

Faith and Patriotism: Some Snapshots and Reflections on 1914 and Beyond

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Abstract

This article offers some fascinating ‘snapshots’ into theological activity and awareness between British and German theologians just prior to WW1, between the wars and post WW2. He helpfully surveys the differences between German and English understandings of the Church-Struggle or *Kirchenkampf* and some of its struggles which we might now name as too much identification with the prevailing culture and not enough critical distance. He considers how public opinion was divided in the 1930s the role of significant Anglican leaders in and post WW2. He concludes with reflections on Luther’s two ‘regiments’, the essential spiritual domain of the Church and the temporal, political power of the State and with Harnack’s understanding of the church with thoughts on implications for how we relate to church and state today.

Introduction

Faith and patriotism is a complex subject with apparent anomalies in any age. In my ‘retirement’ I ponder on the glories of the Romanesque Cathedral of Gloucester. The East Window is 14th century and one of the largest Gothic windows ever built: about 22 metres by 11.5 metres. It is thought that it was a war memorial to the soldiers from Gloucestershire and the West Country who died in the Battle of Crécy in 1346. The great window was certainly a symbol of successful English supremacy in the long wars with France. But, of course, there was no difference of faith. Anomalies are not new, though in 20th century Europe and after two World Wars, we know them to be acute. I will offer just a few ‘snapshots’ for our reflection with no pretence to a systematic survey – which would require several volumes rather than this brief paper.

The Edwardian Summer

First, however, I must set the scene. There was great interest in German theology in England (especially in the Church of England) throughout the 19th century. Not all was approving. Dr Edward Bouverie Pusey, the great Tractarian (Oxford/High Church Movement) studied in Göttingen and Berlin in the 1820s. He got to know the leading German biblical critics. In 1828 he wrote against what he saw to be the rationalistic character of German theology. (Ironically enough, in Pusey House, Oxford there is the best extant collection of the original works of many early 19th century German theologians, collected by Pusey. The destruction

and havoc of the Second World War meant that many originals in Germany were destroyed.) As the science of Biblical criticism advanced in British Universities in the 19th century, there was much more sympathy for German theology. Though on biblical criticism, English theologians tended to be shy of more radical German conclusions, especially in relation to the New Testament. There is, of course, a vast literature. A very good summary, touching on the relationship between English and German theology in the 19th century can be found in Peter Hinchliff's *God and History: Aspects of British Theology 1875 – 1914*. I draw on this work for this first part of my paper¹, together with an account of the Anglo- German Peace exchanges 1908-09 by Keith Clements, now found in *Ecumenical Dynamic: living in more than one place at once*.²

The years leading up to 1914, (often referred to in English as the 'Edwardian Age' after the King, Edward VII) England seemed full of peace, certainty and optimism (except perhaps in Ireland). There were legendary hot summers and the music of Elgar seemed very fitting. (First recognised, by the way, in Germany). In theology it has been described as a 'silver' rather than a 'golden' age. In philosophy, idealism was fashionable and seemed quite compatible with faith. There was talk of 'The New Theology'.³ Charles Gore, Bishop of first Oxford then Worcester and Birmingham was developing a socially concerned, sacramental understanding of Christianity. The Scottish (Reformed) philosopher and theologian Edward Caird was influential in introducing a Neo-Hegelian movement into British theology. R. J. Campbell, a Congregationalist, who later became an Anglican priest, propagated this 'new theology' derived from Caird and Hegel and also Schleiermacher through the French Protestant Sabatier. Only B. F. Westcott the New Testament scholar and later bishop of Durham had been working on international questions, particularly the naval armaments race (which was so decisive a cause of rivalry between Britain and Germany) at an early conference in 1889.

