Faith in the Furnace: British Christians in the Armed Services, 1939-1945

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Material Abstract

Many historians have sought to portray the World Wars of the twentieth century as drivers of secularisation in Great Britain. Much of this analysis has been based on an over-reliance on religious statistics, typically those relating to churchgoing. More recently, greater focus has been brought to bear on other manifestations of Christian belief and practice in British society, with some historians focussing on the impact of warfare on religious faith on the home front or in the British Army. To date, no wider, in-depth study of the religious experiences of men and women across the armed services, who considered themselves to be active Christians, that is pre-war church members and regular attenders, has been undertaken. This study argues the British armed forces during the Second World War was a milieu within which Christian faith could flourish. This was supported by the provision of effective chaplaincy services, as well as by service personnel developing their own modes of devotion and worship. Although, initially, not always fitting comfortably into a military environment, Christians were able to develop new aspects of their identity as warriors, identities that were informed and underpinned by their religious convictions. The resilience of pre-war faith, as expressed through frequent use of the Bible, hymnody and prayer, enabled them to mediate the ethical and moral challenges of warfare, and to emerge from the war with a strengthened faith. Ultimately, this study challenges existing notions of a slump in faith during the war years and positions itself within a growing historiography that acknowledges the continued and renewed importance of religious faith for millions of Britons during this period. It also suggests that this recasting of faith helps to account for the religious revival in 1950s Britain, therefore challenging recent narratives of this being a decade of religious torpor and decay.

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Statement of Copyright

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Dedication

To Dawn who was there at the beginning through to the end. And in honour of those who have gone before and those whose time is yet to come.

Chapter One – Literature Review and Methodology

Introduction

`The gradual decline of Christendom is one of the central themes in the history of western Europe and North America during the last three centuries', claimed Hugh McLeod.[1] For the previous four decades, historians and sociologists of religion have debated the causes, nature, pace and extent of this secularisation in British society during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As Clive Field contended, what started out as a secularisation narrative became a thesis, then a theory, then a paradigm.[2] The case made by Steve Bruce, who did not cite any decade or epoch as especially significant, was that secularisation represented an `erosion of the supernatural.'[3] Whilst a gradualist school has located its origins in the later eighteenth century, instigated by rapid industrialisation, urbanisation and the intellectual impact of the Enlightenment, with a protracted decline taking place over a large number of decades, Callum Brown has claimed there was a revolutionary change, with Christianity remaining a resilient force in Britain until the 1960s, when sharp declines in religious observance and affiliation took place.[4]

McLeod has argued that whilst the 1960s did see a significant rupture of Christianity in the UK, its roots could be traced to the beginning of the twentieth century and beyond.[5] Jeffrey Cox identified a `diffusive Christianity' in his study of Lambeth churches between 1870-1930.[6] Although this was a period of overall statistical numerical decline, for Cox popular religion maintained its own integrity and detachment from official norms. Individuals defined their own religious beliefs within a context informed, but not directed by, denominational orthodoxy. Within this paradigm, Cox identified a gradual decline in the communal importance of the English

[1] Hugh McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.16
[2] Clive D. Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival? Quantifying Belonging, Behaving and Believing in the Long 1950s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave McMillan, 2015), p.4
[3] Steve Bruce, *Religion in the Modern World: From Cathedrals to Cults* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1996), pp. 26-53
[4] Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Harlow: Pearson, 2006); Callum G. Brown `The Secularisation Decade: What the 1960s Have Done to the Study of Religious History', in H. McLeod and W. Ustorf, (eds), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp.29-46; Callum G. Brown `Women and Religion in Britain: The Autobiographical View of the Fifties and Sixties', in Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape, (eds.), *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in Honour of Hugh McLeod* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp.159-73
[5] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*
[6] Jeffrey Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society: Lambeth, 1870-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982)

Churches from the 1880s onwards, as they increasingly failed to participate in the wider cultural and social life of communities.

To identify whether the Second World War was a significant period in the secularisation of Britain, it is first necessary to have a clear definition of the concept. However this is a challenge as, for Brown and Michael Snape, `The absence of agreement on its definition, characteristics, timing, causes, or applicability to particular places or cultures, makes secularisation handy in argument through widespread application (and not a little fragrant abuse).'[7] However, in the 1950s and 60s there emerged a consensus in Britain and the United States that secularisation was `the declining social significance of religion.'[8] This was characterised by `large scale indifference to religion, significant hostility to the churches, and the declining institutional strength of religion in state and civil affairs.'[9]. More recently, the terms of what secularisation entails have been the subject of historiographical discord, with some commentators challenging the notion itself, `abandoning the existing maps for a more sensitive charting of the contours of modern religion.'[10]

For this study, secularisation will be taken to mean a decline in the formal observance of religion, as measured not only by church membership, church attendance and other statistical data, but also the significance of religious tropes in society, such as belief in a divine God, private prayer and knowledge of scripture and hymnody. These manifestations of faith were dubbed by Matthew Grimley the `slippery and unquantifiable question of the broader cultural influence of religion.'[11] Stephen Parker proposed that `Arguably, the historical study of the phenomenon of popular religion now has its own integrity equal to that of other perspectives on the history of religion in Britain.'[12] Similarly, Sarah Williams contended that it is people themselves, rather than contemporary clerical commentators, who should define

[7] Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape, `Introduction: Conceptualising Secularisation 1974-2010: the Influence of Hugh McLeod' in Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (eds.) *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in honour of Hugh McLeod* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p.1
[8] Bryan Wilson, *Religion in Secular Society* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), p.14
[9] Brown and Snape, `Conceptualising Secularisation', p.3
[10] Jane Garnett, Matthew Grimley, Alana Harris, William Whyte and Sarah Williams (eds.) *Redefining Christian Britain: Post-1945 Perspectives* (London: SCM Press, 2007), p.289
[11] Matthew Grimley, `The Religion of Englishness: Puritanism, Providentialism, and "National Character", 1918-1945', *Journal of British Studies*, 46 (2007), p.886
[12] Stephen Parker, *Faith on the Home Front: Aspects of Church Life and Popular Religion in Birmingham, 1939-1945* (London: Peter Lang, 2005), p.16

popular religious life.[13] Therefore, whilst acknowledging a numerical decline, both Parker and Williams cited an alternative means of assessing the importance of religion in British society, one which would claim that secularisation was a much more protracted process than Cox would argue. Consideration of the deeper aspects of religion as a lived experience would allow a distinction between the hard power of the Churches, their membership base and attendance figures, and their soft power, encompassing their broader cultural, political and ethical influence. However, a preoccupation of history from below, and with the local, should not lead to a neglect of national and international identities. Susan Thorne has argued that people's multiple religious identities have been ignored as historians attempted to ascribe a locality-based identity to people of the past.[14]

Within debates on secularisation, a further significant division exists between those like Brown, who see the late 1940s and 1950s as a time of religious revival in Britain, and others, including Clive Field, who argue that modest signs of revival were superficial at best.[15] Hugh McLeod argued that the `post-war revival was […] more modest and less widely spread than in the United States.'[16] Matthew Grimley has suggested a more nuanced post-war religious landscape, with Nonconformity continuing its pre-war decline, whilst Anglicanism experienced a modest revival.[17] Simon Green called the 1950s a decade of `false hopes' of a religious revival, with Britain ceasing to be a Christian country by 1960.[18] Similarly, Nigel Yates has termed the 1950s revival as `very fragile', with the decades between 1950 and 1970 needing to be taken as a whole, `In every case the events of the 1960s have had the ground laid for them, to a very large extent, in the 1950s.'[19] Alan Gilbert concurred with the notion that religious recovery in the 1950s was insignificant,[20] whilst Ian Machin stated that though `the Protestant Churches preserved reasonable stability in the post-war years

[13] Sarah C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880-1939* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.9
[14] Susan Thorne, *Congregational Missions and the Making of an Imperial Culture in Nineteenth-Century England* (Stanford University Press, CA, 1994), p.4
[15] Field*, Britain's Last Religious Revival?*
[16] McLeod, *The Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, p.10
[17] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.887
[18] Simon J.D. Green, `Was There as English Religious Revival in the 1950s?', *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 7 (2006), 517-38
[19] Nigel Yates, *Love Now, Pay Later? Sex and Religion in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: SPCK, 2010), pp.151-154
[20] Alan Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society* (London: Longman, 1980), p.77

up to 1960, [they] did not achieve collectively a revival of numbers and influence to the levels of three or four decades before.'[21] Sociologists Steve Bruce and Tony Glendenning claimed that the Second World War was a key secularising influence, as community ties and family formation were disrupted, negatively impacting on the transmission of faith down through generations.[22]

Amongst debates about the trajectory of British Christianity, the key enterprise of the Second World War has been somewhat glossed over, leaving a lacuna in the study of religious trends over the past century. This is a serious omission, as the war caused such major dislocations of previous routines and practices that it could either have provided an impetus towards further secularisation in the 1950s or acted as a period of resilient Christianity providing a ballast for some measure of post-war revival. According to Michael Snape 'it became increasingly clear that the presumed connection between the experience of modern war and the secularisation of British society was fundamentally misconceived and required radical revision.'[23]

Historians of modern British religion have underutilised the large body of military historiography, with military historians similarly often failing to take account of the deep seam of religiosity which ran through British society in the 1930s and 1940s. This gulf between military and religious historians `enabled a mutually congenial amnesia to settle upon the subject of religion and the twentieth century British soldier.'[24] Since Michael Snape's ground-breaking study of the British Army's religious culture during the twentieth century appeared in 2005, no work has attempted to examine in any detail the overall religious experience in the British armed services during the Second World War. That is not to say that the areas of intersection between Christianity and warfare have been totally neglected. Important contributions examining the organisation of military chaplaincy have been undertaken by Snape, Alan Robinson and Neil Allison, which investigate to some extent the experience of warfare for Christians under the care of chaplains.[25] However, given that nearly six

[21] G.I.T. Machin, *Churches and Social Issues in Twentieth-Century Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p.72
[22] Steve Bruce and Tony Glendinning, `When was Secularization? Dating the Decline of the British Churches and Locating its Cause'. *British Journal of Sociology*, 61 (2010), 107-26
[23] Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion on the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p.x
[24] Ibid, p.x
[25] Michael Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department, 1796-1953: Clergy Under Fire* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2007) ; Alan Robinson, *Chaplains at War* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2008);

million men and over half a million women served in the British armed forces during the war, and of those men enlisting in the army, 99% attested to some form of Christian denomination, it is surprising that no attempt has yet been made to study the religious experience of British Christians across those services.[26]

As historians and sociologists continue to debate the timing and nature of British secularisation, the life-defining episode for many Christians of the Second World War remains mostly overlooked. This study seeks to address that omission by investigating the ways in which active British Christians experienced the ordeals of military life between 1939 and 1945, and what effects this had on their faith. The definition of an active Christian must be clear without being prescriptive. It encompasses all those for whom Christianity was a significant feature of their pre-war lives, as church members or regular worshippers, or who displayed significant tropes of a privately-observed faith. Clive Field has suggested that by 1939 around 35% of Britons were active Christians, being church members, attenders or communicants. [27] Although this figure is not subdivided into age or gender, it is still reasonable to assume that a significant minority of men and women of national service age were part of this cohort, with a further minority having a Christian faith that did not translate, at that time, into church membership or attendance. These positions were not fixed, as indicated by a spectrum model of faith in wartime, in which religious beliefs could shift within an individual across time, was convincingly employed by Richard Schweitzer in his work on the religious culture of British and American soldiers in the First World War.[28]

Most of the primary material in this study will be from those who self-defined as Christians and were active in the pre-war church membership and attendance, and who sought to carry this forward into their wartime experiences. This introductory chapter will firstly examine the position of the British Churches in the 1930s, then provide an overview of the current historiography of British Christianity during the

Neil Allison, *The role of United Board (Baptist and Congregational) military chaplains during the Second World War, 1939-1945* (North-West University, South Africa: Unpublished DPhil Thesis, 2011)

[26] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.146

[27] Clive D. Field, `Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization? A Case Study of Religious Belonging in Inter-War Britain, 1918-1939, *Church History and Religious Culture*, 93 (2013), p.91

[28] Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport: Praeger, 2002)

Second World War. Finally, the key research questions will be established, and a methodological justification will be given as to how they will be addressed.

The British Churches in the 1930s

The British Protestant Churches were in numerical decline by the 1930s. The available data shows that church attendance in the British Isles peaked during the Edwardian era, with the apogee in Nonconformist Church membership coming in 1905-6.[29] The First World War had an adverse effect on church growth whilst a pattern of revival was distinguishable in the 1920s, although this had been reversed by the 1930s.[30] This pattern of wartime decline followed by a period of limited growth before subsequent falls in attendance and membership was to be repeated between 1940 and 1965. It is possible that these statistical revivals were based on a revival of personal faith which had begun during the years of conflict. However, Currie et al would take issue with that proposition, claiming that variations in church membership are endogenous, arising from internal factors such as revival movements generated during times of backsliding.[31] Therefore any post-war revival would be church-instigated in response to a perceived decline in moral behaviour during wartime. The crisis of the British Churches, particularly in the Free Churches, in the inter-war years may be seen to be either internally generated due to lack of clarity of leadership and doctrinal divisions, or externally generated by the availability of alternative forms of leisure which took the place of church social activities, and the lack of answers to the immense social strains caused by economic crisis and unemployment. In practice, the two aspects had a symbiotic relationship, causing a decline in Protestant Church membership and attendance in the 1930s.

