassoon.
  80. R. Keable (1919) *Standing By* (London: Nisbet & Co.), p. 38.
  81. J. Brophy and E. Partridge, *Songs and Slang*, p. 148.
  82. C. H. Mathews, 'Faith or Fear', in *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 166.
  83. Neville Talbot (1918) *Religion behind the Front and after the War* (London: Macmillan), p. 112.
  84. *Ibid.*, p. 3.
  85. Gwynne's War Book, pp. 162 and 318.
  86. Horatio Bottomley, 'Bishops Beware', *Sunday Pictorial*, 28 November 1915.

87. For an absorbing account of the extraordinary success Bottomley enjoyed during the war years, see Julian Symons (2001) *Horatio Bottomley* (London: House of Stratus), pp.148–58.
88. *Times*, House of Commons Report, 21 January 1916.
89. Herbert H. Henson, *Retrospect*, pp. 174–5.
90. Herbert H. Henson, cited in F. J. Foakes-Jackson (1915) *The Faith and the War* (London: Macmillan), p. 240.
91. Herbert H. Henson, *Retrospect*, p. 175.
92. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 340, ff. 36–7, Capt. Birchall to John Macmillan, 29 January 1916.
93. Frank Richards, *Old Soldiers Never Die*, p. 301.
94. F. R. Barry, *Period*, p. 62.
95. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 340, f. 60, memorandum entitled ‘The Clergy and National Service’, circulated in January 1917.
96. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 40 and Davidson papers vol. 340, f. 194.
97. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 341, f. 228, Bishop of Birmingham to Randall Davidson, 16 July 1918.
98. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 340, f.189, Geoffrey Gordon to G. K. A. Bell.
99. *Ibid.*, vol. 340 ff. 189/190.
100. *Ibid.*, vol. 340 f. 231, T. W. Pym, on behalf of 96 chaplains attached to the BEF, forwarded to Lambeth by Bishop Gwynne, 11 July 1917.
101. *Ibid.*, vol. 345, ff. 35–6, Llewellyn Gwynne, from a letter addressed John Taylor-Smith, forwarded to Davidson and circulated among Anglican bishops.
102. *Ibid.*, vol. 345, f. 36.
103. *Ibid.*, vol. 341, f. 47, Gwynne to Davidson, 18 April 1918.
104. J. E. Nelson (1974) ‘Irish Soldiers in the Great War’, *The Irish Sword*, no. 11, p. 167.
105. Guy Rogers, *A Rebel at Heart*, p. 108.
106. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 144.
107. Biographical Note, Robert Keable (1923) *Simon Called Peter* (London: Constable), p. vi.
108. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 134.
109. Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*, p. 174. Richard Holmes, *Tommy*, p. 506 and Stewart Mews (2003) ‘Religion, 1900–1939’, in C. J. Wrigley (ed.), *The Blackwell Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Blackwell), p. 480.
110. Of 220 British and Irish Catholic chaplains surveyed using files held in the Roman Catholic Archbishopric of the Forces (RCAF) Archives at Aldershot, 98 were English, 69 were Irish, 34 were Hiberno-British, 16 were Scottish, and 3 were Welsh. I am grateful to Margaret Kay Day for her help with this research.
111. Liam Blane, *The Irish Catholic Secular Clergy, 1850–1900*, Ph.D. thesis, Trinity College, Dublin, 1994, pp. 2 and 5.
112. Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains’ Department*, pp. 194–5.
113. RCAF Archives. This figure is based on a survey of files relating to 242 Roman Catholic chaplains from Britain, Ireland, the Dominions, and elsewhere that served in the British Army during the war. Of this sample, which is just over a quarter of the total number of Catholic clergy that

received commissions, 30 were Jesuits, 25 were Benedictines, and 23 were Franciscans.

114. Alfred O'Rahilly, *Father William Doyle*, pp. 1 and 7 and obituary of Stephen Gwynne, *The Clongownian*, 1916.
115. Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, p. 195.
116. Joseph A. MacMahon (1981) 'The Catholic Clergy and the Social Question in Ireland, 1891–1916', *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review*, no. 70, p. 279, and Liam Blane, *The Irish Catholic Secular Clergy, 1850–1900*, pp. 2 and 5.
117. *Ibid.*, p. 264.
118. Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism', p. 341.
119. For the Irish Catholic clergy's stance on the issue of conscription, and other war issues, see especially Paucic Travers (1983) 'The Priest in Politics: The Case of Conscription', in O. MacDonagh and P. Travers (eds), *Irish Culture and Nationalism, 1750–1950* (London: Macmillan), pp. 161–81.
120. J. Brophy and E. Partridge, *Songs and Slang*, p. 148.
121. J. A. MacMahon, 'The Catholic Clergy', p. 280.
122. Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism', p. 332.
123. Terence Denman (1991) 'The Catholic Irish Soldier in the First World War: The "racial environment"', *Irish Historical Studies*, 27, pp. 361–2.
124. William Redmond (1917) *Trench Pictures from France* (London: Andrew Melrose), p. 113.
125. Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism', p. 334.
126. Chaplain '19', as cited by Charles Plater (1919) in *Catholic Soldiers by Sixty Chaplains and Many Others* (London: Longmans), p. 20.
127. Michael Moynihan, *God on Our Side*, p. 84.
128. Philip Gibbs (1920) *Realities of War* (London: Heinemann), p. 440.
129. Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism', p. 331.
130. Adrian Hastings, *A History*, p. 187.
131. Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism', p. 342.
132. C. J. Horsley-Smith Papers, IWM Archives 96/38/1, unpublished memoir written in the 1930s.
133. Fr J. Bernard Marshall, IWM Archives 67/180/1, War Journal.
134. G. Gordon and T. W. Pym (1917) *Papers from Picardy* (London: Constable), p. 107.
135. David Thomas (2006) 'Relations Between Christians and Muslims', in Hugh McLeod (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Christianity: World Christianities c. 1914–c. 2000* (Cambridge: CUP), p. 494. In a short but insightful chapter, Thomas emphasises just how large Islamic fundamentalism now looms in Christian thinking and argues that 'there has been no more dramatic change among Protestant and Catholic churches during the twentieth century than in their attitudes towards Islam'.
136. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 183.
137. Ernest Raymond, *Tell England*, p. 110.
138. William Ewing (1918) *From Gallipoli to Baghdad* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 197.
139. Major Bryan Cooper (1918) *The Tenth (Irish) Division in Gallipoli* (London: Herbert Jenkins), p. 189.
140. Jenny Macleod, *Reconsidering Gallipoli*, p. 3.
141. Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, p. 218.