On the eve of 1914 the most interesting 'snapshot' of an English theologian is probably that of B. H. Streeter, not least for our purposes because of his critical appreciation of German scholarship. Streeter's special concern was the origin of the Synoptic Gospels. He argued for Q (Quelle) as the primary literary source behind the Synoptics. Streeter was here greatly influenced by Adolf Harnack. The theory of Q remained important in British New Testament scholarship and is still not without its adherents. Streeter had a related interest in the quest for the historical Jesus – including a great project by his own mentor William Sanday. Streeter was influenced by Albert Schweitzer's *Quest of the Historical Jesus*. Other English New Testament scholars had read Schweitzer, including William Temple, A. J. Rawlinson and F. C. Burkitt.

¹ Hinchliff, P. (1992). *God and History: Aspects of British Theology 1875 – 1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

² Clements, K. (2013). *Ecumenical Dynamic: Living in More than One Place at Once*. Geneva: WCC. See pp. 57-76. Clements had originally published some of this material in *The Ecumenical Review*, 59, no. 2-3, 2007.

³ See Hinchliff, P. (1992). *God and History: Aspects of British Theology 1875 – 1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press 199 ff.

As far as church leadership is concerned there were also significant contacts between Britain and Germany. The Quaker Joseph Allan Baker had attended the Hague Peace Conference in 1907 and was convinced that the churches should also be mobilized. Baron Eduard de Neuville reciprocated on the German side. Baker achieved the backing of the Government and the Archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, and secured funding from the Quaker chocolate magnate Joseph Rowntree. Roman Catholic support was also given. In June 1908 one hundred and thirty-one German guests disembarked at Southampton and were fêted in London and Scotland. They included the senior Court Chaplain Ernst von Dryander. Their progress included a reception given by King Edward VII. With their hosts they stated that war was unthinkable. A reciprocal visit was arranged to Germany in June 1909. It included six bishops. The previous year's sentiments were reiterated, and Kaiser Wilhelm II received them very emotionally at Potsdam. It was agreed that the two visits should be followed up in some structural way. *The Associated Council of Churches of the British and German Empires for fostering friendly relations between the Two Peoples* was inaugurated. Its British debut took place in February 1911, Adolf Harnack being a guest speaker.

My *first* point here, in offering this inadequate summary of theological activity just prior to 1914, is to show that Anglican and other British theologians (and Church leaders such as Gore and Temple) were well aware of German theology, read it and respected it even if they did not always agree with it. There was also in existence the wider Anglo-German Movement for Friendship, which was to meet again at Lake Constance only days before the War to found the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches. The World Alliance actually met during the war in Bern in 1915 and again in 1919. Representatives at the latter conference included George Bell and Nathan Söderblom, Archbishop of Uppsala. There were, then, many points of contact between the British Churches and the German Churches, both at a theological and church leadership level. My *second* point is to note the *lack* of any serious theological discussion of either nationalism or patriotism, nor, with the exception of Westcott, of the underlying causes of the war. English theologians were pre-occupied with questions as to how faith had to be related to 'modern' knowledge or about questions of the historical origins of Christianity. One of the Anglican theologians one might have expected to have discussed questions of loyalty to the state and patriotism would be Fr. Neville Figgis of the Community of the Resurrection, a student of the distinguished historian Lord Acton. But in his otherwise relevant *Churches in the Modern State*⁴ the nearest he gets to the subject is his clear teaching that social liberty is *only* to be guaranteed against the modern omnipotent State when more than individual freedom is found; the real question of freedom was, for him, that of smaller communities having the freedom to live within the wider community of the state. To illustrate *both* points I note that Adolf Harnack's *Constitution and Law of the Church in the First Two Centuries* was translated into English *within only months of its publication* in Leipzig in 1910. The English edition was edited by H. A. D. Major, one of the founders of Anglican

⁴ Lord Acton, (1913). *Churches in the Modern State*. London: Longmans Green.

'modernism' and an exponent of the new theology. Neither Harnack nor Major dealt with our question.