This study will not solely examine changes in figures, the `incremental nature that social historians and sociologists are accustomed to measuring.'[32] It will have a greater focus on the mentalities of individuals as expressed orally and in writing. Sarah Williams has demonstrated that many who seldom went to church insisted that they were active Christians who prayed, read the Bible and sang hymns at home.[33] The

[29] Robert Currie, Alan Gilbert and Lee Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers: Patterns of Church Growth in the British Isles since 1700* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1977), p.50
[30] Ibid, p.51
[31] Ibid, pp.5-9
[32] Brown, *Religion and Society*, p.36
[33] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark*

statistics provide a framework within which to pose questions rather than delivering comprehensive answers. This point was reinforced by Stephen Parker, who suggested that `Churchgoing statistics as the index of the population's religious commitment and sensibility have, of late, come to be regarded with suspicion.' [34] Instead there should be a clearer focus on the `continuing and vital influence of the Churches and of Christian symbol, ritual and practice.'[35] Such manifestations of popular religiosity demonstrate, for Parker, the `persistent relevance of Christianity within the people's communal life, and [act] as a referent in the construction of individual character.'[36]

The Church of England faced significant problems by the 1930s. Adrian Hastings argued that Cosmo Lang, Archbishop of Canterbury from 1928 to 1942, `provided no effective leadership for the Church in either its ecclesiastical or its social dilemmas.'[37] This created a sense of drift and malaise. In addition, it was perceived that the Church of England confirmed to Maude Royden's aphorism of being the Conservative Party at prayer, with twelve Tory MPs sitting on the Church Assembly of the 1930s, leading to an image of too close an association with political partisanship. Whilst there was a revival of Anglicanism at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, and in high political and intellectual circles and in the public schools, in the everyday lives of the people of the Anglican Church was on the wane. Church of England baptisms had declined from over 500,000 per annum before the First World War to below 400,000 by 1932. The number of confirmations fell from well over 200,000 per annum in 1928 to 157,000 by 1939.[38] Whilst resilient in the milieu of the British establishment, Anglicanism was increasingly becoming isolated from the new universities, state schools and working-class areas in the town and countryside.

These challenges inspired a new generation of Anglican leaders to bring forward a more coherent and convincing response to the social and political issues of the 1930s. Men like William Temple and George Bell attempted to connect with younger Christians via the medium of the radio, through connections with other Churches and links with politicians beyond the Conservative Party. This work made the Church of England attractive to many Nonconformists, with `scale, leadership,

[34] Parker, *Faith on the Home Front*, p.15
[35] Ibid
[36] Ibid
[37] Adrian Hastings, *A History of English Christianity, 1920-1985* (London: Collins, 1986), p.251
[38] Ibid

spiritual vitality, theological diversity and at least something of a social conscience but without the secularization which the "social gospel" had largely brought with it in Free Church life.'[39] During the depression, the Church provided welfare in areas where the state's power could not reach, demonstrating, for Matthew Grimley, the retention of `its social significance as a provider and coordinator of welfare.'[40] In addition, the public rituals associated with the funeral of King George V and the coronation of George VI, and the `assertion of the distinctiveness of British political and religious traditions' meant that the Church of England remained at the heart of British public life, despite a decline in its popular base.[41]

Alan Wilkinson identified a diminished identity for British Nonconformity from the First World War onwards.[42] The pressures towards `cultural, ethical, political and religious conformity' caused by the war effort were great, and to a large degree the Free Churches succumbed.[43] This view was echoed by Matthew Grimley. who proposed that `Nonconformists were increasingly slipping into Anglican conformity.'[44] Similarly Simon Green wrote `Even among the religiously committed, a previous unbending sectarianism increasingly lost ground to an emollient ecumenism. Organised Nonconformity moved towards the centre of national life.'[45] Therefore the heightened sense of ecumenism amongst British Protestants in the 1930s was proving of greater worth to the Anglican hierarchy than Nonconformist leaders. This diminution of distinction between the Church of England and the Free Churches was evident in the appointments of Bishop Rawlinson of Derby and Bishop Kirk of Oxford, previously Congregationalist and Methodist clergymen respectively. The overall trajectory of Protestant church decline was given greater nuance by Michael Snape, `The symptoms of religious decline were most in evidence in specific churches, in certain social classes and in particular parts of the country.'[46] The newer, more fundamentalist, Protestant Churches flourished, as did faith in rural, as opposed to

[39] Ibid, p.262
[40] Matthew Grimley, *Citizenship, Community and the Church of England: Liberal Anglican Theories of the State between the Wars* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p.202
[41] Ibid
[42] Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform? War, Peace and the English Churches 1900-1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986)
[43] Ibid, p.5
[44] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.887
[45] Simon J.D. Green. *The Passing of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), p. 157
[46] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.241

urban and suburban England.[47] The traditional Free Churches encountered a dichotomy; the more they fitted into mainstream society the less their distinctive voice was heard.

A further statistical perspective was provided by Simon Green, who argued that the real decline in Free Church importance between 1920 and 1960 was evident in the availability of Methodist, Baptists and Congregational lay preachers falling significantly even as the numbers of clergy remained solid.[48] It was this lack of depth that really undermined Free Church strength as organisational structures had relied heavily on the democratic nature of the churches. In addition, a decline in Sunday School attendance indicated a rot which no amount of doctrinal debates in the higher echelons could eradicate. Similarly, whilst Anglican ordinands continued to come forward to fill the pulpits, the numbers of those being baptised and confirmed declined throughout the 1930s. Therefore, according to Jeffrey Cox, a situation was reached whereby `in the quiet of the suburbs […] the Church of England had been the great beneficiary of the crisis within Nonconformity.'[49] Matthew Grimley highlighted the demise of political Nonconformity which resulted in a situation where `rivalry between Anglicans and Nonconformists abated, and they could more happily enfold each other's traditions into a common narrative.'[50]

The social make-up of the Free Churches between the wars had altered from their heyday of rapid growth during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Whilst 84% of occupations recorded in Nonconformist registers between 1800 and 1840 were lower status occupations such as artisans, colliers and miners, by 1950 nearly half of Nonconformist members were middle class; lower professionals, salaried clerical workers, teachers and managers.[51] This change produced an incongruity between traditional membership and the newer `educated' and `respectable' professional groups. Thus, the Free Churches had drifted from their working-class roots, without finding a strong replacement identity, another factor contributing to a crisis of confidence in British Nonconformity during the 1930s.

[47] Ibid, p.242
[48] Green, *The Passing of Protestant England*, p.65
[49] Cox, *The English Churches in a Secular Society*, p.253
[50] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness' p.891.
[51] Currie et al, *Churches and Churchgoers,* p.62

David Bebbington suggested that `by the Second World War, Evangelicalism had become much more fragmented that it had been a century before.'[52] There was a broad continuum of opinion on the social gospel, with liberals at one end and conservatives at the other. Bebbington identified the Brethren at the conservative end and the Congregationalists at the liberal end. The Baptists, Methodists, Church of England's Evangelical party, the Scottish Presbyterians and Welsh Calvinistic Methodists were between these two points, but with many internal differences of opinion which had become as important as those of agreement. This confusion over the Churches' relationship to the social and political issues of the day caused further decline during the 1930s, with many people turning to alternative secular movements, such as the League of Nations Union, the Peace Pledge Union, and more extreme political groups such as the Communist Party, to find a more powerful message on topical issues. As leading Nonconformists sought to portray themselves as part of the national mainstream, with the new Methodist Central Hall being positioned by Westminster Abbey in 1912, so their more radical members such as Rev Donald Soper and Rev Henry Carter drifted towards alternatives of political activism.

The 1930s have been described as years of crisis for the Baptist Churches.[53] Michael Goodman identified a number of reasons for this crisis; an improvement in the terrible social conditions which had previously drawn people toward Nonconformism, the emergence of the Labour Party as a political alternative in the struggle for social and economic reform, internal doctrinal disputes, and an increasing dislocation between socially successful Baptists and the working class who had once formed their core membership. Attempts by some Baptist Churches to identify themselves with the Oxford Group movement, with its practice of house parties in fashionable locations and support from leading Anglicans, created a further impression of distance from their former working-class roots. The launch of the Forward Movement and Discipleship Campaign, ostensibly aimed at broadening the base of Baptist membership, only served to focus attention away from the internal problems of the Church, which faced an identity crisis, struggling to maintain its distinctive voice within British Christianity.

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[52] David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A history from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.228

[53] Michael Goodman, `Numerical Decline Amongst English Baptists, 1930-1939', *Baptist Quarterly*, 36 (1996), 241-51

An alternative interpretation of the Baptist Church in the 1930s was given by Ian Randall.[54] He found signs of renewal, rather than retrenchment, brought about by the Discipleship Campaign and the Baptist Revival Fellowship, and an increasing engagement of young people in church life.[55] There were signs of Baptist growth in the more affluent south-east where the Forward Movement, which aimed to raise £1 million by 1941 for the building of new Baptist churches, had acquired half that amount by 1936, despite the widespread economic depression in the traditional heartlands of Nonconformism.[56]

Michael Hughes identified an `enormous diversity in the social and political character of British Methodism.'[57] Whilst recognizing that international historians of the twentieth century have traditionally ignored the importance of religion in shaping attitudes to events, he also suggested that the diverse factors shaping an individual's choice of religious affiliation have been overlooked.[58] Debates on the international situation only engaged a small section of the Methodist elite, a feature that gave a `disproportionate weight' to this milieu in public perceptions of Methodism.[59] The Methodist Church had achieved some degree of unity, with the creation of the Methodist Church of Great Britain in 1932, but then had to grapple with the divisive issues of rearmament, collective security and the diverging strands of pacifism and pacificism. This was temporarily resolved with the `liberty of conscience' arrangement, whereby the Church agreed to accommodate all strands of belief on the issue. However, tensions between what an increasingly vocal minority of high profile clerics such as Rev Donald Soper propounded, and the pragmatic common sense of the ordinary churchgoer, continued to eat away at Methodism's solid base. Whilst the *Methodist Recorder* made no secret about its scepticism towards Chamberlain's appeasement policy, and expressed admiration for Eden when he resigned as Foreign Secretary in February 1938,[60] there were, for Hughes, `still many voices within Methodism continuing to espouse the cause of non-resistance, even when confronted

[54] Ian M. Randall, *English Baptists of the Twentieth Century* (Didcot, Baptist Historical Society, 2005)
[55] Ibid, p.105
[56] Ibid, p.107
[57] Michael Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict: Methodism, Peace and War in the Twentieth Century* (Peterborough: Epworth Press, 2008), p.12
[58] Ibid
[59] Ibid, p.13
[60] Ibid, p.102

by such a ghastly regime as the one presided over by Hitler.'[61] These voices were disproportionately within the upper echelons of church hierarchy, with one in five members of the Methodist Peace Fellowship in 1940 being ministers.[62] Therefore, the Methodist Church entered the war having endured years of public division over the issue of war and peace, in numerical decline, and with an increasingly ecumenical mood challenging its distinctive position within British Protestantism.

In 1930, across more than half of England and Wales, the Roman Catholic population was `extremely small', whilst in Lancashire, the West Riding of Yorkshire, Tyneside, London and urban South Wales there were well-organised and numerous Roman Catholic communities.[63] The total practising Catholic population of England and Wales had grown from 1,870,000 in 1914 to 2,360,000 in 1939.[64] Roman Catholic populations had spread into the new suburban districts, causing an increase in the number of church buildings, and a rise in the number of priests from 3,800 in 1914 to 5,600 in 1939.[65] By the outbreak of war, the picture was therefore `full of promise on all sides.'[66] Denis Gwynn somewhat triumphantly contrasted this with the `continuous and demoralising decline' in the Protestant denominations.[67] Arthur Hinsley succeeded Francis Bourne as Archbishop of Westminster in 1935, ushering in a more open approach to religious and political affairs. However, he was not typical of the `way the tide was flowing in the Catholic Church in the 1930s.'[68]

Hinsley's influence was limited and the `general tide of Romanization and disassociation from all other Churches' continued.[69] The most powerful figure in the hierarchy was not Hinsley, but Archbishop Downey of Liverpool, the centre of the most populous diocese in England. The Roman Catholic Church entered the war in a state of expansion, divided within its ranks over the extent of its co-operation with the Protestant Churches in responding to the international situation. Matthew Grimley argued that the English Roman Catholic hierarchy was at pains to demonstrate its

[61] Ibid, p.104
[62] Ibid, p.113
[63] Denis Gwynn, `Growth of the Catholic Community' in George Beck (ed.), *The English Catholics, 1850-1950* (London: Burns Oates, 1950), p.428
[64] Ibid, p.431
[65] Ibid, p.432
[66] Ibid, p.433
[67] Ibid
[68] Hastings, *History of English Christianity*, p.274
[69] Ibid, p.275

Englishness, having dissociated itself from Irish nationalism and pledging vocal support for the government during the 1926 General Strike.[70] In addition, Roman Catholic apologists including G.K. Chesterton sought to create their own narrative of Englishness through the recognition of martyrs such as Thomas More. Evelyn Waugh's work emphasised the continuity with pre-Reformation England, with the recusant country house chapel playing the symbolic role that the parish church fulfilled for Protestant writers.[71] This alignment of Roman Catholicism and national identity would lead to the Church's full involvement with the National Days of Prayer during the war and would, according to Philip Williamson, provide `new opportunities to counteract persistent prejudices and suspicions; that Roman Catholicism was alien to British culture, subordinate to foreign authority, and sympathetic to Britain's enemies.'[72] Therefore the two main currents in the Roman Catholic Church in the 1930 were a general withdrawal from ecumenical activities with the Protestant Churches, but an increasing desire to be seen as integral to British national life.