142. Oswin Creighton, *With the Twenty-Ninth Division at Gallipoli*, p. 32.
143. Bryan Cooper, *The Tenth (Irish) Division in Gallipoli*, pp. 218–19.
144. Jenny Macleod, *Reconsidering Gallipoli*, p. 3.
145. Alan Moorehead (1998) *Gallipoli* (London: Wordsworth), p. 189.
146. Bryan Cooper, *The Tenth (Irish) Division in Gallipoli*, pp. 220–1.
147. Charles H. Barber (1917) *Besieged in Kut and After* (London: William Blackwood), pp. 127–8.
148. Gary Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 97.

## 5 Combatant Faith on the Western Front

1. Brian Bond (2004), 'Sir Hubert Gough', *ODNB*.
2. Hubert Gough, preface to E. C. Crosse (1917) *The God of Battles* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.), p. 7.
3. This type of open contact with parishioners on the home front was quite common among Anglican chaplains. It served as means of giving concerned civilians news and impressions from the front and letting them know how local regiments were faring. Noel Mellish, Edmund Doudney, and other English padres sent similar letters to their parish newsletters.
4. L. L. Jeeves, IWM Archives 4768 80/22/1, 'Heroes, Sundays & Saints'.
5. Robert Keable, *Standing By*, p. 27.
6. Oswin Creighton, *Letters*, p. 167.
7. Philip T. Crick, *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 360.
8. Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man*, p. 304.
9. Jackson Page, cited in Alan Wilkinson (1986) *Dissent or Conform* (London: SCM), p. 55.
10. Neville Talbot, *Thoughts*, p. 15.
11. J. Bowles, cited in Lyn McDonald (ed.) (1986), *Voices and Images of the Great War* (London: Penguin), p. 181.
12. Keith Simpson, 'The British Soldier', p. 142.
13. Major. C. E. Lyne, cited in R. Prior and T. Wilson (2002) *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (London: Yale UP), p. 194.
14. Andrew Causey (1980), *Paul Nash* (Oxford: Clarendon), p. 52.
15. Paul Nash (1949) *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings* (London: Faber), p. 87.
16. L. L. Jeeves, IWM Archives 4768 80/22/1 'God and the War'.
17. G. Gordon, *Papers from Picardy*, p. 198.
18. Albert Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, pp. 215–16.
19. A. G. Lee, Diary entry, 23 September 1917.
20. R. H. Tawney (1981) *The Attack and Other Papers* (Nottingham: Spokesman), p. 16. This article was originally published in the *Westminster Gazette* in August 1916.
21. G. A. Studdert Kennedy, *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 376.
22. D. Railton, IWM Archives 4760 80/22/1, diary entry, 4 January 1917.
23. F. R. Barry, 'Faith in the Light of War', *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 35.
24. Innes Logan (1917) *On the King's Service, Inward Glimpses of Men at Arms* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 28.
25. Oswin Creighton, *Letters*, pp. 111–12.

26. Neville Talbot, *Thoughts*, p. 5.
27. Anonymous RAMC private cited in D. S. Cairns (ed.) (1919) *The Army and Religion*, (London: Macmillan), p. 93.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 93.
29. Excerpt from a Green Envelope letter written on 22/1/17 by unnamed NCO, recorded by Capt. Martin Hardie in an intelligence report on morale, IWM Archives 84/46/1.
30. Hervey Allen (1934) *Toward the Flame* (New York: Farrar & Rinehart), p. 121.
31. Fr Hubert Northcott, excerpts from *CR* quoted in Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 44.
32. Neville Talbot, *Thoughts*, pp. 111–12.
33. Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*, p. 188.
34. G. A. Studdert Kennedy (1918) *Rough Talks by a Padre* (London: Hodder & Staughton), pp. 225–6.
35. E. C. Crosse TS, p. 8.
36. David Cairns (ed.) *The Army and Religion*, p. 8.
37. Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy*, p. 187.
38. M. G. J. Ponsonby (1917) *Visions and Vignettes of War* (London: Longmans & Co.), p. 37.
39. E. C. Crosse TS, p. 8.
40. C. J. Horsley-Smith, IWM Archives 96/38/1.
41. D. S. Cairns (ed.), *The Army and Religion*, p. 164.
42. *Ibid.*, pp. 162–3.
43. Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy*, p. 185.
44. Paul Nash, *Outline*, p. 193.
45. D. S. Cairns (ed.), *The Army and Religion*, p. 164.
46. Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy*, p. 185.
47. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 195 and Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 33. For a brief examination of belief in miraculous phenomena on the Western Front, see Katherine Finlay (2005) 'Angels in the Trenches: British Soldiers and Miracles in the First World War', in K. Cooper and J. Gregory (eds), *Signs, Wonders, Miracles – Representations of Divine Power in the Life of the Church* (Woodbridge: Boydell), pp. 443–52.
48. *Times*, 19 August 1915. The 'Touchwood' talisman was described thus: 'a quaint little figure, mainly head, made of oak, surmounted by a khaki service cap, and with odd sparkling eyes, as if always on the alert to see and avert danger. The legs, either in silver or gold, are crossed, and the arms, of the same metal, are lifted to touch the head'.
49. Anette Becker (1998) *War and Faith* (Oxford: Berg), p. 61.
50. Alfred O'Rahilly, *Fr. William Doyle S. J.*, p. 200.
51. Philip Gibbs, cited in Andy Simpson (2002) *Hot Blood and Cold Steel* (Kent, Spellmount), p. 115.
52. N. Hind, IWM 06/71/1, war diary, p. 21.
53. Oswin Creighton, *Letters*, p. 218.
54. Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy*, p. 201.
55. Annette Becker, *War and Faith*, p. 103.
56. Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy*, p. 186.
57. For an insightful examination of the psychological mechanisms, including fatalism, that front-line troops relied on for survival, see Alex Watson (2006),