1914

In the summer of 1914, as well as literally world shattering events, George Bell, taught by William Temple and Henry Scott-Holland (who influenced him in terms of social and industrial conscience), took up his place as a chaplain to Archbishop Randall Davidson of Canterbury. Almost on the same day, August 1st, Davidson wrote to the chief Court Chaplain to Kaiser Wilhelm II, Dryander:

War between two great Christian nations of kindred race and sympathies is, or ought to be, unthinkable in the twentieth century.⁵

The following day the Archbishop heard Sir Edward Grey, the British Foreign Secretary, speak in Parliament and returned convinced that there was no alternative. In early September a letter arrived at Lambeth from Germany entitled: *Appeal to Evangelical Christians Abroad*. It had been composed by those in Germany leading the Anglo-German Movement for Friendship. The signatures included those of Adolf Harnack, Adolf Deissmann and Dryander himself. They denied that Germany was responsible for the war and talked of the 1910 World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh. If this fellowship was now broken it was not their responsibility but those abroad. It continued:

With the deepest conviction we attribute it to those who have long secretly and cunningly been spinning a web of conspiracy against Germany, which now they have flung over us in order to strangle us therein.⁶

Davidson and the other Archbishops (York and Armagh) together with Free Church leaders repudiated this.

Two months later Adolf Harnack was a signatory to what was called the *Manifesto of the Intellectuals*. Karl Barth was to describe this as a perversion of Christian ethics, dogmatics, biblical interpretation and history. British theologians were deeply shocked at what they perceived to be the attitudes of their German counter-parts, with whom for so long many had been in theological partnership. Theologians as well as popular preachers had taken sides on both sides of the North/German Sea.

There were already a few Anglican theologians at this time who had been critical of the assumption of unimpeded, intellectual and moral advance inherited from the 19th century theory of liberal human progress. Neville Talbot, later to become Bishop of Pretoria in South

⁵ Bell, G. K. (1952). *Randall Davidson*. Oxford: OUP, 732-3.

⁶ Bell, G. K. (1952). *Randall Davidson*. Oxford: OUP 740 ff.

Africa, in the book *Foundations* had already said that the 'modern age' was differentiated from the 19th century by the belief that science had made people feel matter was more important than mind or spirit, that the inevitable progress of humankind had been destroyed and that nothing was absolutely right or wrong. And also that confidence in a 'free-trade' economic ideology had evaporated.

This apart, there was very little in anything written before 1914 to suggest that theologians or church leaders were equipped to understand the cataclysm which was about to overtake the nations. In Peter Hinchliff's words:

They were simply not provided with the necessary tools to devise a theology of tragedy.⁷

And the Christian churches in Germany and Britain prayed for victory and preached that God was on their side. In this respect Free Church and Church of Scotland preaching was in no way different from the Church of England. Roman Catholic voices were equally strident. Controversialists such as Hilaire Belloc and G. K. Chesterton (who actually became a Roman Catholic in 1922) characterised the war in terms of the struggle of the German Reformation to impose itself over Catholicism!⁸ Not that *all* sermons or statements from Church leaders were bellicose. Cosmo Gordon Lang, as Archbishop of York, landed himself in trouble for speaking of the 'sacred memory' of Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1914 by referring to his finding the Kaiser kneeling in prayer by the coffin of Queen Victoria, his grandmother, at Osborne on the Isle of Wight where the Queen-Empress had died in 1901.

Examples of critical awareness were also heard: one being Henry Scott-Holland (who influenced Bell and who died in 1918), now best known for a strange sermon on death and a fine hymn still sung, including the lines:

With thy living fire of judgement
Purge this realm of bitter things
and cleanse the body of this empire⁹
Through the glory of the Lord.

Post-1918 Developments

George Bell (who had himself lost his two younger brothers in the last weeks of the War) was at the centre of reconciliation and rebuilding after 1918 as the Archbishop of Canterbury's chaplain. The story of Bell and the German Churches has been well documented in Andrew Chandler's excellent *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the*

⁷ Hinchliff, P. (1992). *God and History: Aspects of British Theology 1875-1914*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 246.

⁸ Louis Jebb, *Tablet*, 11 January 2014.

⁹ Now usually 'bowdlerised' as 'nation'.