The Church of Scotland had been granted full independence in spiritual matters by an Act of Parliament in 1921, and in 1929 merged with the United Free Church of Scotland. Having spent much of the 1920s trying to give voice to anti-Catholic sentiment and the desirability of restricting Irish immigration, by the 1930s a Forward Movement was established to promote evangelism and moral improvement. However, the movement failed to catch the national interest, and Rev John White's leadership of the Church of Scotland failed to address the huge issue of unemployment and a socially conservative manifesto, which reduced much of the Church's political credibility for many Scots. Statistics suggest that the Church of Scotland, and to a lesser extent the Roman Catholic Church in Scotland, experienced a boost in people observing rites of passage, with their combined share of marriages solemnised rising from 71% in 1915 to 76% by 1935.[73] Civil marriages fell from 20% to 11% in the same period.[74] Despite a slow decline in church adherence during the 1930s, around 44% of Scottish adults self-identified with a denomination by 1939, and 38% of 5 to 15 year olds were Sunday

[70] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.888
[71] Evelyn Waugh, *Edmund Campion: Jesuit and Martyr in the Reign of Queen Elizabeth* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1935)
[72] Philip Williamson, `National Days of Prayer: The Churches, the State and Public Worship in Britain, 1899-1957', *English Historical Review*, 128 (2013), p.338
[73] Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), p.54
[74] Ibid

School scholars in 1931.[75] Membership of the Boys' Brigades grew throughout the 1930s and churches organised weekday-evening religious meetings and social events which kept young people associated with religious activities. Despite the remoteness of the Church of Scotland from the social problems of the day, Callum Brown's summary was that `there was no major breach of the Scottish people from organised religion between 1890 and 1939' and religion remained `extremely important' in the lives of the common people.[76]

Peter Catterall argued that the Labour Party had become the political vehicle through which distinctly Nonconformist ideas about alcohol and gambling could be channelled.[77] In addition, the attitude of the Labour Party towards the war, one of largely full engagement whilst ensuring the rights of conscientious objectors were maintained, fitted well with many Nonconformists with a left-wing political outlook. During the 1930s, many Nonconformists campaigned on a range of social issues which they considered had a moral angle. As well as alcohol and gambling, Sabbath attendance at cinemas and theatres, sex outside marriage and even reading non-Christian books on the Sabbath were condemned. Ian Randall argued that `these were all cases of new moral and social challenges which could not be simply dealt with rapidly and put away.'[78]

For Callum Brown, this `Puritan innovation kept the Christian message in the public eye [...] but it tended to destabilise ecclesiastical hierarchies, creating fellowships rather than church structures. [...] The impression gained ground in many quarters by the 1930s that Puritanism was failing in British society.'[79] However, Currie et al took the view that the collapse of the Liberal Party between 1916-18 reconstructed politics on a mostly secular basis, around debates between the Conservative and Labour Parties about economic redistribution.[80] Simon Green concurred that radical politics shed its Nonconformist heritage.[81] For some leading figures in the Labour Party, such as Stafford Cripps, socialism became the best means of securing Christian

[75] Ibid, p.62&64
[76] Ibid, p.154&147
[77] Peter Catterall, `Morality and Politics: The Free Churches and the Labour Party between the Wars', *Historical Journal*, 36 (1993), 667-85
[78] Randall, *English Baptists of the Twentieth Century*, p.106
[79] Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p.125
[80] Currie et al, *Churches and Churchgoers*, p.40
[81] Green, *The Passing of Protestant England*, p.43

principles, therefore their immediate energies were channelled into the political sphere. Institutional connections between the various branches of Nonconformity and the Labour Party were fewer than had been the case with the Liberal Party before its post-1919 collapse. Its prominent members were not as involved in Nonconformist Church affairs as was, for example, the prominent Liberal politician and Baptist preacher Ernest Brown.

However, the political influence of the Nonconformist Churches is difficult to gauge, according to Keith Robbins.[82] He agreed with Green that Nonconformity shed its political homogeneity and fragmented into support for all three main parties, and further postulated that it became difficult to define what constituted a Nonconformist politician. Upbringing, faith and personal behaviour all denoted aspects of Nonconformity but there was a wide difference in the religiosity of men such as Baldwin, Simon, Brown and Lloyd George. Therefore, whilst some Nonconformists enjoyed careers as prominent politicians, the Free Churches' access to power had been significantly weakened. As Matthew Grimley put it, `The implosion of the Liberal Party deprived Nonconformists of their key organ of tribal identity.'[83] Stanley Baldwin's dominance of the Conservative Party between 1923 and 1937 ensured that the pre-eminent politician of the inter-war era was sincerely Christian in outlook, as a `devout but modest faith was an obvious feature of the public as well as the private man.'[84] According to Philip Williamson, Baldwin viewed the totalitarian regimes threatening world peace in the 1930s as `an atheistic assault upon Christianity', which required `a strengthening of the nation's and Empire's grasp of spiritual fundamentals.'[85]

Robbins argued that in trying to determine the state of the Free Churches during this period, it is necessary to distinguish between what was said and written in the upper echelons of the movement and what the laity were thinking, `it would be rash to assume that resolutions and statements drafted and passed at national level, filtered down through editorials and articles in the denominational press, do in fact represent "what Baptists think". People who sit on committees, attend assemblies and write to

[82] Keith Robbins, `Free Churchmen and the Twenty Years' Crisis', in Keith Robbins (ed.), *History, Identity and Religion in Modern Britain*, (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), pp.149-160
[83] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.892
[84] Philip Williamson, *Stanley Baldwin: Conservative Leadership and National Values* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.281
[85] Ibid, p.329

or for newspapers are unusual.'[86] Political Nonconformity could still exhibit some degree of mass organisation, if not influence. For example, the League of Nations Union's Peace Ballot of 1934 received a high proportion of support from the Nonconformist areas of Wales, the campaign being co-ordinated through the chapels. However, this was an exception, as Adrian Hastings put it, `The Nonconformity of the 1930s was still recovering from the political bewitchment of Lloyd George. As he receded further and further from the centre of the political stage, so did it.'[87] He argued that whilst scholarly and organisational advances were made in the Free Churches, the decline in membership and attendance was even more serious than even the depressing statistics indicate. This was due to a geographical shift in membership from the traditional strongholds of the industrial north towards the south-east where there was less hard-core loyalty. This was exacerbated by a decline in the wider Nonconformist constituency of Sunday Schools and other social activities. Politically, some Free Church members stayed loyal to the existing Liberal Party through to the 1950s, whilst many in the south and midlands transferred allegiance to the Conservative Party of Baldwin and Chamberlain. As already noted by Catterall, the more working-class elements in the north transferred support to the Labour Party.

The weakening of the grip of the Free Churches on political parties was one factor in the retreat from `Puritan England.' Young people found more attractive alternatives to a Sunday in church, or even undertaking church-organised social activities. Thus, the religious element of the Sabbath was becoming increasingly remote for those attaining adulthood in the 1930s. They preferred cheap modes of transport such as the bicycle or train to somewhere more appealing than their home surroundings.[88] Other areas of concern for Nonconformists were the popularity of the Sunday cinema, Sunday drinking in public houses and gambling. The grip of the British Churches over personal morality was weakening as the scale of social change and challenge to traditional church assumptions was, according to Ian Machin, greater than at any time until the 1960s.[89]

The Church of England, in contrast, sought to influence public life less via campaigns on personal habits and behaviours, and more through its voice in the

[86] Robbins, `Free Churchmen and the Twenty Years' Crisis', p.151
[87] Hastings, *History of English Christianity*, p.262
[88] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues*, p.53
[89] Ibid, p.107

formation of a British Christian identity. Anglican leaders sought to justify the continuation of their prominent role in political life by arguing that Britain remained an essentially Christian country. Matthew Grimley argued that the frequent symbolic use of a church or chapel in patriotic films of the 1940s `worked in wartime only because the link between national character and religion had already been firmly established before the war.'[90] Despite this, Grimley argued that `discussion of the religious dimension has been strikingly absent from recent writing on Englishness.' [91] This is true both of historians of religion and of cultural identity, as a resurgence of Christianity within the development of a national identity does not easily fit into many secularisation narratives.[92] It was an identity characterised by tolerance, eccentricity, modesty and individualism. Grimley demonstrated that the writers of the 1930s who sought to give voice to this notion of national identity were of predominantly Protestant upbringings and many, such as Arthur Mee, J.B. Priestley and Stanley Baldwin, were from Free Church backgrounds. The English religious tradition which informed this identity was that of the layman, rather than ecclesiastical authorities. Thus, whilst the identification of English identity became increasingly marked with Christian rhetoric, the influence of the Churches in the development of this discourse became weaker.

Grimley further argued that Anglican moderation and Nonconformist voluntaryism formed the twin pillars of English religious piety, and the decline of political Nonconformity following the collapse of the Liberal Party made it easier for these two previously competing traditions to recognise each other's virtues and form a common cultural narrative during the 1930s. This coincided with the disestablishment of the Church of Wales, which further reinforced the `Englishness' of Anglicanism. The failure of the foreign doctrines of communism and fascism to gain a foothold in English society was ascribed to the Nonconformist tradition of mistrust of dogma from on high, be it spiritual or political.[93]

A further innovation which helped to develop a greater sense of national identity was the spread of the wireless. The BBC's managing director John Reith, a Scottish Presbyterian, introduced a weekly, and after some pressure a daily, religious

[90] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.885
[91] Ibid, p.885
[92] Ibid, p.886
[93] Ibid, p.899

service. However this did little to improve the lot of the Free Churches as British religious broadcasting was, according to Callum Brown, `overwhelmingly conservative, unevangelising [...] High Church and pro-establishment in tone.'[94] This interpretation was at odds with John Turner's Methodist perspective that `Religious broadcasting began to break down denominational exclusiveness.'[95] Michael Snape's more nuanced view was that religious broadcasting, rather than encouraging Anglicanism, or subtle ecumenism, in fact encouraged a more personal and autonomous faith.[96] It became easier for Christians to develop an independently-constructed faith away from the increasingly conformist Free Churches. Lack of regular contact with a church congregation did not now automatically mean being cut off from taking part in acts of collective worship. The increasing availability of religious services and other broadcasts with a religious theme would accord with Williams' and Parker's theses that more religious activity was taking place away from churches and chapels.

Attitudes towards the imminent threat of war varied across the denominations. Richard Overy claimed that `Pacifist enthusiasm was most closely associated with the non-conformist churches.'[97] He argued that British Christianity displayed an ambivalent attitude toward pacifism and warfare, failing to exert any great influence on events and creating despondency amongst the Church faithful. This lack of clarity on the burning issue of the day was emphasised by Glenn Hinson, `most Baptists in the United States and in England [sic] displayed uncertainty and ambivalence in their thinking about war.'[98] Pacifist organisations, including the denomination-specific Free Church ones, tended to have a profile which was disproportionate to their relative sizes, therefore, as demonstrated by Keith Robbins, `as the prospect of war drew nearer, so the minority of absolute pacifists within each Free Church denomination grew more determined and more vocal.'[99] This vocality has meant a greater degree of attention being given to this milieu, as opposed to those who make the subject of this

[94] Brown, *Religion and Society*, p. 152
[95] John M. Turner, *Conflict and Reconciliation: Studies in Methodism and Ecumenism in England, 1740-1982* (London: Epworth Press, 1985), p.192
[96] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.243
[97] Richard Overy, *The Morbid Age: Britain and the Crisis of Civilization, 1919-1939* (London: Penguin, 2010), p.241
[98] E. Glenn Hinson, `Baptist Attitudes to War and Peace since 1914', *Baptist History and Heritage*, 39 (2004), p 105
[99] Robbins, `Free Churchmen and the Twenty Years' Crisis', p.159

study, active Christians who sometimes wrestled quietly with their own religious consciences before enlisting in the armed services.

Smaller sects, unlike the mainstream Nonconformist Churches, experienced growth between the wars. Callum Brown argued there is `clear evidence of a growth of attendance at minor denominations in the inter-war period, with evangelical missions, the Brethren and unaligned congregations benefitting considerably.'[100] The Brethren were strongly represented in industrial towns and fishing villages whilst the British Israelite movement peaked during the interwar years with up to 10,000 active members.[101] Their claim that the ten lost tribes of Israel had migrated through Europe and settled in Britain during the Norman Conquest found support amongst some evangelicals. The Seventh Day Adventists, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the Jehovah's Witnesses all experienced growth in the 1930s and in the case of the last, a considerable jump during the first half of the 1940s.[102] This sudden growth of the Jehovah's Witnesses was contemporaneous with their firmly anti-war stance, which was often cited as a reason for conscientious objection at tribunal hearings.[103]

Thus, the British Churches approached the war facing considerable internal and external challenges. Numerical decline was accompanied by a decreasing sense of distinct denominational identity and purpose. In addition, there was a fall in regularity of worship due to a diversification of secular leisure interests.[104] Changing social habits meant that less time was spent at church-organised events and more Sabbaths were being spent in cinemas, public houses or in the countryside. The political influence Nonconformity had wielded in the latter nineteenth and early twentieth century had declined with the shattering of the Liberal Party. Its traditional heartlands were also in economic and social decline. Ian Machin claimed that with the exceptions of the Roman Catholic Church and the Church of Scotland, British Churches were in a beleaguered state, with falling attendance, changing public morals and intellectual challenges to their doctrines.[105]

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[100] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain* (London and New York, Routledge, 2001) p.165
[101] John Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain: Religion and National Life in Britain and Ireland*, 1843-1945 (London: Routledge, 1994), p.248
[102] Currie et al, *Churches and Churchgoers*, p.36
[103] Rachel Barker, *Conscience, Government and War: Conscientious Objection in Great Britain, 1939-45* (London: Routledge, 1982), p.121
[104] Field, `Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization?', p.72
[105] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues*, p.107

However, Christianity still ran deep through the veins of British society and through the lived experience of millions of individuals. Values and beliefs learnt in childhood did not disappear overnight and a distinction must be drawn between the organisational difficulties of the British Churches and the solid core of faith which existed deep in the souls of millions of Britons. That faith would prove remarkably resilient, both for those on the home front, as demonstrated by Stephen Parker, and for those entering the armed services, as this study will argue. Despite the struggles of the Protestant denominations, by 1939 Britain was, by any reasonable definition, a Christian society. As Matthew Grimley wrote, `Religion remained central to the articulation of the idea of national character in the first half of the twentieth century.'[106] Close ties existed between the leaders of the church and secular elites, with laws and other aspects of public life such as education and welfare based on Christian values. Most children were socialised into Christian society, and most people were assumed to be Christian unless they defined themselves as otherwise, with Christianity providing a common language used throughout society. Dorothy Entwhistle demonstrated that church rituals remained central to identities and experiences into the 1930s[107] and, for Matthew Grimley, `the idea of belonging to a Protestant nation was an important component of the "discursive Christianity" that Callum Brown identified as dominating British culture until the 1960s.'[108] Therefore, despite ongoing challenges to the authority of the Churches in British life, the society which went to war in 1939 was infused with deeply held Christian attitudes, beliefs and practices. These would be reflected in the way that Christians mediated the war, both on the home and fighting fronts.

The British Churches in the Second World War

The historiography of the British Churches during the Second World War has yet to fully address the nature of Christianity as a lived experience both at home and abroad. Clive Field reflected that `Relative to the Great War, the modern secondary literature on British religion during the Second World War is sparse.'[109] He argued

[106] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.906
[107] Dorothy Entwhistle, `"Hope, Colour and Comradeship": Loyalty and Opportunism in Early Twentieth-Century Church Attendance among the Working Class in North-West England', *Journal of Religious History*, 25, (2001), 22-38
[108] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.906
[109] Clive D. Field, `Puzzled People Revisited: Religious Believing and Belonging in Wartime Britain, 1939-45', *Twentieth Century British History*, 19, (2008), p.446

that the spiritual experience of ordinary people during the period had been neglected, both those engaged in military conflict and those on the home front. This may be because within the broader narratives of writers like Brown `the war did not represent a cataclysmic watershed in a trajectory towards secularization.'[110] The period has not merited intense study as it has not been seen as a distinctive era in any secularisation process. For example, Adrian Hastings' work on English Christianity between 1920 and 1985 devoted nearly fifty pages to the period 1939-45, focussing on home front disruptions, debates within the Churches over the ethics of bombing, and attempts to bring about peace.[111] No evaluation was made of the effect of the war on popular religion.