- 'Self Deception and Survival: Mental Coping Strategies on the Western Front, 1914–1918', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 41(2), pp. 247–68.
58. Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 48.
  59. Donald Hankey, *A Student in Arms*, pp. 112 and 113.
  60. *Ibid.*, pp. 101–2.
  61. Hankey's articles in the *Spectator* were published in book form during the war and seem to have been widely read by Anglican padres, some of whom clearly appreciated his constructive criticism of the Church and his analysis of combatant faith. In 1916, Harry Blackburne, who was then serving as Senior Chaplain to the First Army, wrote, 'I think *A Student in Arms* ... is excellent; and I'm trying to get all chaplains to read it'. In 1917 James Hannay wrote 'In "*A Student in Arms*" there are some chapters dealing with the religion of our soldiers. Nothing has been written on this subject more interesting and stimulating than these chapters'. Geoffrey Gordon corresponded with Hankey before his death and in an article on religion in the BEF written in the final year of the war he referred to 'Donald Hankey's masterly analysis'. See H. W. Blackburne, *This Also Happened*, p. 93, *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 342, and *The Challenge*, 21 June 1918.
  62. Robert Keable, *Standing By*, p. 56.
  63. Mark Marsay (2000) *The Bairnsfather Omnibus* (Yorkshire: Great Northern Publishing), p. xvii.
  64. Tonie and Valmai Holt (2001) *In Search of a Better 'Ole* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword), p. 53.
  65. Wyndham Lewis (1982) *Blasting and Bombardiering* (London: John Calder), p. 38. For examples of humorous exchanges between British soldiers, see Richard Holmes, *Tommy*, pp. 333–5.
  66. *Times*, 30 January 1919.
  67. Alex Watson, 'Self Deception and Survival', p. 253.
  68. Tonie and Valmai Holt (1978) *The Best of Fragments from France* (London: Phin), p. 17.
  69. Charles Carrington (2006) *Soldiers from the Wars Returning* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword), p. 97.
  70. Robert Keable, *Standing By*, p. 58.
  71. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
  72. C. Edmund Doudney (1995) *The Best of Good Fellows* (London: J. Horne), pp. 14 and 30.
  73. James Hannay, 'Man to Man', *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 344.
  74. Henry K. Southwell, 'Personal Religion', *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 326.
  75. Patrick Porter, 'New Jerusalem', p. 114.
  76. Jon Stallworthy (2002) *Anthem for Doomed Youth, Twelve Soldier Poets of the First World War* (London: Constable), p. 65.
  77. Jon Stallworthy (1977) *Wilfred Owen* (Oxford: OUP), p. 265.
  78. M. Hardie Papers, IWM Archives 84/46/1, excerpt from letter from 'Officer of London Regiment', transcribed for Report on Morale.
  79. In *Rough Talks of a Padre*, published in 1918, G. A. Studdert-Kennedy insisted that the British Army would emerge victorious from the conflict because the national characteristics of British soldiers made them superior to their German counterparts: 'You could not make machine parts out of Britons', he argued 'they would give the fitters the devil of a time because

they would not fit. Britons can be led, they can't be driven; Germans can be driven, but can't be led ... The British officer goes before his men and cheers; the German officer comes behind his men and snarls'. G. A. Studdert Kennedy (1918) *Rough Talks of a Padre* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 40.

80. Geoffrey Gordon, *Papers from Picardy*, p. 183.
81. Philip T. Crick, *The Church in the Furnace*, p. 360.
82. A. H. Gray, *Chaplains in Council*, p. 50.
83. D. S. Cairns (ed.), *The Army and Religion*, p. 16.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
85. *Ibid.*, p. 16.
86. A. H. Gray, *Chaplains in Council*, p. 21.
87. Robert Keable, *Standing By*, p. 161.
88. An Army Chaplain (1917) *Can England's Church win England's Manhood* (London: Macmillan & Co.), p. 5.
89. *Ibid.*, p. 19.
90. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
91. *The Army and Religion*, pp. 195–6.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 196.
93. Davidson Papers, LPL, J. Taylor-Smith to Davidson, 26 October 1915, vol. 344, f. 32.
94. Davidson Papers, LPL, Gwynne to Davidson, 2 November 1915, vol. 344, f. 45.
95. D. Railton, Diary entry, 20 January 1917, IWM Archives 4760 80/22/1.
96. An Army Chaplain, *Can England's Church win England's Manhood*, p. 22.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
98. T. L. B. Westerdale (1916) *Messages from Mars* (London: C. H. Kelly), p. 36.
99. E. C. Crosse (1919) *A Sermon Preached in Marlborough College Chapel* (printed for private circulation, Marlborough), p. 4.
100. Julian Bickersteth, *The Bickersteth Diaries*, p. 182.

## 6 Veteran Padres and the Idealism of Fellowship in Post-War Britain

1. *Times*, 6 December 1918.
2. The initial assault on Vimy Ridge has been referred to as 'the first really striking success in British trench warfare'. The action was designed to draw German troops away from the French sector in advance of the disastrous Nivelle Offensive. J. Bourne and G. Sheffield *Douglas Haig War Diaries*, p. 278. For details of the offensive, see Nigel Cave (1996) *Arras: Vimy Ridge* (London: Leo Cooper).
3. N. L. Brooke, *A History of the University of Cambridge*, pp. 148–9 and F. W. Dillistone, *Charles Raven*, p. 86.
4. B. K. Cunningham, recorded in Gwynne's War Book, p. 335, and G. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, p. 97.
5. Charles Raven (1935) *Is War Obsolete?* (London: George Allen & Unwin), pp. 45–7.



6. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
7. F. W. Dillistone, *Charles Raven*, p. 86.
8. See especially Patrick Porter 'Beyond Comfort: German and English Military Chaplains and the Memory of the Great War'. Porter argues that both Church of England and Lutheran chaplains viewed the peace as the continuation of an unfinished moral and spiritual struggle in which commemorative services and memorials served not primarily to comfort the bereaved but to remind the living of the debt owed to the dead.
9. *Times*, 1 July 1919.
10. Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, p. 256.
11. Carolyn Scott (1977) *Dick Sheppard – a Biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 62. Lady Dudley, founder and patron of the volunteer hospital, was the wife of the Governor-General of Australia, William Ward, the 2nd Earl of Dudley. Sheppard was succeeded as padre of the hospital by the prominent Christian socialist, J. G. Adderley. For a detailed account of the origins of the hospital, see Andrew Paterson (1934) *Happy Dispatches* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson), Chapter 13, 'Lady Dudley'.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 64.
13. Cosmo Gordon Lang, as cited in R. Ellis Roberts (1942) *H.R.L. Sheppard, His Life and Letters* (London: John Murray), p. 79.
14. Carolyn Scott, *Dick Sheppard*, p. 66.
15. Alan Wilkinson, Hugh Richard Laurie Sheppard, *ODNB*.
16. The proposed assembly would rule on any legislative changes in the Church, such as the creation of new dioceses or new clerical livings. Traditionally, legislative change had to be introduced and passed in the House of Lords, and latterly in the House of Commons. The perceived flaw with this system was that the members of the House rarely had the time or the inclination to discuss ecclesiastical matters in depth. This was especially the case during the war. The result was that Church reforms took a long time to be implemented and could be decided upon by MPs who were indifferent to the needs of the Anglican faithful. See Kenneth A. Thompson (1970), *Bureaucracy and Church Reform* (Oxford: Clarendon).
17. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 70.
18. For an insightful account of the work of the National Mission in 1915–16, see David M. Thompson (1983) 'War, the Nation and the Kingdom of God', in W. J. Sheils (ed.), *The Church and War, Studies in Church History 20* (London: Blackwell), pp. 337–50.
19. F. A. Iremonger (1963) *William Temple*, abridged edition (Oxford: OUP), p. 94.
20. Kenneth A. Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, p. 156.
21. *Times*, 'Liberty in the Church', 20 June 1917.
22. William Temple (1917) *Life and Liberty* (London: Macmillan), p. 1.
23. Leslie Paul, *Deployment and Payment of Clergy*, p. 110.
24. Davidson Papers LPL, vol. 344, Chaplains of 7th Div. to William Temple.
25. *The Chaplains' Bulletin*, May/June 1918, p. 37.
26. F. H. Brabant, *Neville Stuart Talbot*, p. 71.
27. Dora Pym, *Tom Pym – A Portrait*, pp. 50–1. Pym was so outspoken in his advocacy of 'Pam' that Neville Talbot affectionately nicknamed him 'Ig', a reference to the notoriously zealous founder of the Jesuit Order, Ignatius Loyola.

28. *Times*, 17 July 1917.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Kenneth A. Thompson, *Bureaucracy*, pp. 160–1.
31. H. H. Henson, *Retrospect*, p. 87.
32. Oswin Creighton, *Letters*, pp. 202–3.
33. Charles Raven, *The Challenge*, 29 November 1918.
34. William Temple as quoted in Ellis Roberts, *Dick Sheppard*, p. 119.
35. Carolyn Scott, *Dick Sheppard*, p. 11.
36. For an account of the life of P. B. Clayton, see Tresham Lever (1971) *Clayton of Toc H* (London: John Murray). For Clayton's own writings on Talbot House and the movement that it inspired, see John Durham (ed.) (1962) *Tubby on Toc H: From the Speeches and Writings of the Reverend P. B. Clayton, Founder Padre of Toc H* (London: Toc H). A short but comprehensive account of the movement's history to date, and the social work its members are involved in, can be found in J. Rice and K. Prideaux-Brune (1991) *Out of a Hop Loft, Seventy Five Years of Toc H* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd).
37. P. B. Clayton to Mrs Clayton, 14 November 1915, *Letters from Flanders*, p. 13.
38. Tresham Lever, *Clayton*, p. 42.
39. Guy Rogers, *A Rebel at Heart*, p. 109.
40. John Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer*, p. 181 and F. H. Brabant, *Neville Stuart Talbot*, p. 64. In memory and honour of his younger brother, Talbot named his son Gilbert. On the outbreak of the Second World War he joined the Rifle Brigade. He was killed in action in 1944. Brabant, p. 138.
41. J. Rice and K. Prideaux-Brune, *Out of a Hop Loft*, p. 7.
42. Tresham Lever, *Clayton*, p. 45.
43. Harold Lovell, as quoted in J. Rice and K. Prideaux Brune, *Out of a Hop Loft*, p. 8.
44. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
45. Tresham Lever, *Clayton*, p. 50.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 53.
47. P. B. Clayton (1929) *Plain Tales from Flanders* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.), p. 8.
48. *Ibid.*, p.68.
49. The recommendation read: 'For most valuable services in "The Salient" and at Talbot House, Poperinghe, for past two years. In addition to daily Church services at Talbot House he has held services at Ypres every week for Artillery units during period when Ypres was heavily shelled. His zeal and devotion to duty [are] beyond all praise'. GOC 18 Corps 6/10/17.
50. P. B. Clayton, *Plain Tales*, p. 1.
51. (1948) *Toc H Defined, Some Brief Notes on the History, Aims and Methods of Toc H* (London), p. 5.
52. For a brief overview of the War's impact on the training and recruitment of clergy, see Stuart Mews, 'Clergymen, Gentlemen and Men, World War I and the Requirements, Recruitment and Training of the Anglican Ministry'.
53. *Times*, 6 February 1919 and P. B. Clayton, *Plain Tales*, p. 90.
54. *The Challenge*, 10 April 1915.
55. P. B. Clayton, *Tales*, p. 91 and *Plain Tales*, p. 68.
56. G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson*, p. 884.