*Church of England and the Crisis in German Protestantism 1933-1939.*¹⁰ This part of my paper is indebted to Andrew Chandler's work, though I personally examined the relevant papers of the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations referred to by Chandler, when I was Secretary of its successor body at Lambeth.

But first a word of caution. It is important to understand the historical differences between our churches in relation to the State. In spite of successive Acts of Uniformity implying that the English Nation was Anglican and the Church English, British history qualifies this national ecclesiology. From the beginning there had been more radical English Protestants following Calvin and Zwingli more than Luther and a great many home-grown Independents and Baptists. Recusants, 'Papists', also continued communion with the Church of Rome, many occasionally conforming to communion with the Church of England. In the 17th century Anglicanism itself had been abolished and its adherents persecuted under the Commonwealth. By the 18th century toleration of both Catholic and Protestant 'non-conformists' was normal. Legal religious restrictions were successively abolished by the mid-19th century. Only in the 16th century could the theory *cuius regio, eius religio* be arguably true in England. Further, the Sovereign is – since Elizabeth I – Supreme Governor (not Head) of the Church of England. That was never identical to the German prince as *summus episcopus*, as Article XXXVII (of the *Articles of Religion*) makes clear:

We give not to our Princes the ministry either of God's Word, or the Sacraments.

Luther's distinction between the province of the church and the law with the 'two regiments' of religion and politics decisively separate, was never found in the Church of England. Bishops continue to sit in the House of Lords as a voting part of the legislature to this day. Bishops in the 17th and 18th century were appointed by reason of their loyalist, Tory or Whig (royal, conservative, liberal) persuasion. In the 19th century evangelical (not *evangelisch*) members of the House of Commons campaigned against the slave-trade. In the 19th century the influence of Christian socialism (through writers such as Charles Kingsley) gave the whole church a social conscience which led to the practical alleviation of poverty as well as political and economic comment. By the 20th century this tradition reached its apogee in William Temple in the period we are considering.

One of the decisive effects of the First World War and especially the dismay of British theologians at the apparent uncritical apologetic for the German Empire (in particular the invasion of Belgium) was that the theological community lost trust in the theological findings of their German colleagues. Theologians and Church leaders such as Arthur Headlam (who had worked with Sanday on an important commentary on Romans) spoke of a riot of German theories. He became a major figure with Bell in the emerging Ecumenical Movement

¹⁰ Chandler, A. (1997). *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis in German Protestantism 1933-1939*. Church of England Record Society: Boydell Press.

and later Bishop of Gloucester; differing (as we shall see) radically from Bell in his assessment of the German 'Church-Struggle'.

Interest in German-speaking theology only revived eventually with discussion of *formgeschichte* but more widely with Barth's *Epistle to the Romans*, translated by Sir Edwyn Hoskyns. Michael Ramsey was greatly influenced by this. In the meantime Bell, by 1924 Dean of Canterbury, with Adolf Deissman organised a series of conferences between British and German theologians (1927, 1928 and 1931). At these conferences Bell noted a radical difference of interpretation of the relationship between the Kingdom of God and the life of the Church.¹¹

The Church of England and the *Kirchenkampf*

While Bell, Headlam, and other Anglicans did not know a great deal about either Luther or the detailed history of the German Churches, Lutheran, Reformed and Union, they were well and closely informed of the emergent Church-Struggle. In 1933 the Church of England Council on Foreign Relations was established through the efforts of Bell and Headlam, now Bishop of Gloucester, who became its first Chairman: the same year that Adolf Hitler became Chancellor of Germany. Some Anglicans saw Hitler's election as a consequence of the demeaning conditions of the Treaty of Versailles, including Cosmo Gordon Lang, who had become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1928, who condemned in it what was 'vindictive and arbitrary'.¹² Others were surprised that many German churchmen believed Hitler had saved Germany from communism.¹³ *The Times* correspondent in Berlin, Norman Ebbutt, provided accurate accounts of the Church-Struggle and the Church press in England also gave good coverage. Headlam received regular reports for the Council on Foreign Relations through the Embassy Chaplain in Berlin, Ronald Cragg. The Archbishop of Canterbury also received information through the Council and used official contacts through the British Foreign Office. Bell had 'friends' in the Foreign Office but also a large, emergent ecumenical network. This included Dietrich Bonhoeffer, whom Bell came to know while the latter was pastor of the Lutheran Church in Forest Hill, South London, in the mid-thirties. He also paid regular visits to Germany by reason of the *Life and Work Movement*, eventually to be a constituent part of the World Council of Churches. Clements says of the Oxford Life and Work Conference of 1937, which addressed issues of Church and State, that 'the churches were far better prepared to face war in 1939 than they had been in 1914'.¹⁴