Where attention has been drawn to the British Churches during the war, the traditional narrative of continuing statistical decline has been challenged by cultural historians with a more nuanced view of what constitutes manifestations of faith. Currie et. al demonstrated a dramatic fall in church membership and conversions for Nonconformist, Established and Catholic churches during the Second World War.[112] For them, `This pattern must cast considerable doubt on the commonly held doctrine that crises such as wars stimulate religious activity.'[113] However, the focus on statistics as a metric of religious action failed to acknowledge any tropes outside of those of church membership and attendance. As Callum Brown has argued, `it is not possible to continue to study the subject by looking at the churches, church membership, religious observance or opinion polls. […] Church history could once claim to encompass the social history of religion. It cannot any more.'[114] In an era during which church membership and attendance were disrupted to the exigencies of war, it is hugely important to seek additional evidence of religious activity in the testimonies of those who lived through the era.

Hugh McLeod, in a discussion of various iterations of secularisation theory, wrote that `Historians using the same concepts may have radically different ideas as to when and why the decisive changes took place.'[115] He stated that it is possible to

[110] Ibid, p.477
[111] Hastings, *History of English Christianity,* pp.355-402
[112] Currie et al, *Churches and Churchgoers,* p.30
[113] Ibid
[114] Callum G. Brown, `The Secularization Decade', p.36
[115] Hugh McLeod, `Introduction', in Hugh McLeod and Werner Ustorf (eds.), *The Decline of Christendom in Western Europe, 1750-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.16

see the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries as the key period for secularisation, or the period between the French Revolution and the Second World War, with further scholars `who argue that the most significant changes have taken place since World War II, or maybe since 1960.'[116] Thus the war years appear to have become a lacuna, during which time the broad trends which characterise the debate suffered short-term convulsions which may sit separately from the broader narratives historians propose. One purpose of this study will be to address this void and seek evidence of indications of further secularisation or the resilience of faith amongst British Christian men and women in the armed services.

War Office figures demonstrated that in 1942, of 2,476,956 men and women in the British Army, 70.9% had attested as Church of England, 10% as Roman Catholic, 8.9% as Church of Scotland or Presbyterian, 5.6% as Methodist, and 2.7% as Baptist or Congregationalist.[117] Other minority denominations made up a further 0.3% with only 0.06% professing to be atheists. These figures require some interpretive caution due to the practice of some individuals of independent faith who were outside of the Church of England attesting as Anglicans, due to not falling into other available categories. The author's own father had attended a Baptist church in the 1930s and on the time of enlistment was an active member of an independent Railway Mission. Despite this, he attested as Church of England upon call-up in 1940.[118] That fact notwithstanding, according to Snape, `the decline of the mainstream Nonconformist churches in England and Wales (and their strong pacifist sympathies in the 1930s) was probably reflected in their smaller representation in the army between 1939 and 1945.'[119]

Statistics provided by Currie et. al. would suggest that the war did mark an important juncture in the secularisation process. Protestant Churches overall saw a 13% decline in church membership between 1939 and 1947, over three times the figure for the period 1914-1920.[120] The disruption to congregations, both physical and psychological, was particularly marked during the Second World War, with over six million men and women aged between 18 and 45 changing employment and often

[116] Ibid
[117] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.146
[118] John Broom, Second World War Service Record, Author's Collection
[119] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.147
[120] Currie et al, *Churches and Churchgoers*, p.113

place of residence.[121] However, whilst the Established Churches had regained losses in membership by the mid-1950s, the Free Churches failed to do so. Currie et. al. suggest that one group particularly affected by wartime alterations were those in their mid-teens, citing the collapse in Sunday School pupil numbers and junior members between 1939 and 1943, with some of this explicable by evacuation.[122] This collapse was never fully reversed and the continuing post-war decline suggests that further exogenous factors were at work. These included greater geographical mobility, improved leisure opportunities and the fragmentation of industrial communities.

Michael Snape challenged the view that the religious experience of the Second World War gave an impetus to secularisation.[123] Male religiosity remained strong in the army, partly due to the strongly-expressed Christianity of prominent generals like Montgomery, and the religiously-orientated public-school upbringing of many of the officer class. Therefore, religious culture did not need female influence to thrive, contradicting Callum Brown's theory of feminine piety being at the heart of British Christian culture.[124] Military religious culture was further reinforced through compulsory attendance at church parades, which were, Alan Wilkinson argued, `disliked by most servicemen and some chaplains […] but defended by many officers and some chaplains as a declaration of corporate religious allegiance.'[125] Attendance at religious services in prisoner of war camps was not compulsory, but they were generally well attended as they often included lectures of a general nature as well as worship. Continuing to worship under such difficult conditions also brought men of different faiths closer together, and sometimes meant that ecumenical services were held. Another argument which would support the strength of male religiosity in the armed services was made indirectly by Steve Bruce and Roy Wallis. Whilst defending the gradualist secularisation thesis, they argued that religion flourishes best in smaller communities with shared beliefs and where social interaction is face-to-face.[126] It is possible that the tightly-knit army unit, RAF squadron or RN ship of the Second World War provided such an environment and may partly account for the post-war revival in

[121] Ibid, p.113
[122] Ibid, p.114
[123] Snape, *God and the British Soldier,* p.246
[124] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p.58
[125] Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?,* p.294
[126] Steve Bruce and Roy Wallis, `Secularization: the orthodox model', in Steve Bruce (ed.), *Religion and Modernization: Sociologists and Historians Debate the Secularization Thesis* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1992), pp.8-30

church attendance. This is a theme which will be examined in chapter four of this study.

A further aspect of the Christian's wartime experience was the disconnect from the previous moral standards which had been expected in the church, home and workplace. Michael Snape argued `It was in the widespread deterioration of civilian moral standards, far more than in a loss of faith per se, that the churches confronted the most significant symptom of religious change in the years of the two World Wars.'[127] Ian Machin saw the war as a period during which the British Churches continued to grapple with the social and moral issues which had proved problematic during the 1930s.[128] He focussed on the domestic agendas of ecumenism, education, housing, plans for a new welfare state, sex and marriage and alcohol consumption, making no direct reference to the experience of Christians in the armed services and how war modulated their attitudes to the issues he investigated.

Sean Longden portrayed the behaviour of the 21st Army Group in Europe during 1944-5 as characterised by sex, burglary, rape, pillage and alcohol.[129] The interwar period saw a decline in evangelical work in the army and wartime brought an increase in sexual licentiousness and changes in attitudes from a markedly Protestant strain of self-denial and deferred gratification to one of less self-restraint due to the ever-present fear of mutilation or death. In contrast, Callum Brown noted that during the 1950s the `religious mindset of restraint, self-control, self-restraint, abstinence from sex and alcohol became more rigidly enforced.'[130] Thus for Brown, the 1950s saw hardening of moral restraint, appearing to run contrary to the liberalisation of morals during the war. The extent to which Christians in the armed services mediated a less sexually restrictive milieu, and its possible impact on the moral tone of 1950s Christianity, will be also be considered in chapter three.

Michael Snape and Stephen Parker argued for the existence of a robust wartime religiosity.[131] They cited the laws on homosexuality, abortion and Sabbath day

[127] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.186
[128] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues,* pp.108-136
[129] Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils: Soldiers' Lives from D-Day to VE-Day* (London: Robinson, 2007)
[130] Ibid, p. 397
[131] Michael Snape and Stephen Parker, `Keeping Faith and Coping: Popular Religiosity and the British People', in Peter Liddle. John Bourne and Ian Whitehead (eds.), *The Great World War, 1914-1945: Who Won, Who Lost, vol 2*, (London: Harper Collins, 2001) pp. 397-420

observance as exerting a strong moral influence on British society. In addition, the imagery and metaphor in the wartime speeches of King George VI and Winston Churchill exuded a sense of God watching over the affairs of the nation. The active support of both leaders for biannual National Days of Prayer has been demonstrated by Philip Williamson.[132] That these leaders considered prayer and religious language as the appropriate tone for national supplication and morale-raising lends further weight to the idea of a robust Christianity diffused through British life. Often this religiosity was not to be found within the mainstream denominations. It could be in the form of intercessory prayer, the observance of personal Sunday rituals and even an interest in astrology. These apparently contradictory practices were part of what Snape and Parker termed `promiscuous eclecticism', the increasing tendency for people to indulge in a smorgasbord of customs, practices and rituals in a personally blended faith, as opposed to following one set creed or doctrine.[133] Sarah Williams has shown that routines of private and domestic prayer were common amongst non-churchgoers.[134] The prevalence of such tokens of religiosity within the armed services will be a focus of further investigation in this study in chapter two.

Parker presented further evidence of a persistent wartime faith in his study of Birmingham.[135] He reiterated aspects of diffusive Christianity identified in his earlier work and challenged the view that the study of religion and experience of war are mutually exclusive. Parker used oral history testimonies to reinforce Brown's and Williams' arguments that religion remained a pervasive influence in the early twentieth century by extending the timeframe to 1939-1945. This influence began in a person's life with a symbiotic relationship between church, school and home where Christian values were inculcated. These values may not necessarily have translated into church attendance but into other, less measurable means of Sabbath Observance, such as wearing one's `Sunday best' or refraining from sporting activity.

Parker claimed that events such as the National Days of Prayer demonstrated a `sympathy with the religious rhetoric attached to the nation's cause than with the Christian religion *per se*.'[136] It was in the actions of ordinary people in extraordinary

[132] Williamson, `National Days of Prayer'
[133] Snape and Parker, `Keeping Faith and Coping', p.410
[134] Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark*
[135] Parker, *Faith on the Home Front*
[136] Ibid, p.89

situations that the true depth of religious feeling could be found, as a revision of priorities, values and self-perception was made. However, apart from Parker's and Snape's work, there is no significant historiography on religion and the ordinary British subject, either civilian in the case of Parker or military in the case of Snape. As Parker summarised, `Rarely however, have questions of change resulting from war been posed about the individual's religious life and spiritual experience.'[137] This could be due to the challenge in isolating the spiritual aspect of a person from their personal disposition, available emotional support and nurture. However, there is a wealth of available, and largely unexamined, primary material which can shed light on the impact of armed service life on those with a religious faith during the Second World War.

The experience of British Baptists on the home front was explored by Ian Randall. [138] He emphasised the importance of maintaining contact with Christian congregations for this milieu. Prayer groups were established in peoples' homes due to the blackout and the Church fully supported the National Days of Prayer. However, Randall showed that congregations were depleted by call-ups, shift work and evacuation and that £6 million worth of damage was done to Baptist church buildings in air raids.[139] That the Baptist Church survived to `flourish' in the 1950s, would indicate an enduring faith and sense of purpose which would give lie to the notion of the war being a major secularising influence. Randall also identified an increasing ecumenism during the war, alongside the faith being strengthened in some and weakened in others. Petty denominational disputes were placed into a larger context and many ex-servicemen applied for ministerial training. Examining the Evangelical Churches as a whole, David Bebbington saw that the war favoured conservative evangelical growth more than the interwar period had.[140] The war generated an idealism of hope for the future, with evangelicals drawing parallels between the sacrifices of Christ and the daily sacrifices of those in the armed services, `The Dunkirk spirit had a spiritual dimension.'[141]

[137] Ibid, p.72
[138] Randall, *English Baptists of the Twentieth Century*
[139] Ibid, p.379
[140] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p.252
[141] Ibid, p. 254

Michael Hughes covered the contribution made by Methodist chaplains in the armed forces, the responses of the Methodist Church to the destruction of many of its chapels and missions and the dispersement of families due to evacuation.[142] He also considered in some detail the ethical dilemmas in the early stages of the war faced by young men being conscripted into the armed forces, and the further crystallization of opinion between the pacifists and pacificists.[143] In discussing the response of those Methodists who supported the war, Hughes argued that `Leading figures in the church showed no great wish to step outside the prevailing assumptions that governed the British war effort.'[144] The 1941 Annual Conference passed a resolution calling the war a `sacred cause.'[145] This alignment of mainstream Methodism with the British war effort helped to limit falls in church membership to 10% between 1939 and 1945, `testimony to the continuing vigour of the Methodist Church in the face of the challenge of total war.'[146] Between 1943 and 1947 the Methodist and other Churches organised the evangelical initiative of the Christian Commando Campaigns. This coincided with a net loss of church members during the period, but a subsequent gain in the following four years, another example of the difficulty of differentiating between exogenous and endogenous factors in church growth and decline cited by Currie et al. However, Hughes relied extensively on the *Methodist Recorder* for evidence of the attitude of Methodists to the war, leaving a gap in testimony of those actively involved in the armed services, who would not usually be in a position to express their thoughts through such a medium. Therefore, the available denominationally specific historiography, written by historians with a direct affinity and sympathy, indicates a robustness in the Methodist and Baptist Churches during the war.

The close-knit nature of pre-war Roman Catholic Church organisation in Britain led Denis Gwynn to claim that `the impact of war in 1939 upon the Catholics of England and Wales brought a far more drastic upheaval to their religious life and their social traditions than to any other denomination.'[147] Catholic children and mothers were evacuated from areas with strong Catholic communities to areas where they were barely established. Therefore, there was `little real progress' in extending

[142] Hughes, *Conscience and Conflict*, pp.119-139
[143] Ibid, p.130
[144] Ibid, p.134
[145] Ibid, p.120
[146] Ibid, p.117
[147] Gwynn, `Growth of the Catholic Community', p.433

Catholicism across England and Wales.[148] There was a similar upheaval of Catholic military personnel in the war, but how this immersion into military life affected their religious practices and outlook remains an underexplored area.