57. *Times*, 6 February 1919.
58. Gwynne's War Book, p. 44.
59. *Ibid.*, and Lever, *Clayton*, p. 75.
60. Tresham Lever, *Clayton*, p. 76.
61. *Times*, 7 February 1919. In November the *Times* reported that the total number of names on the register was 3136, of whom 1184 had begun training, 804 were still under consideration or had not yet been demobilised, 59 had already been ordained, 86 had been killed in action or died of wounds or illness and the remainder had been rejected for various reasons.
62. Tresham Lever, *Clayton*, p. 78.
63. F. R. Barry, *Mervyn Haigh*, p. 55.
64. *Times*, 'Poor Men for Holy Orders', 24 May 1920.
65. G. K. A. Bell, *Randall Davidson*, p. 944.
66. F. R. Barry, *Mervyn Haigh*, p. 57.
67. *Ibid.*, p. 58, italics inserted.
68. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 280.
69. On leaving Knutsford, Wilson went on to take a degree at Queen's College, Oxford and was ordained in 1924. By 1938 he had been appointed Dean of the colony of Hong Kong. In 1941 he was consecrated Bishop of Singapore and remained there the following year when the city was occupied by Japanese forces. He spent the rest of the war in captivity, firstly in an internment camp and later in the notorious Changi Gaol where he was brutally tortured. At the end of the war he confirmed a group of Japanese soldiers including some of his former captors. For his leadership and valour during this period he was awarded the CMG in 1946. In 1948 he became Dean of Manchester and in 1953 he became Bishop of Birmingham. John Leonard Wilson Obituary, *Times*, 19 August 1970; see also R. McKay (1973) *John Leonard Wilson, Confessor for the Faith* (London: Hodder & Stoughton).
70. F. R. Barry, *Mervyn Haigh*, p. 56.
71. The establishment of this second school was made possible through a grant of land and money from Henry Gladstone, the former Prime Minister's eldest son.
72. Railton Papers, IWM 4760 80/22/1, letter to wife, 30 August 1916.
73. David Railton (1931) 'The Origin of the Unknown Warrior's Grave', *Our Empire*, November, p. 34.
74. Jay Winter (1996) *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: CUP), p. 104.
75. *Church Times*, editorial, 21 November 1919.
76. For a detailed and absorbing account of the selection, transport and interment of the Unknown Warrior, see Neil Hanson (2005) *The Unknown Soldier* (London: Doubleday), pp. 327–64.
77. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 288.
78. Neil Hanson, *The Unknown Soldier*, pp. 387 and 391.
79. *Times*, 21 November 1920.
80. David Railton, *Our Empire*, p. 36.
81. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 305.
82. Railton Papers, IWM 4760 80/22/1.
83. Andrew Railton, cited in Michael Moynihan, *God on Our Side*, p. 75.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 75.

85. John Oliver, *The Church and Social Order*, p. 18, and 'The Church and the Labour Party', *Times*, 14 March 1923.
86. *Church Times*, 17 March 1923.
87. Alan Wilkinson, *Christian Socialism*, p. 90.
88. Gerald Studdert Kennedy (1982) *Dog Collar Democracy* (London: Macmillan), p. 124. The author is a nephew of the well-known padre.
89. *Memorial of the Clergy to the Labour Members of Parliament*, an original copy of the memorial is held at the Labour History Archive and Study Centre in Manchester.
90. Dora Pym, *Tom Pym – A Portrait*, p. 72.
91. *Ibid.*, p. 123.
92. *Ibid.*, p. 54.
93. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
94. Gwynne's War Book, p. 46.
95. William Purcell (1971) 'Birth of a Rebel', in Kenneth Brill (ed.), *John Groser: East London Priest* (London: Mowbray), p. 12.
96. *Ibid.*, p. 13.
97. *Ibid.*, p. 29–31 and Christopher Langdon (2008) *Square Toes and Formal* (Hastings: Hock), p. 46.
98. *Ibid.*, p. 36.
99. Gerald Studdert Kennedy, *Dog Collar Democracy*, p. 4.
100. John Oliver, *The Church*, p. 23.
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103. Gerald Studdert Kennedy, *Dog Collar Democracy*, p. 56.
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106. See G. A. Studdert Kennedy (1921) *Democracy and the Dog Collar* (London: Hodder & Stoughton).
107. Gerald Studdert Kennedy, *Dog Collar Democracy*, p. 57.
108. Caroline Moorehead (1987) *Troublesome People: Enemies of War* (London: Hamish Hamilton), p. 123.
109. H. R. L. Sheppard (1927) *The Impatience of a Parson* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 62.
110. R. Ellis Roberts, *Dick Sheppard*, p. 187.
111. *The Manchester Guardian*, 16 October 1934. The letter was also printed in the *News Chronicle* and the *Daily Herald*. The *Times* did not print the letter but did give Sheppard some publicity by reporting on the mass response to his appeal, asserting on 19 October that the 'peace appeal was sweeping the country'.
112. Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, p. 178.
113. Anthony Beavis, the hero of Huxley's 1936 novel, *Eyeless in Gaza*, is a pacifist who achieves a sort of spiritual fulfilment by embracing peace. See Aldous Huxley (1936) *Eyeless in Gaza* (London: Harper).
114. Caroline Moorehead, *Troublesome People*, p. 124.
115. F. A. Iremonger, *William Temple*, p. 334.
116. Kester Aspden, *Fortress Church*, p. 14.

117. F. W. Dillistone, *Charles Raven*, p. 118.
118. *Ibid.*, p. 118.
119. For correspondence relating to the anti-war statement, see *Times*, 14 and 16 April 1924.
120. Charles Raven (1963) *The Crucible*, January.
121. Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, p. 67.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 68.
123. F. W. Dillistone, *Charles Raven*, p. 212.
124. *Ibid.*, p. 212.
125. *Ibid.*, p. 228.
126. John Horne (2002) 'Locarno et la Politique de Démobilisation Culturelle, 1925–1930', *14–18 Aujourd'hui-Today-Heute*, no. 5, pp. 73–5.
127. Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain*, p. 60.
128. P. B. Johnson (1968) *Land Fit for Heroes* (London: University of Chicago Press), p. 220.
129. J. L. Hammond (1918) *Past and Future* (London: Chatto & Windus), pp. 34–5.
130. George Robb (2002) *British Culture and the First World War* (Basingstoke: Palgrave), p. 67.
131. 22.11 per cent of the male population of the UK served in the British Army during the War. Most of these men came from urban working-class backgrounds. Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory*, p. 148.
132. Julian Bickersteth, *Bickersteth Diaries*, p. 14.
133. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
134. See [www.icf-online.org](http://www.icf-online.org).
135. See [www.ppu.org.uk](http://www.ppu.org.uk).
136. R. Currie, A. D. Gilbert, L. Horsley (eds) (1977) *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon), pp. 31–2.

## Conclusion: Why the Myth?

1. *Church Times*, 28 March 1918.
2. Gwynne's War Book, p. 67.
3. Kennedy grew up in Leeds and although both of his parents were Irish and he spent a limited amount of time in Dublin as a student, there is no evidence to suggest that he spoke naturally with an Irish accent, much less a working-class Dublin accent. Yet according to a former school friend, 'Kennedy inherited a certain peculiarity of temperament. His dropping into a kind of Irish brogue was, I think, an expression of this, though a contemporary of his at Ripon [clergy college], and a fellow countryman also, said, "I wish Kennedy would not speak like a Dublin jarvie to show that he is an Irishman!"' J. K. Mozley (ed.) (1929) *G. A. Studdert Kennedy By His Friends* (London: Hodder & Stoughton), p. 24.
4. For examples of Studdert Kennedy's glorifying of the British war effort, see G. A. Studdert Kennedy, *Rough Talks by a Padre*, pp. 36, 91–2, and 130–1.
5. Stephen Loudon, *Chaplains in Conflict*, p. 60.
6. Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, pp. 278, 280, and 284.