The best concise description of the *Kirchenkampf* in English is in Chandler's *Brethren*. By 1933 many English bishops had protested against the concentration camps and the

¹¹ Chandler, A. (1997). *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis in German Protestantism 1933-1939*. Church of England Record Society: Boydell Press and Clements, K. (2013). *Ecumenical Dynamic: Living in More than One Place at Once*. Geneva: WCC, 110.

¹² Beaken, R. (2012). *Cosmo Lang*. London and New York: Tauris, 183.

¹³ Chandler, A. (1997). *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis in German Protestantism 1933-1939*. Church of England Record Society: Boydell Press, 10.

¹⁴ Clements, K. (2013). *Ecumenical Dynamic: Living in More than One Place at Once*. Geneva: WCC, 111.

persecution of the Jews, including the Archbishop of Canterbury's public condemnation of *Kristallnacht* in *The Times*.¹⁵ The Bishop of Durham, the larger-than-life Hensley Henson, even went as far as to suggest that Hitler's assassination would be a good Christian act. Even those of a more pacifist persuasion, such as Dick Sheppard at St Paul's Cathedral, sensed the seriousness and danger.¹⁶ Chandler cogently argues that English observers saw the *Kirchenkampf* not so much as a struggle for faith as a conflict between church and state. On the other side, German observers from the stand-point of the Confessing Church saw the struggle as profoundly doctrinal because of the bankruptcy of liberal Protestantism and natural theology. Bell directed his criticism not so much against the quiescent Church administration personified in *Reichsbischof* Müller but the tyranny of the State which imposed Müller on the Church.¹⁷

But there were not only differences between German and English understanding of the Church-Struggle. Within the Anglican observers there were notoriously differing opinions. Headlam argued, contrary to Bell, that the German Government should not be criticised because that would endanger the German Church politically. He was no great lover of the Barthian tendency of the Confessing Church. He rejected, of course, a faith which put race over God but he did argue that the German Churches should be able to express their faith in an appropriate German culture. He supported pastors who were neither members of the *Deutsche Christen* party nor the Confessing Church. He opposed interference in the 'internal troubles of another Church'. The Archbishop of Canterbury, although a naturally cautious conservative, looked to Bell for guidance rather than Headlam, even though the latter chaired his Council on Foreign Relations.

At the other end of the spectrum the librarian of the Council for Foreign Relations, A. J. Macdonald, was over-sympathetic to the German Government and its puppets in the Church. For some time this remained an internal and confidential difference of opinion. But in 1937 it clearly surfaced in the Church Assembly (predecessor of General Synod). Headlam thought the neo-paganism movements exaggerated and denied that there was religious persecution in Germany. Bell passionately stated the opposite. Temple (by now Archbishop of York) supported Bell and while Lang (Archbishop of Canterbury) diplomatically noted that Headlam's views were his own, he went on to add that Hitler had never used his power beneficially! Later Lang was to be further embarrassed by Headlam and public letters were exchanged between himself and Bell making their position clear. This sharp English disagreement puts in perspective the differing perspectives and convictions which were found on the German side at this time.

¹⁵ Beaken, R. (2012). *Cosmo Lang*. London and New York: Tauris, 185.

¹⁶ Cf. Chandler, A. (1997). *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis in German Protestantism 1933-1939*. Church of England Record Society, Boydell Press 11-20.