For Alan Wilkinson, war provided a further stimulus for pre-war ecumenism.[149] This was particularly evident in the BBC's Religious Broadcasting Department where the universality of the Christian message was upheld under the leadership of James Welch. Kenneth Wolfe has argued that one of the defining characteristics of the BBC from the 1920s through to the 1950s was a softening of denominational differences.[150] Hannah Elias' recent study has confirmed that the BBC developed a distinctly ecumenical brand of Christianity for its wartime output.[151] Wilkinson claimed that many Christian leaders were `exhilarated that they could be both patriotic and ecumenical.'[152] Nonconformists favouring deeper ecumenical ties, such as William Paton and Nathaniel Micklem, were further encouraged by the appointment of William Temple as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942. Temple's view that the kingdom of God could not be advanced by war, but that by fighting a just war, Christian civilisation could be saved from destruction, was aligned with that of many Nonconformist leaders. However, Wilkinson's chapters on the war tended to focus on debates within the church hierarchy, rather than discerning any patterns of growing ecumenism within the armed services. This aspect of British Christianity will be explored in chapter three.

Callum Brown argued that churchgoing in Britain during the war was a matter of blandness and not a case of any great religious revival.[153] Religion provided a stoical backdrop to support the resolve of the nation, a folk Christianity, rather than experiencing a period of revival. Brown did argue that a revival of Christianity occurred in the Far East prisoner of war camps, as a form as resistance to the harsh treatment received.[154] However, in general he argued that there was less of a religious revival in the Second World War than the First. The continuing importance of

[148] Ibid
[149] Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?* p.253
[150] Kenneth M. Wolfe, *The Churches and the British Broadcasting Corporation, 1922-1956: The Politics of Broadcast Religion* (London: SCM Press, 1980)
[151] Hannah Elias, *Radio Religion: War, Faith and the BBC, 1939-1948* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, McMaster University, 2016)
[152] Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform* p. 253
[153] Brown, *Religion and Society*, p.164
[154] Ibid, p.166

Christianity in the domestic agenda was demonstrated by Simon Green, in his consideration of the Education Act of 1944.[155] He contended `it was a Protestant act. That is it was conceived with the prejudices and sensibilities of Anglicans and nonconformists in mind.'[156] It re-established the importance of Christianity, most notably Anglicanism, in the education of children in the state system, reversing the trend of secularisation evident since 1870, and provided a ballast for a Christian revival in the 1950s. This was in part fuelled by a `growing awareness of the moral dangers of secular ideologies' that the emergence of fascism and communism had engendered.[157]

Despite the portrayal of the war by many leading churchmen and politicians as a struggle between Christian civilisation and the excesses of Nazism, John Wolffe claimed that among combatants there was a `notable absence of the high moral and spiritual purpose that had initially been apparent in the First World War.'[158] However, he identified a `transient religious vitality' rather than general or sustained Christian revival.[159] The huge ethical challenges presented at the end of the war by the discovery of the concentration camps and the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki meant that new theological rationalisations would be necessary in response. The effect of the Second World War, according to Wolffe, was to break the link between religion and British patriotism, which had been identified by Grimley as a feature of the interwar years.[160] Therefore, it might be expected that, particularly in the latter period of the war and its aftermath, a more reflective and less militaristic tone in British Christian rhetoric would be in evidence, than in 1939. The significance of national identity for active Christians in the armed services will be investigated in chapter five.

The mass disruption of many societal norms would heighten the generative power of religious values in the 1940s. Furthermore, this disruption would mean that faith would have to been sustained to a much greater extent by individuals and small groups of believers, rather than through regularity of contact with religious institutions. By studying the religious aspects of the lives of individuals within the armed services,

[155] Simon.J.D. Green, `The 1944 Education Act: A Church-State Perspective', *Parliamentary History*, 19, (2000), 148-165
[156] Ibid, p.150.
[157] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p. 242
[158] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, p. 251
[159] Ibid
[160] Ibid

a fresh contribution to the historiography of Christianity in Britain in the Second World War can be made. Theological differences between different denominations can be examined within the broader context of a necessarily more personal relationship with God which developed without the regularity of Sunday services, weekday prayer meetings, and the wider cultural activities offered by many churches. Callum Brown noted Mass-Observation's conclusion that during the period 1937-1960 there was a `marginalization of religion from meaningful social activity, but [an] obstinate influence in the provinces and its inchoate inward psychological influence.'[161] This would suggest that deep influences were not disengaged during the war. They were no longer apparent in double or triple church attendance on Sunday, as this was often impossible during the war for service personnel and civilian alike.

Brown also claimed that during the 1940s and 50s, there was a trajectory away from a direct allegiance to God towards a view of religion as part of popular culture, particularly, according to his thesis, among females.[162] However, Brown did not focus attention on those who had experienced armed service life. It will be argued in this study that Christians in this milieu experienced a heightened sense of a personal God, whilst maintaining affiliation to religion as part of a generalised culture.

Research questions

The main proposition of this study is that the experience of active Christians in the British armed services during the Second World War is an important but hitherto overlooked factor in understanding the nature, timing and pace of secularisation in British society in the twentieth century. This experience demonstrates a resilient faith which suggests validation for those who argue that there was a subsequent religious revival in Britain during the 1950s.

The research questions which require attention in each chapter to test that thesis are:

1. In what ways did the armed services provide for the religious needs of their members and how successful was this provision?

[161] Callum G. Brown, `Secularization, the growth of militancy and the spiritual revolution: religious change and gender power in Britain, 1901-2001', *Historical Research*, 80, (2007), p. 396
[162] Currie et al, *Churches and Churchgoers*, p.38

2. How were the key manifestations of contemporary religious culture maintained and shaped by the experience of war?

3. To what extent did life in the military create a sense of mutually collective belonging, and a distance between those in the services and those on the home front?

4. How did Christians in the armed services reconcile their faith with the killing of enemy combatants and civilians?

5. To what extent did Christians identify with the trope of a national crusade in defence of Christian civilisation?

6. Was there a strengthening or weakening of personal faith during the war?

Methodology

It is firstly necessary to establish the parameters of the Christian population under investigation. It is proposed that a definition of `active Christianity' is used. Although ninety-nine percent of those attesting in the British Army chose to define themselves as Christians, for the purposes of this work, the concept of `active' will be taken to mean any individual who asserted a denominational allegiance and displayed an active engagement with that faith through pre-war church membership or regular attendance, prayer, Bible reading or other acts of devotion. This would encompass the 35% of the population cited by Field in addition to those who experienced closeness to God through radio broadcasts and other private devotions.

This range of what is meant by active Christianity was articulated by Jeremy Morris in his recent challenge to the existing historiography of secularisation in modern British religion.[163] Whilst accepting the difference between numerical religious decline and religion as a lived experience, he argued that historians have not gone far enough in defining the parameters of the latter as an analytical category. The diversity of this experience had `been subsumed under a single historical problematic.'[164] Measurable data is not enough to reveal inner states of mind. What is required is `to think more creatively about the historical interpretation of religious

[163] Jeremy Morris, `Secularization and Religious Experience: Arguments in the Historiography of Modern British Religion', *The Historical Journal*, 55, (2012), 195-219
[164] Ibid, p. 197

belief.'[165] Morris called for a more sophisticated and contextualized methodology `which takes religion seriously in the sense of recognizing the sophistication, complexity and generative power of the values, practices and ideas of the people of the past.'[166] If an individual claimed in their writings, either in contemporary of subsequent testimony, to have sought solace in an act of piety or devotion, or even contemplated their relationship with God at any stage of their wartime experience, then they were demonstrating some degree of religious lived experience, and will fall within the range of this study.

Callum Brown rejected the `traditional social-science route of church-led social history [for] a larger linguistic turn into a postmodern-inspired approach of discourse analysis.'[167] For him, social science polarised people in churchgoers and non-churchgoers, believers and unbelievers. That framework was `reductionist to bipolarities' and instead he sought to assign roles to Christianity in society:

1. Institutional Christianity – people's adherence to churches and worship
2. Intellectual Christianity – the influence of Christian ideas on society. Belief of individuals
3. Functional Christianity – the role of religion in civic society – local government, education and welfare
4. Diffusive Christianity – the role of outreach religion amongst the people. [168]

Brown suggested a `Discursive Christianity' which drew on modern cultural theory, using oral history, autobiography, popular books, magazines and religious tracts to trace how Christian discourse circulated in society. `In this way, we reconstruct an individual's religious identity from how they in their own words reflected Christianity.'[169] This study will utilise such a range of qualitative sources.

Qualitative and quantitative data do not inhabit binary polarities but can be mutually illuminative. Therefore, this study will consider the available statistics on church affiliation and attendance, although these were difficult to collect during the dislocation of wartime. The anthropologically-based Mass-Observation organisation

[165] Ibid, p. 204
[166] Ibid, p.209
[167] Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* p.202
[168] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p.11
[169] Ibid, p.13

conducted a range of opinion polls and merged these responses into a series of file reports which form an impressive and valuable collection for the researcher seeking information on religious attitudes and practices during the war.[170]

Various problems arise when seeking too much enlightenment from religious statistics. Church membership does not equate to church attendance. Church attendance in turn does not demonstrate the nature or depth of belief. Therefore, the statistics do not provide a rounded, sophisticated picture. Secondly, statistics themselves have different sources and different means of definition and measurement. By far the most important drawback of religious statistics is that they tend to impose numerically definable outcomes, such as church-goer or non-church-goer. Domestic and personal religious rituals are excluded. Even social surveys which claim to measure belief usually offer a limited choice of responses, rather than reflecting the graduated, nuanced and complex nature of faith. This study will use the statistics to contextualise the richness of the qualitative evidence, providing a context for an investigation into the extent and nature of faith in the armed services.

If statistics alone are inadequate in addressing the research questions posed, more qualitative primary material will need to be marshalled. Richard Aldrich advised that `Ideally, in attempting to construct any historical account we should draw on a great variety of sources, including diaries, memoirs, oral history and press material as well as official records.'[171] Debates were conducted in the secular and religious contemporary media, and many commentators highlighted Christian themes in their works. Due to the all-encompassing nature of modern warfare, theologians from across the denominational spectrum, including Leslie Weatherhead, William Temple, Arthur Hinsley and Thompson Elliott, produced treatises on the relationship between warfare and Christianity.[172] Such sources will prove useful in contextualising the experiences of Christians in the armed services.

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[170] University of Sussex, Mass-Observation Archive (MOA), FR 23 `Mass Observation File Report on Religion', January 1940; FR 1200 `Religion', April 1942; FR 1566 `Religion and the People', January 1943; FR 1572 `Religion and the People', January 1943; FR 1870A `The Chaplain to the Forces.', July 1943; FR 2245 `Puzzled People', May 1945

[171] Richard J. Aldrich, *Witness to War: Diaries of the Second World War in Europe and the Middle East* (London: Corgi, 2013), p.17

[172] Leslie D. Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in War-Time* (Abingdon: Cokesbury Press, 1940); William Temple, *Thoughts in Wartime* (London: MacMillan, 1940); Arthur Hinsley, *The Bond of Peace and Other War-Time Addresses* (London: Burns Oates, 1941); W. Thompson Elliott, *Spiritual Issues of the War* (London: Student Christian Movement Press, 1939)

Most of the primary evidence for this study comes in the form of personal testimony. Despite the relative paucity of secondary literature about Christianity in the British armed forces in the Second World War, the fact that the conflict is still within living memory means that the historian is faced with a mountain of potential primary material. According to Brown, such evidence, oral history, autobiography, letters, and diaries, `is now better theorised and commands widespread support in the profession.'[173] Although this study draws upon a wide range of these sources, it is acknowledged that they are self-selecting in nature, being skewed towards those of a literate turn of hand, who often sought to knowingly leave such testimony. Alan Allport has termed such evidence `ego-documents' and therefore unrepresentative.[174] He claimed they tend towards the better educated who were wont to write things down. Initially a disproportionate amount come from officers, and those with idiosyncratic views have tended to be given greater emphasis as they appear more interesting or noteworthy.

However, in recent decades there has been much work undertaken to gather oral and written testimony from people with a wide range of wartime experiences, and from a greater range of social classes by, among others, the Imperial War Museum in London and the Second World War Experience Centre in Wetherby. This means that an ever-broadening selection of evidence is available. Although for too long viewed as a poor relation to written testimony, oral history has, more recently, been acknowledged as a methodologically sound means of gathering evidence. As Penny Summerfield recently claimed, `the practice of oral history has pushed against the constraints imposed by the social science tradition from which it emerged. Understanding subjectivity rather than seeking objectivity has become important, and with it a need to address the interrelationship of culture and memory.'[175] Oral history and written autobiographies can be problematic because of the fallibility of memory. However, as Trever Lummis pointed out, it is often the case that whilst short-term memory declines with age, long-term memory remains strong.[176] This researcher recognises that such testimony originates from those who have volunteered to have it

[173] Brown, *Religion and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain*, p.203
[174] Alan Allport, *Browned Off and Bloody-Minded: The British Soldier Goes to War* (London: Yale University Press, 2015), p. xvii
[175] Penny Summerfield, `Oral History as Autobiographical Practice', *Miranda*, 12, (2016), 1-14
[176] Trevor Lummis, *Listening to History: the Authenticity of Oral Evidence* (London: Hutchinson, 1987)

recorded. Nevertheless, it can provide information that would not always emerge from a written edited account.

The historian must be wary of what Allport termed the `distorting filter of memory' of later memoirs and interviews.[177] People reflect differently on their youthful experiences in later years than they might have done at the time. Sonya Rose chose to restrict her study of wartime citizenship to sources published before January 1946 so her information was filtered through the public culture of the time, rather than via post-war reconstructions of experiences.[178] However admirable as that approach is, much valuable evidence of religiosity in wartime would have been excluded from this study, to the detriment of a better overall understanding of the topic.

Martin Francis claimed that very few memoirs or diaries of flyers refer to religious issues.[179] Despite this claim, this researcher has found that a significant minority of personal testimonies of men and women across all branches of service, including the RAF, do make reference to religion, sometimes sporadically, and it is possible that as religion was not a central focus of Francis' work, he overlooked the seam of Christianity to be found in many works.[180] Available personal testimonies vary from accounts written as the war progressed, to later retrospectives of a long life. Some can show the development of patterns of thinking, as they cover the full length of the war and beyond. However, it is rare to find a collection of contemporary letters or diaries from which it is possible to identify the full development an individual's inner life of faith. Letters home were written for a specific audience, usually family, and the individual could be trying to reassure loved ones that their faith remained strong. Diaries tend to be patchy. Some were expressly written with a future audience in mind, whilst others were written in secret due to regulations prohibiting the recording of information that could prove useful to the enemy, or with the limited opportunities to record thoughts that a prisoner of war camp afforded. However, Richard J. Aldrich was able to claim of personal diaries that `they, more than any other medium, reflect

[177] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.xvii
[178] Sonya Rose, *Which People's War?: National Identity and Citizenship in Wartime Britain, 1939-1945* (London: Oxford University Press, 2004)
[179] Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British Culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p.123
[180] Campbell Muirhead, *The Diary of a Bomb Aimer* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2009); Roger Hall, *Spitfire Pilot* (Stroud: Amberley, 2013); Les Bartlett, *Bomb Aimer over Berlin* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2007)

the true human experience of war.'[181] They reflect an inner conversation and frequently one, in the case of individuals considered in this study, with the feeling of God being close by.