7. Oswin Creighton, *Letters*, p. 187.
8. Major R. S. Cockburn Papers, IWM P238, p. 123.
9. Alan Wilkinson, *The Church*, p. 131.
10. Robert Keable, *Simon Called Peter*, pp. 37, 76, and 142.
11. David Railton, IWM Archives 4760 80/22/1, 20 September 1916.
12. Keith Grieves (1997) 'C. E. Montague and the Making of Disenchantment, 1914–1921', *War in History*, 4(1), p. 45.
13. Neil A. Allison (2007) 'Baptist Chaplains Revivalism at the Front (1914–1918)', *Baptist Quarterly*, 42(4), pp. 303–13.

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Letters of Appointment	SACC/18/F/9
Army Book	SACC/18/Z/1
Miscellaneous Photographs	SACC/18/Z/6

#### *Imperial War Museum*

Rev. M. A. Bere	66/96/1
Rev. J. K. Best	81/17/1-3
Rev. Bulstrode	87/10/1
Rev. E. C. Crosse	80/22/1
Rev. L. Foxall	uncatalogued
Capt. M. Hardie	84/46/1
Rev. C. J. Horsley-Smith	96/38/1
Rev. L. L. Jeeves	80/22/1
Fr. J. B. Marshall	7/180/1
Rev. N. Mellish (microfilm)	PP/MCR/269
Rev. D. Railton papers	80/22/1
D. L. Rowlands papers	93/20/1
J. R. Skirth papers	99/53/1
Rev. H. A. Thomas	P305 & Con Shelf
A. Surfleet	uncatalogued

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Over 700 chaplains' War Office files held in the National Archives under the department and series coded 339 and 347 were examined, the data they yielded being cross-referenced with that contained in Gwynne's War Book and in Crockford's Clerical Directory. Listed here are the files on which supplementary research was carried out.

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C. E. Montague, War Office file	WO 339/63410

#### *Lambeth Palace Library*

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*Liddle Collection, Leeds University Library*

J. Esslemont Adams	GS 0527
M. S. Evers	GS 0531
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# Index

- air raids 37, 42
- Anglican army chaplains: and awards for gallantry 139; and combatant faith 171–202; and troop morale 23, 52, 90, 100, 103, 109–122, 124, 125; class consciousness of 136–137; criticism of civilian clergy 154–149; lack of training 93–99; official duties of 99–109; positive wartime press 145–148; post-war reputation of 1–21, 148, 244, 247; relations with combatants 8, 12, 111–112, 123, 127–170, 228, 242; social backgrounds of 12, 20, 34, 58–72, 74–75, 80–82, 87–88, 129–131, 132, 203, 243, 248 unofficial duties of 109–114
- A Passionate Prodigality* 3–4 *see also* Guy Chapman
- Armstrong-Hall, Henry 97
- Army Chaplains' Department 8, 16, 23, 48–56, 59, 119, 136, 142, 177, 198, 206, 269 n. 59
- Asquith, Herbert 33, 58
- Atlee, Clement 136
- atrocities stories 35, 40, 47, 256 n. 44
- Australia 11, 41, 55, 66, 67, 205, 239
- Bairnsfather, Bruce 190–193, 249
- Barnett, Samuel 28, 70
- Barry, Frank Russell 55, 65–66, 70, 92, 93, 96, 125–126, 131, 149, 179–180, 219–221, 231, 246
- Becker, Annette 188, 249
- Bell, George K. A. 93, 157
- Benstead, Charles Richard 12–15, 20, 247, 248 n. 49
- Best, Kenneth 140, 145
- Bickersteth, Burgon 149–150
- Bickersteth, Julian 55, 95, 97, 144, 149, 160, 201, 205, 239, 264 n. 14
- Blackburne, Harry W. 93, 96, 113, 116–117, 120–121, 125, 149, 156, 158, 196, 199, 210, 236, 274 n. 61
- Blair, Duncan 110
- Blunden, Edmund 4, 89
- Bond, Brian 2, 252 n. 26
- Booth, Charles 71
- Bottomley, Horatio 153–154, 207
- Bourke, Joanna 245
- Bourne, John 7–8, 125
- Brade, Reginald 52, 53
- Brindle, Robert 46
- British Expeditionary Force 1, 5, 9, 117, 157, 243
- Brooke, Rupert 18–19
- Brophy, John 10–12, 20, 151, 159, 162, 244, 247, 267 n. 16
- Cairns, D. S. 181, 184, 185
- Cambridge House 71, 77, 228, 229
- Cambridge University 16, 58, 61, 62, 67–75, 79, 88, 190, 203, 220, 228, 229, 260 n. 41
- Campbell, Edward 104–105
- Canada 41, 67, 89
- Carey, D. F. 118–119
- Carrington, Charles 4, 192, 291 n. 16
- Ceadel, Martin 238
- Cecil, Henry 37
- Cecil, Hugh 15, 17, 19, 21, 132
- Chamberlain, Neville 156–157
- Chaplains' Bulletin* 97, 98, 210
- Chapman, Guy 3–7, 11, 14, 19, 89, 140, 159, 161, 165, 247, 248
- Chesterton, G. K. 79
- Christian socialism 29, 66, 73, 75–82, 83, 87, 226–227, 231
- Church of England 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 21, 22, 101, 124, 128, 150, 154, 189, 194, 197, 201, 207, 208, 209, 218, 219, 221, 231, 233, 234, 240, 242, 247, 250; and commemoration 241; and