¹⁷ Chandler, A. (1997). *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis in German Protestantism 1933-1939*. Church of England Record Society: Boydell Press, 21-22.

Many years later, Ulrich Simon was to write *Sitting in Judgement: An Interpretation of History 1913 – 1963*.¹⁸ As well as reading these conflicting confidential minutes of the Council on Foreign Relations papers at Lambeth and the subsequent Church Assembly debate, Ulrich Simon also, for me, has a personal significance. Born of Jewish parents, Ulrich Simon was brought up in Berlin. He was a refugee in London and was baptised under the guidance of George Bell and later ordained in the Anglican Church. None of his friends survived the Holocaust. He was Professor of Christian Literature at King's College, London, and when I was a student taught Old Testament. His readings of Isaiah in Hebrew were unforgettable. He professed a huge indebtedness to King's London where he had read theology as an impoverished refugee student. Headlam had been principle of King's years before he became Bishop of Gloucester. Simon wrote this of Headlam:

Here was a highly gifted prelate, of outstanding integrity, an apostle of Christian unity committed to international understanding, who sided publicly with the near-Fascist advocacy of friendship with Nazi Germany. He presented me with the hard problem of the discernment of righteousness. Many weak and muddled people sense the wrong and usually avoid it, but strong minds side with a party which offends our simple moral instincts. How is this possible? Headlam, for example, stood for a very English Christianity and, because of his love for tradition and authority, fell into the trap of shibboleths, such as 'church', 'home', 'country'.¹⁹

Public Opinion and Pacifism

In the 1930s public opinion in Britain was consistently divided. For some the great threat was Communism. For others it was the emergence of Fascism in Italy, Spain and Germany. Politically, policies of 'appeasement' prevailed. Churchill was politically in the wilderness. The cultural elite of the country were conscious of the carnage of the trenches and pacifism became popular, fostered by the emergence, for example, of the poetry of the trenches as exemplified in the War Poets and writers such as Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. Poets and musicians such as W. H. Auden and Benjamin Britten were 'conscientious objectors'.

Within the Churches Dick Sheppard at St Paul's Cathedral, who had himself been an Army Chaplain in the War, led the Peace Pledge Union. He was received by both Lang and Temple, whilst making it clear they did not share his pacifist stance.²⁰ There was an Anglican Pacifist Fellowship. Lang spoke in the House of Lords in December 1939 asserting non-the-less that the first task of the war was to cast out evil but he then went on to consider how the Church must contribute to a just peace.²¹ Temple as Archbishop of York was to follow this up with a

¹⁸ Simon, U. (1978). *Sitting in Judgement: An Interpretation of History 1913 – 1963*. London: SPCK.

¹⁹ Simon, U. (1978). *Sitting in Judgement: An Interpretation of History 1913 – 1963*. London: SPCK, 50. For a full account of Headlam's ambiguous and confused attitude to the Church-Struggle see, Jasper R. (1960). *Arthur Cayley Headlam: the Life and Letters of a Bishop*. London: Faith Press, 284ff.

²⁰ Beaken, R. (2012). *Cosmo Lang*. London and New York: Tauris, 193.

²¹ Beaken, R. (2012). *Cosmo Lang*. London and New York: Tauris, 194.

major conference at Malvern the following year. In the Second World War there were no formal prayers for victory in the Church of England as there had been in the First War.

One fascinating snap-shot of developing opinion can be found in the writings of Vera Brittain, social commentator, diarist, writer and proto-feminist. She was a disciple of Sheppard in the Peace Pledge Union. She had lost her younger brother and fiancé during the Great War. She was at first scandalized that her baby's nurse had put a Flanders poppy on her infant daughter's cot on Armistice Day 1930. The she remembered that the nurse had only been eight during the war. The baby girl grew up to be Baroness Shirley Williams, founder member of the Social Democrat party and still a distinguished speaker in the House of Lords. More significantly, during the Second World War Vera Brittain's convictions altered and she qualified her pacifist stance and re-embraced a Christian faith.²²

1945 and After

The developments during the Second World War are well known, not least Bell's continuing links via Sweden with Bonhoeffer and his condemnation of the Allied Bombing of Dresden. But Archbishop Lang had himself cautioned about any spirit of vindictiveness or reprisals, though his denunciation of the Nazi regime as evil became stronger as the war continued. He publicly opposed indiscriminate bombing of civilians as early as 1941.²³ Lang gave much thought to plans for peace and this was followed through by his successor as Archbishop of Canterbury, William Temple, in terms of questions of social and economic order in Britain which were eventually to result in the birth of the Welfare State.