Some people were keen to record their experiences later in life, whilst the evidence from others is confined to the period of conflict with a subsequent reluctance to share their feelings with a wider audience. Corporal John Broom of the RAMC wrote towards the end of his war service, `I don't think I shall ever describe my experiences to anyone unless in reminiscence with some other seasoned soldier. After all, why should I? I'm not the only soldier on the Western Front.'[182] In contrast Captain Edgar Beresford Mash's account of his rescue from Dunkirk begins `this is a testimony', and the final chapter is an invitation to give one's soul to Christ.[183] Therefore there exists a range of testimony, from the overt to that which was not written with future historical analysis in mind.

Michael Snape claimed that, in a field that is still fighting to establish its distinct identity, work lavish with illustrations and examples was necessary as `only a barrage of evidence would make an adequate impression on the myths and prejudices.'[184] He acknowledged that this could lead to issues of representativeness, but sought to strike a balance between use of later personal testimony, contemporary written accounts, the secular and religious press, social surveys and military archives. This approach allowed for a sound distribution of evidence and is one which the current study follows. Therefore, direct testimony from those who experienced the war as Christians comes from three main sources. Firstly, there are significant collections of archives which reflect the importance of Christianity in the armed services. The researcher has accessed papers housed at the Imperial War Museum in London, the Second World War Experience Centre in Wetherby, the Army Medical Services Museum in Aldershot, the Royal Army Chaplains' Department Archive at Amport House, Hampshire and the Armed Forces Christian Union collection at Havelock House, Aldershot.

[181] Aldrich, *Witness to War*, p.2
[182] Broom, Letter, 30 April 1945
[183] H.E. Beresford Mash, *Up from the Gates: A Story of Divine Dealing through Dunkirk* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott, 1943), p.11
[184] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.x

Secondly, the researcher has been granted access to many private papers still in the possession of the families of those who served in the war. These private papers, usually in the form of diaries, journals and letters to family members, have an immediacy which is invaluable in accessing thoughts and feelings from seven decades ago. In addition, they benefit from being hitherto untapped sources of testimony, thus bringing fresh evidence to the topic.

Thirdly, memoirs and autobiographies from those involved in the war began as a trickle in the late 1940s, usually written by those in positions of command, and personal war accounts largely continued in this vein until the 1980s, when publishers became increasingly keen to record a broader range of experiences from an ageing generation. In addition, the increasing emphasis on `history from below' from the 1960s onwards has meant an increased appreciation of, and desire to read, the experiences of ordinary men and women as historical actors. Furthermore, many people who had experienced horrors which they had kept locked away in their minds for decades found the voice to record them as they passed retirement age. Some accounts were privately published for a relatively small readership, whilst others received a wider critical acclaim. New accounts of wartime experiences are still being published, and whilst a minority were written with Christianity as a central theme, many have passing references to, or extended reflections on, an individual's faith.

No study of faith in wartime can ever claim to provide a complete picture. What follows is one reconstruction of the Christian religious culture and mentalities of Second World War service personnel given the disparate nature of the sources and the difficulties in understanding other people's conception of faith, particularly those of two generations ago. The question has been asked as to whether an historian should possess a personal faith in order to undertake a work of religious history.[185] Whilst good religious history can be written by people of all faiths and none, it is necessary to acknowledge that the sources were written or spoken with sincerity, and that one can certainly not bring an antagonistic attitude to beliefs which were genuinely held. Nor would a eulogistic or exculpatory gloss do full justice to the subject. The researcher trusts that he has struck a balance between an appreciation of British

[185] Christopher Brooke et. al., `What is Religious History?' *History Today*, 35, (1985), 25-31

Christian culture, having been brought up within a Protestant evangelical household himself, and the detached critical eye of the historian.

Chapter Two - Religious Provision in the Armed Services

Introduction

Between 1939 and 1945 5.8 million men, or 60% of all those born between 1905 and 1927, were mobilised into the British armed services, 3.8 million of them serving in the army.[186] In addition approximately 640,000 women served in various branches of the military, including the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS), the Auxiliary Territorial Service (ATS) and the Women's Auxiliary Air Force (WAAF).[187] Service life took people away from the familiar milieu and routines of work and family, and patterns of religious observance, and thrust them into an environment which was often not conducive to the maintenance of pre-war Christian rituals. However, within all branches of service, significant attempts were made to provide formal Christian worship and informal pastoral and spiritual advice through the various chaplaincy services.

The army appointed 3692 chaplains of all denominations, a ratio of approximately one chaplain for every 1250 soldiers.[188] By 1945 the strength of the chaplaincy establishment of the Royal Navy and Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve was 534, comprising 416 Anglicans and 118 Nonconformists and Roman Catholics.[189] They served in ships of cruiser size and above, small ships and shore establishments at home and overseas. In the RAF a total of 577 Anglican clergy served as chaplains, in addition to 231 Roman Catholics and 246 from various other Protestant denominations.[190] United Board chaplains, representing the Baptist and Congregational denominations across all three services, remained within the existing chaplaincy structures, whilst Roman Catholics had their own distinct administrative structure under the direction of a Vicar-General. Christian philosopher T.E. Jessop noted of army chaplains `the fewness of their numbers in relation to the men they have to serve.'[191] It cannot be denied that the additional duties military chaplains were

[186] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.xix
[187] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.xvii; Beryl Escott, *The WAAF: A History of the Women's Auxiliary Air Force during the Second World War* (Oxford: Shire Publications, 2003), p.5; M.H. Fletcher, *The WRNS, A History of the Women's Royal Naval Service* (London: B.T. Batsford, 1989), p.8
[188] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.117
[189] Gordon Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains: A History of the Chaplains of the Royal Navy* (Headington: Oxford Illustrated Press, 1978), p.331
[190] Information provided by Rev. Eleanor Rance, RAF Chaplaincy historian, telephone conversation with the author, 13th February 2017
[191] T.E. Jessop, `The Padre's Hour', *The Spectator*, 22 October 1943, p.380

expected to undertake over and above the work of a parish priest or congregational leader could result in resources being thinly spread at times. During the war, army chaplains suffered casualties proportionate to the rest of the troops and their positions were harder to fill with fresh recruits than other roles.[192]

Despite the importance of Christianity in British society between 1939 and 1945, scant attention has been paid to the religious aspects of the culture of the British military machine during the Second World War. Michael Snape's *God and the British Soldier* is the only significant work to assess the range of ways in which religious culture was infused throughout the British Army during the period of the two world wars.[193] Various studies have examined the work undertaken by chaplains who served in each of the branches of the military. Sir John Smyth VC, an Anglican who had served as an officer in both world wars, wrote an officially-sponsored history of the Royal Army Chaplains' Department, viewing the organisation as an effective tool of the state, the role of chaplains being to justify government war aims and to maintain morale.[194] For Smyth `the Church, State and Army are inextricably woven.'[195]

Michael Snape's more recent official history of the RAChD devoted much coverage to the political machinations at its head, and the disgruntlement of many chaplains serving on the ground.[196] However, it did not specifically focus on perceptions of their work in the eyes of Christians in the British Army. Alan Robinson's study of army chaplaincy during the Second World War did gather evidence from those who had served across the ranks. [197] He argued that the way in which army chaplains approached their work was a blend of the influence of the sending church, the military context in which the chaplain found himself, and the individual personality of each chaplain. With a few exceptions, men highly valued the sacramental and pastoral services provided by chaplains.

The only published account of RAF Chaplains in the second half of the twentieth century was pacifist Gordon Zahn's 1969 study.[198] Zahn identified a `role

[192] Information provided by David Blake, Curator, Royal Army Chaplains' Museum and Archive, Amport House
[193] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*
[194] Sir John Smyth, *In This Sign Conquer: Story of the Army Chaplains* (London: Mowbray, 1968)
[195] Ibid, p.15
[196] Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department*
[197] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*
[198] Gordon Zahn, *Chaplains in the RAF: A Study in Role Tension* (Manchester: MUP, 1969)

conflict' for chaplains based on their dual loyalties to the military and the Church. Again, there was no attempt at an assessment of the service they provided from the point of view of serving Christians. Gordon Taylor's coverage of the Second World War in his history of naval chaplaincy tended towards extended narrative accounts based on interviews and correspondence from those who had served as chaplains within the Royal Navy and Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve, but it did provide some opinions on the role of the chaplain and the position of church parades.[199] Taylor's views on the effectiveness of religious provision in the navy were influenced by his own wartime service as a naval chaplain. Again, there was little reference to the opinion of sailors as to the quality or utility of chaplaincy services.

Some studies on the chaplaincy work of specific denominations have been undertaken. Ronald W. Thomson produced a brief overview of the work of United Board chaplains in 1964.[200] Neil Allison, himself a Baptist military chaplain, examined in more depth the work of Baptist and Congregational chaplains, and found a well-organised and committed level of provision.[201] Tom Johnstone and James Hagerty's laudatory work emphasised the physical and moral courage of Roman Catholic chaplains in the different branches of the armed services, and the importance of the maintenance of the sacramental approach in conflict zones, `Through [chaplains'] ministry the Church lavishes her saving means upon the faithful who serve in that particular type of life.'[202] Again, little mention was made of the quality of the service provided from the point of view of those serving in the forces.

Therefore, among those historians who have studied religious aspects of military life during the Second World War, the overwhelming focus has been on the work of chaplains, the official representatives of the Churches in the armed services. How ordinary service men and women, particularly those of an active faith, perceived the quality of that provision remains an underexplored area. This is an important omission, as any significant dissonance between chaplains and service personnel would indicate a weakening of ties between the individual Christian and the Churches

[199] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*
[200] Ronald W. Thomson, *Ministering to the Forces: The Story of the Baptist and Congregational Chaplains and the Work of the United Navy, Army and Air Force Board, 1914-1964* (Brighton: BUGBI and CEUW, 1964)
[201] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*
[202] Tom Johnstone and James Hagerty, *The Cross and the Sword: Catholic Chaplains in the Front* (London: Chapman, 1996), p.6

and would thus limit the potential for any post-war religious revival in the United Kingdom.

Military Chaplaincy

The range of postings for army chaplains was huge. They could be deployed to bases, hospitals, along lines of communication and with fighting divisions across three continents. Due to the geographically scattered roles that army personnel were assigned to, such as serving on anti-aircraft batteries, chaplains often found it a challenge to provide regular face-to-face provision for all, and therefore supplementary radio broadcasts were used in larger establishments. Similarly, RAF chaplains covered significant distances between bases to provide for their flock. Roman Catholic chaplain Fr William Hamilton recalled regularly leading three Masses per day in order to cater for his congregation dispersed across balloon sites, radar stations and decoy airfields.[203] Similarly, at one point Fr Walter Meyjes had to cover all the naval bases in North Africa for Roman Catholics.[204]

Many clergy opted for service in the navy or air force, as pay and allowances were better than in the army, and in the navy chaplains were not encumbered by the burden of an officer's rank. Despite this, Neil Allison has argued that the RAChD was more representative of the civilian church during the Second, as opposed to the First World War as a broader range of interviewers assessed the suitability of clergy for service.[205] In the navy, the Chaplain of the Fleet was the head of the chaplaincy service, with a rank equivalent to that of Rear Admiral. He had to be an Anglican, however the position of his deputy, the Principal Chaplain, was open to Free Church and Church of Scotland clergy. The navy treated the latter two groups as one broad denominational catchment, providing greater flexibility in posting chaplains to different naval establishments. Naval chaplains did not wear a uniform, but were denoted merely by a clerical collar, as the rank of chaplain, unlike in the army, held no equivalency with the fighting men. However, during the Second World War it became increasingly common for chaplains to wear a navy cap with a chaplaincy badge to prevent them

[203] P. Hamilton Pollock, *Wings on the Sun: A Padre with the RAF* (Dublin: Clanmore and Reynolds Ltd, 1954), p.29
[204] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.445
[205] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.46

from being arrested as suspected spies in naval bases, although some longer serving chaplains continued to retain the privilege of wearing plain clothes.

Despite this increasing formality, naval chaplains were still frequently able to speak frankly to senior officers as well as lower ranks. Rev H.V. Evans recalled the advice he was given by his ship's commanding officer, that, whilst addressing him he could act as if an admiral, `Padre, remember in the stokers' mess you're a stoker.'[206] Rev Lloyd Harding, a United Board chaplain, believed that absence of rank helped him to gain the confidence of his men through association.[207] Some naval chaplains were in charge of chapels and churches on shore, with others at sea `conducting services when and where they could, and ministering to a constantly changing flock.'[208] Rev Frederick Darrel Bunt, chaplain at Chatham naval barracks between 1940 and 1943, asserted `the navy is one parish.'[209] He saw it as lacking the regimental exclusivity of the army, with departing parishioners being personally commended to the next chaplain into whose care they would transfer.

One of the main issues facing RAF chaplains in establishing and maintaining credibility among their flock was their remaining on base whilst the aircrews flew in operations. Thus, they could not share the same dangers as their men unlike some army and naval chaplains. This was a matter of honour for Fr William Hamilton, who managed to gain access to a Coastal Command mission to secure a fuller appreciation of the dangers encountered by his men.[210] Despite these occasional displays of courage, Rev L. John Collins, an Anglican serving as an RAF chaplain, was sharply critical of the quality of many of his colleagues, `the bishops of the Anglican Church failed to realise the importance during wartime of encouraging the best available men to enter the services as chaplains, and often preferred to use the occasion to rid themselves of their duds and misfits.'[211] Collins identified a further challenge facing military chaplains, arguing that when bishops had to mediate in a dispute between chaplains and the secular authority of the armed services, they invariably came down on the side of the latter. Thus, `the work of the Church in the RAF often suffered because so many chaplains were afraid to challenge authority at those points where

[206] Quoted in Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.399
[207] Allison, *United Board Chaplains,* p.96
[208] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.391
[209] Ibid, p.391
[210] Pollock, *Wings on the Sun:* p.36
[211] L. John Collins, *Faith Under Fire* (London: Leslie Frewin, 1966), p.84

their integrity as ministers of the Christian religion was at stake.'[212] Collins himself was not averse to challenging a commanding officer, Air Marshal Arthur Harris, over the ethics of the obliteration bombing strategy. However not all RAF chaplains were accused of being auxiliaries of the state. Neil Allison claimed, of United Board chaplains, that `the Sending Churches and their chaplains had not and would not become simple tools of the State even in times of great international tension and conflict.'[213] Thus, many Nonconformist and Roman Catholic chaplains managed to maintain a degree of independence that was denied to Anglican clergy.