- the working classes 29–31, 78, 80–81, 87, 128–129, 130–134, 161, 162, 200–201, 208–209, 213; and recruitment 38–39, 41, 43, 57, 154, 242; civilian criticism of 30, 153–154; image of civilian clergy 130–132; pre-war decline of 27–33; pre-war education and training of clergy 60–75, 98; stance on role of clergy in wartime 43–48, 156–159, 247; support for Labour 226–227, support for the war 21, 34–43, 44, 56–57, 154–156, 242, 245
- Church of Ireland 41, 84–85, 194, 263 n. 82
- church parades 10, 48, 91, 97, 99–102, 110, 112, 126, 144, 172, 199
- Clayton, Philip Byard 14–15, 71, 137, 213–218, 219, 220, 241, 246, 252 n. 45, 277 n. 36
- Cockburn, R. S. 101
- combatant faith 21, 22, 92, 171–202, 243, 248, 249, 274 n. 61
- Coppard, George 10, 12, 20, 120, 137, 140, 247
- Cox, Jeffrey 27, 30, 254 n. 10
- Creighton, Louise 208
- Creighton, Mandell 107, 208
- Creighton, Oswin 107, 112, 136–137, 160, 168, 172, 180, 187, 212, 245, 248
- Crick, Philip T. 92, 172, 196
- Crosse, Ernest 47, 90, 94, 103, 106, 108, 131, 132, 133, 135, 185, 200, 205
- Crozier, Frank P. 89–90
- Crozier, John Baptist 41
- Cunningham, Bertram Keir 66, 96, 98, 116, 204, 244
- Cunningham, William 78–79
- Davidson, Randall 30, 36, 37, 38, 42, 43–44, 45–46, 49–50, 51, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 86, 93, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 199, 209, 211, 216, 217, 218–219, 221, 244
- Deane, Anthony 61
- Deslandes, Paul 69
- Digby, Everard 97
- Dillistone, F. W. 70
- Dillon, John 154–155
- Disenchantment* 4–6, 20 *see also* C. E. Montague
- Donaldson, Frederic Lewis 29, 79, 226–227, 232
- Doudney, Charles 193–194, 272 fn. 3
- Doyle, Willie 145, 161, 163, 187
- emergency religion 183–185, 196
- Englander, David 109, 121
- Evers, Mervyn 103, 116, 246
- Falls, Cyril 4, 168
- fatalism 163, 183, 185–186, 188
- Ferguson, Niall 25
- Finn, William J. 168
- Fosdick, Harry Emerson 233
- Free, Richard 39
- French clergy 35, 42, 44–45, 155, 164–165, 178
- French, John 52, 58
- Fuller, J. G. 110, 113
- Furse, Michael 41, 52
- Fussell, Paul 2
- Gallipoli 11, 18–19, 20, 107, 146, 165–169, 240
- Geare, William Duncan 143
- George V 25, 88, 121, 145, 217, 224
- German clergy 42, 178
- German theologians 35–36
- Gibbs, Philip 163, 187
- Goodbye to All That* 1, 2, 8, 10, 14, 20, 21, 89, 251 fn. 1 *see also* Robert Graves
- Gordon, Geoffrey 157–158, 160, 165, 177, 179, 184, 186, 188, 196, 228, 274 n. 61
- Gore, Charles 35, 62, 75–76, 77, 78, 80, 82, 84, 85, 87, 231, 256 n. 41
- Graham, Stephen 130
- Graves, Robert 1–11, 14, 19, 20, 21, 60, 89, 107, 123, 127, 128, 140, 159, 161, 236, 244, 247, 249
- Gray, Arthur Herbert 196–197, 236
- Gregory, Adrian 25
- Groser, John 66, 229–230, 241, 249

- Gwynne, Llewellyn H. 54–56, 59–60, 67, 84, 96, 113, 139, 143, 149, 153, 157–159, 165, 198, 199, 104, 205, 213, 219, 228, 244
- Gwynne, Stephen 161
- Haig, Douglas 56, 121–122, 123, 124, 125, 236
- Haigh, Mervyn 220
- Hall, John Foster 132
- Hankey, Donald 25, 91, 189, 190, 193, 267 n. 8, 274 n. 61
- Hardie, Keir 30, 79, 80
- Hardy, Theodore Bayley 5, 95, 142–143, 149, 150, 246
- Harvey-Darton, F. J. 4, 14
- Hastings, Adrian 64, 83, 164
- Headlam, Stewart 82
- Hensley Henson, Herbert 82, 83, 154, 211
- Hillman, S. Y. 41
- Holland, Henry Scott 36, 75, 76, 78, 80, 82
- Horne, Henry 117, 121, 125
- Horne, John 35, 237
- Horsley-Smith, C. J. 164, 185, 186
- Industrial Christian Fellowship [ICF] 226, 230–233, 249
- Ireland 41, 68, 74, 84–85, 89, 154, 161–162
- Jewish army chaplains 51, 56
- Jewish soldiers 41–42
- Jünger, Ernst 1
- Keable, Robert 16–17, 18, 20, 21, 151, 160, 189–190, 193, 197, 247, 249
- Keble, John 72
- Kennedy, G. A. Studdert 94, 95, 120, 142, 178–179, 184, 207, 230–233, 237
- Kennedy, Gerald Studdert 227
- Kikuyu controversy 85–87
- Kitchener, Horatio H. 4, 38, 53, 54
- Knapp, Simon 160
- Knutsford Test School 216, 218–222, 240, 249, 278 n. 69
- Kramer, Alan 35
- Lang, Cosmo 35, 38, 42, 53, 156, 206, 234
- Langdon, C. G. 230
- Langley-Barnes, R. 98
- Lansbury, George 79, 234
- Life and Liberty 205, 208–213, 231, 240, 249
- Lightfoot, J. B. 73
- Lister, Charles 18–19
- Lloyd George, David 33, 224, 238
- Louden, Stephen 22, 245
- Lux Mundi* 76, 82
- MacDonald, J. Ramsay 79, 226
- MacLeod, Hugh 81, 130
- Macmillan, J. V. 50, 219
- MacPherson, Ewen 49, 52, 54
- Macready, Nevil 52, 123, 124, 246
- Marrin, Albert 21–22, 29, 30, 37
- Marshall, Bernard 165
- Mellish, Noel 15, 104, 134, 138–139, 144, 147, 246, 252 n. 49, 272 n. 3
- Memoirs of a Fox-Hunting Man* 7 *see also* Siegfried Sassoon
- Mesopotamia 165, 169
- Methodists 9, 41, 47, 48, 56, 86, 200
- Mews, Stewart 64
- Military Cross (MC) 12, 90, 93, 99, 114–116, 134, 139–141, 142, 144–145, 147, 148, 149, 216, 268 n. 46
- Miller, W. H. 139
- Milner-White, Eric 87–88
- Montague, Charles Edward 4–6, 13, 19, 20, 107, 244, 247, 248, 249
- Morgan, David 58, 259 n. 1
- music hall 28, 113, 131, 132
- Nash, Paul 176, 186
- National Mission of Repentance and Hope 207, 208, 211, 231, 276 n. 18
- New Zealand 11, 67, 205
- Noel, Conrad 79, 84, 229, 263 n. 82
- Northcott, Hubert 182–183
- Old Bill idealism 189–196, 249
- Old Soldiers Never Die* 8–9, 10, 102, 155 *see also* Frank Richards
- Owen, Wilfred 194–195