In relation to Germany there was almost universal determination that the economic and political mistakes of Versailles should not be repeated, Churchill being an eloquent advocate for magnanimity in victory and an advocate for European co-operation, especially between France and Germany as well as a United Nations with teeth that the old League of Nations so disastrously lacked. I offer one snap-shot of 'post war reconstruction'. Robert Runcie, later to be Archbishop of Canterbury, had interrupted his Oxford studies to join the Guards in 1942. In 1945 he was awarded the Military Cross for bravery in a tank skirmish. He *returned*

²² 'On the afternoon of VE Day I went to Whitehall... as I had in 1918. In spite of the flags, bells and streamers... the multitudes never surged into that outburst of relief known to history as Armistice Day... It is only civilians far from the line who burst into noisy rejoicing. The people of London had seen their fellow citizens killed and their homes destroyed; they had known danger, terror, apprehension and relief. Because of these things, their attitude to war's end resembled the attitude of soldiers at the front... And then came a strange experience... Walking dumbly and blindly up Whitehall at the end of the First War, I had felt no conviction of any divine principle, any Easter morning, any meeting again. Now, walking up Whitehall at the end of the Second, I became deeply aware that in the past five years, my attitude had changed... I knew that God lived, and that the sorrow and suffering in the world around me had come because men refused to obey His laws. The self-interested, provocative policies which had driven mankind to the edge of the abyss seemed to supply incontrovertible testimony that an opposite policy – the way of God, the road of the Cross – would produce an opposite result.' Brittain, V. (1979). *Testament of Experience*, London: Fontana, 362-3.

²³ Beaken, R. (2012). *Cosmo Lang*. London and New York: Tauris, 191-192.

to Germany after the war, taking part in the Oxford-Bonn University Exchange as part of a programme of reconciliation.

So far my ‘snap-shots’ have been from an English and Anglican perspective but my *final* story has, as far as I am aware, never been written up and I rely on its veracity upon a conversation many years after the event with an old Anglican priest called Wrangham-Hardy who was a British Army Chaplain during the War. It concerns Pastor Martin Niemöller. Niemöller’s story was well known in British circles and his trial in 1938 was followed closely. After the war had ended W. A. Visser ‘T Hooft, together with Bell and others wanted to invite Niemöller to the inauguration of the World Council of Churches in Amsterdam. It was thought that Niemöller had retired to a Schloss ‘somewhere’ in the British Occupied Sector. Eventually the Army Chaplain, armed with an invitation from Bell, tracked the castle down. He was received at the door by an aged *Graf* who said he would ask if Pastor Niemöller would receive him. He would and he was invited to dinner. Beautiful silver and Dresden tableware. But little actual food – this was Germany of 1946-7. Niemöller eventually agreed to go to Amsterdam, under the sole condition that he could travel on his *Weimar* passport! Bell spoke to the British Foreign Secretary, Ernest Bevan, and it was so!