To cater for the large numbers of women serving in the forces, a cohort of females was mobilised to provide chaplaincy support as Chaplains' Assistants. Thirty-six were appointed and assigned to the WRAC, WRNS, WAAF and ATS. However, they were excluded from leading celebrations of Holy Communion, with the focus of their work being pastoral support. They could teach and lead padre's hours and sometimes lead public worship. It was not until the end of the war that the first female, the Congregationalist Elsie Chamberlain, was appointed as a military chaplain to the RAF. This was after substantial political pressure from the Secretary of State for Air, Viscount Stansgate, whose own wife, Margaret, was later to become head of the Congregational Union of England and Wales.[214]

Michael Snape contended that chaplains serving in the army during the war were, like the men of their generation, of a less deferential mood.[215] They had to mediate an initial suspicion of military culture and structures to meet the demands of the day. From the point of view of the military high command `the whole of the chaplain's ministry stood to benefit soldiers' morale.'[216] Rev Percy Middleton Brumwell, the Deputy Chaplain-General, identified the moral qualities that needed to be engendered in men and women in order for this morale to be sustained. They were `The Will to Win', `Self-respect', `Self-control' and `High Sense of Honour.'[217] In addition to these personal qualities, a demanding range of practical duties was expected from chaplains, including providing invigorating services, maintaining a

[212] Ibid, p.85
[213] Allison *United Board Chaplains*, p.53
[214] Alun Wyburn-Powell, *Political Wings: William Wedgwood Benn, First Viscount Stansgate* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2015), p.176
[215] Snape, *Royal Army Chaplains' Department*, p.281
[216] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.119
[217] Percy Middleton Brumwell, *The Army Chaplain* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1943), p.59

presence on the front line, ensuring decent burials for the dead and being available for less formal activities including general chats. Their remit could often extend to providing entertainments and organising canteens, assisting medical staff during times of battle and recovering bodies from tanks. Often there was marriage guidance work to be undertaken with their men and writing letters to bereaved relatives.

T.E. Jessop thought that civilian clergy did not make natural military chaplains. Padres were, like most of the men in the armed forces, `civilians at heart.'[218] When military service was demanded of them, however, they recognised how the experience could make them more effective churchmen. One chaplain commented, `I notice that practically all the effective leaders in the Church of England are men who have had military experience in the World War.'[219] In spite of this improvement in their spiritual leadership qualities, Alan Wilkinson suggested that army chaplains were `in the greatest danger of becoming auxiliaries of the state.'[220] They were sometimes placed in a spiritual no mans' land, with tensions between the RAChD and the bishops being exacerbated by an inadequacy of pastoral care for the chaplains. In addition, they had to try and meet the sometimes-conflicting demands of a military culture which demanded adherence to the formality of church parades, whilst reaching out to the men in their care who often resented the obligation to attend those occasions. This led to a situation whereby, according to Alan Robinson, `devout Christian soldiers were both the most ardent supporters of chaplains and their sharpest critics.'[221] This could be interpreted as a dissonance between the organised Churches and active Christians, but the fact that the latter were critical demonstrates an engagement with the quality of the Christian leadership being provided, and thus suggests the resilience of Christian faith within this milieu.

This dichotomy of a chaplain's position in wartime was succinctly outlined in Mass-Observation's 1943 Report, *The Chaplain to the Forces*:

> It is difficult for a padre to do anything without getting severely criticised. […] His sincerity is not questioned, but if he is too sheltered and intellectual he is said to be "other worldly", and if he comes right out and acts as the others do,

[218] Jessop, `The Padre's Hour', p.380
[219] Quoted in Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, p.233
[220] Ibid p.292
[221] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.190

> it is wondered if this is the sort of example that clergymen ought to set. If his sermons are learned, he is accused of talking over the men's head, if they are simple, he is said to be talking down to them. If he keeps strictly within his own sphere, people wonder what he does all the week, if he is generally helping, here, there and everywhere, he is accused of pushing his nose in.[222]

The report also identified that, whilst chaplains were perceived as being men of personal sincerity and high morals, they lacked a `common touch', had a markedly different outlook on life to many of the men and women in their care, used too much obscure vocabulary, and, in the context of the army and RAF, suffered from the remoteness from the masses that an officer's rank brought.[223] Chaplains were seen as well-meaning and sincere, but lacked the ability to `get over' to their men. Fr William Hamilton recalled being told during an initial six-week training course at Uxbridge, `It is our duty to make officers and gentlemen of you all.'[224] Hamilton considered that the petty rules which abounded in the service would impede him from his job of `saving souls.'[225] The M-O report found that `it does seem undeniable that the padre is held in much higher esteem in the navy.'[226]

Despite these competing demands, according to Michael Snape, Second World War army chaplains, in contrast to their predecessors in the First World War, `had fewer grounds on which to attract criticism.'[227] There proved few reasons for public recrimination against chaplains who supported a war seen at the time, and retrospectively, as just, and one which was then followed by worthwhile domestic social reforms. In addition, they `undoubtedly provided enormous support for soldiers both individually and collectively.'[228] However, this judgement of army chaplains was made in the context of the generality of troops. There has been little specific research on whether their work attracted praise or criticism from self-defining Christians.

The 1943 M-O report provided an example of how active Christians wanted a very different chaplaincy service to that which would appeal to most recruits:

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[222] MOA, FR 1870A, `The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, p.28
[223] Ibid, p.21
[224] Pollock, *Wings on the Sun:* p.16
[225] Ibid, p.17
[226] MOA, FR 1870A, `The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, p.24
[227] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.135
[228] Ibid, p.137

> The chaplain finds himself confronted with all types at once. An R.A. Battery in the North of Scotland was served by occasional visits from two different chaplains; one was a highly academic man, who had no appeal at all for the majority of men but was very popular with a few of the more intelligent, who supported him thoroughly. The other was a free and easy `hearty' type, who was popular with those men who were not the type to come to voluntary services, etc.; at the same time, the supporters of the other chaplain, who were the main religious nucleus, felt that this one was not doing his duty properly and were not at all helpful.[229]

The same report found that a shy, academic parson who preached theological sermons managed to increase attendance at voluntary services.[230] This demonstrates the tendency for active Christians to respond well to robust religious provision, even when provided from military-sanctioned sources. Michael Snape has demonstrated how chaplains emphasised Britain's moral purpose as a defender of Christian civilisation against the twin totalitarian ideologies of Nazi Germany and the Communist Soviet Union, thus being in alignment with the generally patriotic nature of Christian service personnel, a theme addressed in chapter five.[231]

Church Parades

One aspect of religious provision which caused continuing resentment amongst recruits, and a sense of futility for many chaplains, was the weekly church parade. Until 1946 it was compulsory, under Paragraph 1605 of the King's Regulations, for all men and women in the armed services to attend a Sunday church parade, unless on other military duties. It stipulated that `all ranks, unless granted special leave or prevented by military duty, will attend divine service', with personnel to be marched to and from the place of worship.[232] This was despite the view of Sir Ronald Adam, the Adjutant-General, that `formal parades every Sunday are likely to do more harm than good to the men's spiritual welfare.'[233] There was often a choice between Church of England, Roman Catholic and Nonconformist services which, due to the

[229] MOA, FR 1870A, `The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, p.9
[230] Ibid, p.12
[231] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.120
[232] War Office, *The King's Regulations for the Army and the Royal Army Reserve 1940* (London: HMSO, 1940) ,p.510
[233] Quoted in Jeremy Crang `The Abolition of Compulsory Church Parades in the British Army', *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56 (2005), p.97

compulsory imperative, had to cater for the full spectrum belief, from devout to nominal to none.

The church parade became the most regular and high-profile experience of military chaplaincy for most men and women. Historians have claimed that these occasions were disliked by most people, whether religious or not. Alan Robinson contended that some chaplains and their flock saw church parades as a `dreadful mix-up between religion and spit-and-polish.'[234] He also found that Anglicans and Roman Catholics did not generally grumble about compulsory church parades, but Methodists and Baptists complained more frequently. This suggests that Nonconformists resented the spiritual blandness required of a service which had to try to meet the needs of all men and women and indicates their rejection of a homogenised Christianity and a continuing adherence to previous doctrinal norms.

Jeremy Crang argued that the mass of the army saw compulsory church parades in negative terms, finding them being either monotonous and moralistic, with homilies against the recreational pleasures of sex and alcohol, or too much abstract theology.[235] For Michael Snape, services were another manifestation of army `bullshit' along with sick parades and pay parades.[236] Concerned clergy and laymen thought they alienated soldiers from religion of any kind, with Snape suggesting that at times non-religious soldiers were more likely to attend a voluntary service than a compulsory one.[237] Alan Allport agreed, citing religion as `an officially prescribed Army virtue',[238] thus making it suspect in the eyes of soldiers. Neil Allison argued that many men from a Free Church or Church of Scotland background found church parades an imposition due to the Anglican forms of service.[239]

Nevertheless, the Army Council reaffirmed the importance of the church parade in 1941, citing `their profound conviction of the value of religious inspiration as a source of spiritual and moral strength in the present conflict.'[240] As Crang put it, `God, it seems, was to be mobilised to bolster the morale of the troops; and they would

[234] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.294
[235] Crang, `The Abolition of Compulsory Church Parades', p.95
[236] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.141
[237] Ibid, p.142
[238] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.256
[239] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.53
[240] Brumwell, *The Army Chaplain*, p.42

march to meet Him with their brasses gleaming.'[241] This caused resentment across much of the army, with the element of compulsion being seen by many Christians as incompatible with true religious meaning. During a 1942 War Office investigation into army morale, two essays were received in evidence which demonstrated the unpopularity of church parades. A private in the Black Watch claimed that the parades had more to do with military regimentation than religious observance and that this was undermining the role padres were playing, 'the forbidding display of compulsion and regimentation inherent in many church parades appears to be entirely wrong in relation to the fundamentals of true religion.'[242] Another soldier agreed, 'What I do object to is the wrong emphasis almost always laid by the military authorities on the parade, the result of which is disastrous for the church. For *church* parade, the Army substitutes church *parade*.'[243] There was, however, some relaxation of the regulations in many units, allowing a `marking in' system whereby individuals would be checked against a list after making their own way to the service, rather than being marched there in formation.

Whilst some saw formal parades as disastrous for the church, as they impeded the propagation of true religion, others argued that compulsory parades allowed men an expression of religiosity without being susceptible to being singled out and ridiculed by their comrades.[244] Rev. Ronald Selby Wright, a Church of Scotland army chaplain and radio broadcaster, took the view that church parades were a success for the Churches, writing that `never before have so many Sunday by Sunday attended Divine Worship at one time.'[245] An exchange of letters in *The Times* in August 1943 confirmed that not all sections of the armed forces held a derogatory view of compulsory parades. In response to a letter from Rev Leslie Derrett, an officiating Chaplain to the Forces, who had asserted that the mandatory nature of parades was `indefensible [and] a-moral' and seen by soldiers as a `disgusting and revolting imposition', an anonymous RN Captain countered with the view that `the average sailor does not find church parades a distasteful imposition.'[246]

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[241] Crang, `The Abolition of Compulsory Church Parades', p.94
[242] The National Archives, *Joint secretaries, essay on morale in the army by a private in the Black Watch*, 1 March 1943, WO 163/161, app. A.
[243] Ibid, app. B
[244] The National Archives, AG, *Compulsory church attendance in the army*, 6 March 1946, WO 163/99.
[245] Ronald Selby Wright (ed.), *Soldiers Also Asked* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), p.v
[246] *The Times*, 21st August 1943, p.7; *The Times*, 28th August 1943, p.8

Despite some chaplains and officers speaking highly of compulsory church parades, their place in the WAAF were debated in the House of Commons on 22nd March 1944, with Hugh Lawson, Common Wealth Member of Parliament for Skipton, arguing that the `practice of detailing personnel for church parades does great harm, not only to the discipline of the Service, but to the Christian religion.'[247] Lawson, an active Methodist, had recent experience of the military church parade, having returned from service in Gibraltar in 1943 in order to contest a by-election. The Under Secretary of State for Air, Harold Balfour, replied that the WAAF was subject to the King's Regulations just like any other part of the armed services.