- Oxford University 36–37, 47, 55, 58, 62, 65, 67–75, 76, 77, 81, 149, 213, 229, 260 n. 32, 278 n. 69
- pacifism 37, 89, 233–238
- Parker, Linda 23
- Parry Okeden, Carl 106–107
- Partridge, Eric 10–12, 20, 151, 159, 162, 244, 247, 252 n. 35
- Peel, Maurice 149, 151, 268 n. 55
- Peel, William 86
- Ponsonby, Maurice 184–185
- Porter, Patrick 42, 276 n. 8
- Presbyterian army chaplains 49, 54, 56, 167, 180, 196, 236
- Presbyterians 41, 47, 49, 54–55, 85, 86, 121, 181, 184, 233
- public schools 18, 31, 43, 58, 65, 69, 70–71, 110, 111, 113, 135, 136, 161, 213, 221, 260 n. 29
- Punch* 132, 173–174
- Pym, Tom 55, 71, 78, 105, 137, 145, 158, 210, 227–229, 230, 231, 241, 246, 249, 276 n. 27
- Quakers 42
- Railton, David 103, 134–135, 179, 199–200, 222–227, 231, 232, 241, 247
- Raven, Charles E. 70, 106, 136, 141, 144, 203–204, 212, 227, 231, 233, 234–238, 241, 243
- Raymond, Ernest 17–19, 20, 21, 166
- Richards, Frank 8–9, 10, 12, 20, 102, 132, 137, 140, 155–156, 247
- Redmond, Willie 163
- Remarque, Erich Maria 1
- Retreat, A Story of 1918* 12–16
- Reynolds, Frank 173–174
- Roberts, Robbie 132
- Robinson, Alan 23, 50
- Rogers, Guy 85, 125, 141, 160, 214, 231
- Roman Catholic army chaplains 2, 3–4, 5, 7, 11, 12, 14, 19, 20, 48, 52, 56, 96, 145, 159–165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 187, 199, 248, 270 n. 110 and 113
- Rowlands, D. L. 127–128
- Rowntree, B. Seebohm 71
- Royal Welch Fusiliers 1, 8, 123, 132
- Royden, Maude 211
- St Omer [AChD HQ] 52, 55, 66, 96, 97, 98, 117, 125, 153, 157, 177, 201, 219, 244
- Sassoon, Siegfried 4, 6–7, 19, 21, 89, 150, 173, 234, 236, 247
- Schweitzer, Richard 22, 183, 249
- (Second) South African War [Boer War] 35, 46, 89, 93, 256 n. 41
- Shaw-Stewart, Patrick 18
- Sheffield, Gary 136, 148, 170
- Sheppard, H. R. L. (Dick) 71, 93, 205–210, 213, 216, 231, 233–235, 237, 238, 241, 243, 276 n. 11
- Skirth, J. R. 128
- Simon Called Peter* 16–17, 21, 190, 247 see also Robert Keable
- Simms, J. M. 49, 52, 54
- Smith, George 46
- Smith, R. Mudie 32
- Smyth, John 142, 269 n. 59
- Snape, Michael 2, 23–24, 50, 121, 125, 162, 166, 181, 188, 249
- Snowden, Philip 154, 155
- Somme offensive 5, 10, 91, 103–104, 116, 121–122, 123, 124, 132, 146, 168, 173, 178, 222, 246, 266 n. 94
- Songs and Slang of the British Soldier (1914–1918)* 11, 20, 252 n. 35
- South Africa 16, 41, 67, 205, 256 n. 41
- Southwell, Henry K. 122–124, 194, 246
- Stanhope-Walker, J. M. 91–92
- Stansfeld, John 71, 72
- Sunday Schools 28–29
- superstition 183, 184, 187–188, 273 n. 48
- Surfleet, Archie 137–138
- Talbot, Edward Stuart [Bishop of Winchester] 35, 36, 49, 53, 57, 58, 62, 77, 87, 210, 215, 220, 255 n. 21
- Talbot, Edward Stuart [Jr.] 62, 160, 219

- Talbot House [Toc H] 14, 164,  
213–218, 241, 243, 249, 255. n. 45
- Talbot, Neville Stuart 49, 91, 113,  
130, 152, 158, 160, 173, 180, 183,  
205, 210, 213–214, 246, 248,  
266 n. 8, 276 n. 27
- Tanner, Edward Victor 99–100
- Tawney, Richard H. 79, 178, 231
- Taylor-Smith, John [Chaplain-General]  
48, 49–51, 54, 55, 56, 74, 158
- Tell England* 17–19, 20, 21, 166 *see*  
*also* Ernest Raymond
- Temple, William 76, 80–81, 83, 84,  
205, 207–211, 235, 260 n. 29, 262  
n. 55
- The Army and Religion* report (1919)  
181, 184, 185, 186, 196, 198
- Thom, John 139
- Thompson, Kenneth 72
- Tomb of the Unknown Warrior  
222–226, 227–228, 241, 249
- university settlements 70–72, 75,  
228–229, 239
- Walke, Bernard 37
- Watson, Alexander 191–192, 273  
n. 57
- Westcott, F. B. 75–76
- Westerdale, T. L. B. 200
- Westminster Abbey 26, 38, 223
- Weston, Frank 86
- Wilberforce, Basil 39, 40
- Wilkinson, Alan 22, 55, 76, 132,  
160, 221
- Williams, Sarah 30
- Winnington-Ingram, A. F. [Bishop of  
London] 26, 38, 39–40, 48, 53, 58,  
77, 230
- Winter, Jay 2, 128–129, 143
- With a Machine Gun to Cambrai* 10  
*see also* George Coppard
- Woodward, C. S. 97, 210