I relate this story with some caution as it is not told in James Bentley’s *Martin Niemöller* (Oxford, 1984). But I don’t think the old Army Chaplain’s story came out of no-where. The first trip ‘abroad’ that Niemöller made after the War was actually in February 1946 to Geneva. This was in connection *with* the emerging World Council of Churches, constituted in Amsterdam in 1948. I suspect that the oral story relates to the Geneva meeting. After that Niemöller travelled very extensively in support of the ecumenical movement – though he was still sometimes branded as a nationalist.²⁴

Reflections

I spoke at the onset of ‘anomalies’. I will therefore end with something which relates to the previous story. In 1939 Bell was perplexed that the Niemöller he so admired had still offered to return to U-boat service for the German Government which had imprisoned him. Bell confided in Karl Barth. Barth replied: Niemöller is a good – a *too* good German, and a very good – a *too* good Lutheran. But he went on to say that there were those who saw what was actually going on and that they needed prayer and sympathy and that they would soon be visible and audible.²⁵ The correspondence did not continue (or at least it is not in Bell’s papers). A matter for reflection today in relation to faith and patriotism might well be on Barth’s cryptic criticism of Niemöller, which it must be added was before Niemöller himself became a pacifist. Barth indicates a criticism of Luther (or at least Lutheranism) and German nationalism (as it then was).

²⁴ Cf. Bentley, J. (1945). *Martin Niemöller*. Oxford: OUP, 199-200.

²⁵ Chandler, A. (1997). *Brethren in Adversity: Bishop George Bell, the Church of England and the Crisis in German Protestantism 1933-1939*. Church of England Record Society: Boydell Press, 32.

As a post-script, I offer two thoughts for our discussion on the period 1914 – 1945.

First, I go back to Luther's two 'regiments', the essential spiritual domain of the Church and the temporal, political power of the State. While the notion of the 'godly Prince' is familiar to Anglicans and indeed very much part of the Tudor apologia for the English Reformation, there was always at least in appearance the agreement of the ecclesiastical government of the Church, whether through Convocation or the bishops in the Upper House of Parliament. Luther, on the other hand, had to rely more on the State alone for the defence of the Reformation. *Summus episcopus*. After German unification in the 19th century the State became a much 'greater' factor with respect to each of the still separate and divided *Landeskirchen*. *Second*, was the German Protestant sense of the Church as a 'divine structure' in some sense weakened by its general understanding of law in the 19th century? Mention has been made of Harnack's *Constitution and Law of the Church* as published on the eve of the First World War. In its Preface Harnack notes his disagreement in some aspects but major agreement with another German Protestant historian and jurist, Rudolf Sohm. Sohm had published in 1909 a major study of the nature and origins of Catholicism. Sohm argued in this and earlier works that the Church was *wholly* spiritual, while law was wholly secular. The development of legal and institutional structures in the primitive Church (primitive Catholicism) was an abandonment of the original 'charismatic' origins of the Christian Church. Sohm's ideas attracted considerable interest and arguably had implications for the relationship between church and state. Sohm's thesis would have been flatly contradicted by Figgis (mentioned earlier) who argued that the respect for the structural integrity and freedom of other bodies was essential for a healthy state. Moreover, arguably, if Sohm's (and apparently Harnack's) view of the Church is that essentially in relation to the State it is only a conglomerate of individual, charismatic Christians, with no ultimate status as a corporate institutional entity, as the Body of Christ, then *individual* prophetic witness could be expected *vis-à-vis* an absolutist state but hardly more.

At the least there is a contrast between such a charismatic understanding of the church (not without similar advocates today, for example James Dunn's portrayal of the original Church as a kind of chaotic collection of diverse, spirit-led, separate congregations) and the portrayal of the Church in the Meissen Agreement. In particular, the strong ecclesiology which opens our *Common Statement*:

The Church, the Body of Christ, must always be seen in this perspective as instrumental of God's ultimate purpose. The Church exists for the glory of God and to serve, in obedience to the mission of Christ, the reconciliation of humankind and of all creation. Therefore the Church is sent into the world as a sign, instrument and foretaste of a reality which comes from beyond history – the Kingdom, or Reign of God. It is already a provisional embodiment of God's will which is the coming of the Kingdom. The Church is a divine reality, holy and transcending present finite reality.

At the same time, as a human institution, it shares all the ambiguity and frailty of the human condition and is always in need of repentance, reform and renewal.²⁶

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²⁶ *On the Way to Visible Unity. A Common Statement 1988*, Meissen, para.3.