Compulsory church parades assumed a different complexion in the navy. As larger ships contained only one chaplain, with smaller vessels having to share a chaplain between them, there was rarely compulsion for Roman Catholics and Nonconformists to attend parades. In addition, the lack of space on many ships meant chapels were small, thus limiting attendance figures, so parades became *de facto* voluntary events. On some ships all those not attending the formal service had to stand to attention as a procession led by the chaplain made its way to the chapel. Rev Gordon Taylor bemoaned the abolition of compulsion, as church parades provided `a witness for the cause of Religion.'[248] For Taylor, the change served neither the interests of the church, nor of the navy, with the replacement of church parades with `moral leadership' classes a poor substitute for what had been lost. Social pressures from comrades discouraged many from attending parades once they were made voluntary, with one man commenting to Taylor, `They've made it impossible for a man like me to go to church.'[249] However Taylor did accept the inevitability of abolition as church attendance had begun to decline in civilian life, noting that attendance at voluntary Holy Communion following compulsory parades had been small.[250]

Christian service men and women reflected this range of conflicting attitudes toward the church parade. Michael Benn, an RAF officer and evangelical Anglican, who was considering a career in the ministry before his untimely death in 1944, strongly criticised the church parades he encountered in 1940 and 1941. The *Student Christian Newsletter* of 25th November 1941 contained a letter from an army chaplain

[247] HC Deb 22 March 1944, vol 398, col 838
[248] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.457
[249] Ibid
[250] Ibid

arguing that, as the military was based on orders and compulsion, it was logical that church parades should be so too. Benn had written a footnote in pencil, `Is a Corporate Service which means nothing to anyone but the organiser dead or alive?'[251] He did not stop at this note, but drafted a lengthy response arguing that church parades were unsuccessful due to either being too complex, too simple, irrelevant and failing to make the subject `live.' Benn argued that military authorities were incapable of providing Religious Education. Chaplains were often unsuitable, there was too much emphasis on `spit and polish', and parades were resented by the men for eating into precious leisure time and were often held in unsuitable conditions. At one parade at RAF Church Fenton, recalled Benn, the service had been inaudible due to the sound of aeroplanes revving their engines. Other services had been conducted in the freezing cold. Benn asserted, `I tolerated having my food, my clothes, my life organised by Senior Officers, often very stupid, but I cannot have my Religion similarly controlled.'[252]

Benn's impression of RAF church parades was echoed by one of those charged with conducting them, Rev L. John Collins, who reflected they were `if not positively harmful, on the whole useless.'[253] Collins cited the example of RAF Yatesbury, a base which housed 5000 men and women, with a chapel that could only hold 150 people. Services were therefore held in a freezing marquee which could accommodate 1000, with four further congregations waiting their turn outside, sometimes in the cold rain. When their turn came, neither officers nor NCOs joined the ranks for the service, creating much resentment. Due to Collins' intervention, compulsory church parades at Yatesbury were soon abolished. Only a handful attended the subsequent voluntary parades, with `the vast majority looking upon these services as a provision, like extra milk at school, for the few who liked or needed them.'[254] Collins was not the only RAF chaplain who thought enforced attendance counterproductive. Rev John T. Hamilton, a Baptist chaplain, `made a point on each station of informing the men that he was opposed to compulsory attendance at church services. He only wished men to be

[251] Michael Benn Papers, Benn Family Archive, Letter from William Greer to Michael Benn, 25th November 1941.
[252] Michael Benn Papers, Notes on Army Chaplains, n.d.
[253] Collins, *Faith Under Fire*, p.70
[254] Ibid, p.71

present on a voluntary basis.'[255] Therefore in the RAF, church parades were not looked upon favourably by active Christians or many chaplains, with their worth being openly challenged.

Ken Tout, who rose from private to tank commander in the Northamptonshire Yeomanry, considered army church parades to be at best unproductive and at worst counter-productive. His colleagues, who were nominal Anglicans, spent their Sundays polishing buttons and boots before spending more time on parade. This caused many to resent the church. In addition, Anglicans in the army were not free to find a local church at which to worship, a right Tout enjoyed as an attested Salvationist.[256] Neil Cochrane, another Salvationist serving with the 51st Highland Division, could attend services at the Salvation Army Citadel in Bradford rather than church parades whilst stationed in Otley.[257]

For those active Christians who had not availed themselves of the option to attest as a Nonconformist, church parades could sometimes provide episodes of uplifting collective worship. John Broom, whose home church had been an independent Railway Mission, was impressed with the first Anglican church parade he attended at his RAMC training depot in Leeds. Having praised the beauty of the organ music and the simplicity of the setting, he noted that `everyone was most reverent.'[258] Broom found that the chaplain:

> [S]poke very well, without a single note, and standing in the centre of the platform in his vestments. He didn't make a single mistake but spoke just like somebody you hear on the radio. […] I quite enjoyed the service and fellows I spoke to afterwards who haven't been for years and who usually spend Sunday in the pubs, said that they too quite enjoyed the meeting. There wasn't any particularly evangelical note about it. All the same it was reverent, sincere and thoughtful and I've heard worse sermons from Evangelists.

This early favourable impression of church parades was not consistently sustained, as by October Broom was choosing to attend a straightforward Anglican

[255] B. Talbot, *A Man Sent from God: The Life and Ministry of John T. Hamilton, 1916-1999* (Oxford: Regent's Park College, 2011), p.69
[256] Ken Tout Papers, Tout Family Archive
[257] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Neil Cochrane
[258] John Broom, Letter, 25 March 1940

service at a nearby church rather than rely on the church parade, `the service on the whole was good & certainly much better than that I should have had in the Main Hall in B. Park.'[259] This episode also indicates a willingness on some bases not to insist on the enforcement of attendance at the parade, as long as it was known that an individual was at a service elsewhere. A few months later Broom `dodged (as usual) out of Church Parade & shot along to St. Chad's.'[260] However Broom found that a parade service given by a Nonconformist chaplain of some spiritual reward, `Last Sunday we had the morning service in the grounds, the chaplain being a free church minister. He spoke well on "This is the way; walk ye in it."'[261]

The following month, a service in the NAAFI was `definitely good […] the chaplain repeated the text "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ & thou shalt be saved"'[262] However, Broom felt that the chaplain's `interpretation of "saved" wasn't as strongly evangelical as it might have been.' During 1942 Broom attended Nonconformist church parades on board the SS *Strathnaver* en route to Egypt, `finding that the content "grips" more.'[263] However he did enjoy a service led by a Church of England padre who spoke `straight from the shoulder' and was the only army chaplain he had heard who had proselytised, evidently taking the opportunity to offer men anxious about their futures the chance to convert to Anglicanism.[264] Over the course of the war, Broom found nothing objectionable in the compulsory nature of church parades, although availed himself of the opportunity to visit alternative places of worship when the opportunity arose. He attended services led by both Anglican and Free Church chaplains and judged them on the quality of the sermon. Even those he found less evangelical than he would have liked still provided a continuity of collective worship away from his home church community and were thus an important feature in the cycle of faith.

However, church parades could also be valued by the less devout. James Driscoll, an Anglican conscientious objector who had been granted his request to serve in the RAMC, found that despite many of the several hundred in the congregation at

[259] Ibid, 21 October 1940
[260] Ibid 12 December 1940
[261] Ibid, 8 July 1941
[262] Ibid, 11 August 1941
[263] Ibid, 25 June 1942
[264] Ibid, 25 June 1942

church parades being there to avoid fatigues, they sang with enthusiasm.[265] For some of a nominal faith, church parades offered an opportunity to play the system. Private Alexander Adamson, a Scotsman in the RAMC, reflected that he had an inner desire to `kick against the establishment […] my Presbyterian label helped me to do so when I was so minded.'[266] Having been ordered to attend a Church of England parade at Crookham Camp, Hampshire, `I pointed out that I was not of that persuasion and they grudgingly allowed me to join several Methodists whose chapel was near Fleet. This walk meant having a short spell out of barracks.'[267] Adamson's admission demonstrates how church parades could be counterproductive to army discipline, as they offered an opportunity for subversion over an issue that was of minimal importance, `Silly really, as I had no strong feelings about religion or church attendance.'[268] A similar attitude to church parades was noted by Second Lieutenant Arthur Royall, an Anglican who, when attending a service at the Garrison Church at Mile End, saw two card schools taking place on the back rows during the service.[269] Private Jim Wheeler, a Methodist in the RAMC, attended Nonconformist church parades in the NAAFI at Church Crookham, and recalled it was `funny [that] people used to chuck themselves around saying `Hallelujah'' for half an hour then go and play cards.'[270]

There were occasions in prisoner of war camps where church parades were made compulsory, with a similar degree of irritation expressed by men forced to attend them. Private Stanley Dawson of the 18th Division Field Workshop recalled his time at Changi Camp:

> We had our full complement of churches of all denominations […] and had we been left to our own devices we should have filled them to capacity at every service. But to the higher-ups churches meant one thing, despite the protests of many of the padres, church parades. Compulsory church parades. With, as far as possible, all the spit and polish of such a parade at home. They became in

[265] James Driscoll, *Memoirs of an Old Man* (Privately Published, 2008), p.56
[266] Aldershot, Army Services Museum Archive (ASM), Alexander Adamson, *Experiences of an Ordinary Soldier*, p.6
[267] Ibid
[268] Ibid, p.8
[269] Wetherby, Second World War Experience Centre (SWWEC), LEEWW 2001-123, Papers of Arthur Royall
[270] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 15433, Interview with Albert Frederick James `Jim' Wheeler

> fact excuses for full dress commanding officers' parade. And were, accordingly, disliked as heartily as any compulsory church parade in England.[271]

However, Dawson noted that there was a good attendance at voluntary evening services.

Padre's Hours and Religious Education

The questioning nature of Second World War recruits created new challenges for military chaplains, who could no longer rely on submissive compliance from troops receiving their message via the medium of a weekly church parade. Furthermore, fears were expressed by some commentators that, should a resilient Christian message become absent as a result, there would be a breakdown in communal culture and ethics, and that an alternative communist ideology might fill the void. Leslie Weatherhead claimed that only a rebirth of Christian conviction could save the world from the `demons of savagery and fear which haunt mankind today.'[272]

In response to these concerns, from 1942 onwards, the provision of padre's hours spread throughout the army. Begun by Rev J.J.A. Hodgkin as an initiative in the Airborne Division, on the orders of its GOC, Major-General F.A.M. Browning, who was anxious to ensure high levels of motivation amongst men undertaking this dangerous work, they were much more congenial than a church parade. The hour would begin with a short, informal talk from the padre, followed by discussions on issues which arose. Men could smoke, and the atmosphere was relaxed. Rev Ronald Selby Wright, the `Radio Padre', produced a book, *Soldiers Also Asked*, which covered some of the questions raised during padre's hours. Wright wrote that the hours `helped, probably in a greater way than has ever before been possible, to let the Church […] know *if* men are thinking and *what* men are thinking about the Christian Faith.'[273]

According to Michael Snape, padre's hours suited the wartime generation who were used to challenging authority, as they could `heckle and argue, as they couldn't do in church – they could get points cleared up or refuse to be satisfied as they chose.'[274] Alan Robinson concurred, `Whereas soldiers resented compulsory worship,

[271] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 3156, Papers of Stanley Dawson
[272] Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in Wartime*, p.36
[273] Wright (ed.), *Soldiers Also Asked* p.v
[274] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.123

compulsory discussions about Christianity were acceptable.'[275] The practice spread to some parts of the navy, although many naval commanders remained keener on the use of morning and evening prayers and Sunday services. As chaplains were in persistent proximity to the men, it was not generally felt that additional time needed to be set aside for `organised' informal occasions.

Rev R.J. Blofeld, an Anglican army padre, highlighted the workload that padre's hours entailed, claiming to have conducted 203 sessions over the course of a year.[276] Blofeld noted that 763 questions had been asked during those sessions, giving some indication that the amount of time given over to each discussion was between fifteen and twenty minutes, allowing for some depth of discourse. Most attendees were warrant officers and non-commissioned officers, although some officers took part. The questions raised were challenging towards the Churches, including `Why are the churches empty?', the men blaming dull, unintelligible services too prone to ceremony, and `Is organised religion necessary?'[277] Men also asked questions about the Churches' ethical teachings and the efficacy of welfare services provided by different denominations. However, Blofeld found a reluctance to address matters of personal faith, arising from an attitude that `the Christian mustn't question these things.' Questions were also asked about the Bible and the ethics of killing. Blofeld summarised the attitude shown by the men towards religion as one of `mild hostility.'[278]

However, even this less formal arrangement of religious provision could cause controversy. An exchange of letters in *The Spectator* magazine in the autumn of 1943, in response to an article by T.E. Jessop, showed some dissent towards the view that padre's hours were a positive innovation. Jessop had claimed that chaplains `were there to keep or make men religious, so far as the men would let them, and the platform of the weekly parade-service was not big enough for so big a task.'[279] To fill this void, some chaplains were providing up to thirty padre's hours per week. Officers were

[275] Robinson, *Chaplains at War* p.145
[276] R.J. Blofeld, 'Soldiers' Questions', *The Spectator*, 30 June 1944, p.588
[277] Ibid
[278] Ibid
[279] Jessop, `The Padre's Hour', p.380

usually not present and there existed `a knock-about of argument, a frank exchange of rebukes, a mutuality of contribution, a straight confrontation of men with men.'[280]

In response to Jessop's article, one George Burgess, whose son was serving with the Eighth Army, contended that padre's hours `are not appreciated by the rank and file of the Service man.'[281] Chaplains, Burgess claimed, were too out of touch to reach their men even through this medium, too hidebound by their officers' rank and still seen as responsible for the detested church parade. Burgess claimed that none of Britain's main allies had compulsory religious observance and called on chaplains to:

> [C]ome down to the average soldier and airman, let the Chaplain-General insist that his men are capable of understanding the lives and understandings of the workers, which constitute our gallant fighting men, and learn a few lessons from the Red Army, who are putting up a great fight without Church Parades.[282]

Burgess' view was endorsed by Edmund Laird-Clowes, who claimed that in two years of home service, he only came across one chaplain who was able to exert any influence on his men.[283] Laird-Clowes complained that during his convalesence in a military hospital, the Senior Chaplain preferred to conduct Easter services in the local parish church rather than minister to patients. He implied that the best chaplains were sent abroad, with those remaining with home troops being of inferior quality. Although Laird-Clowes' contribution lapsed into a general litany of complaints about army chaplaincy, both correspondents implied that even if the padre's hour were a better model in theory, the chaplains leading them had reputations that were too damaged for them to be productive. This was a view strongly contested by Blofeld's conclusion that:

> The men are finding that the Church's representative is willing to listen to their questions and criticism and to attempt an answer; that where those criticisms are justified they are honestly welcome […] and that the Church's teaching is

[280] Ibid
[281] George Burgess, `Letters to the Editor', *The Spectator*, 5 November 1943, p.432
[282] Ibid
[283] Edmund Laird-Clowes, `Letters to the Editor', *The Spectator*, 12 November 1943, p.457

> not blind and unreasoning, but perhaps more challenging than they supposed.[284]

Blofeld also recognised the importance of padre's hours to the chaplains themselves as it helped them to `understand men's minds more fully; he is discovering what is valuable and what is redundant or misleading in his own expression of the faith.' [285] Furthermore, due to the `battering' that faith had received, it was emerging more strongly than before.[286] Whilst padre's hours appear to have brought chaplains and their wider flocks closer together, there is little evidence of them forming much, if any, importance in the religious experience of active Christians in the war. None of the memoirs, diaries or other primary material consulted for this study mentions attendance at padre's hours. For this group, it was through the medium of smaller, informal prayer and Bible study groups that provision was made for a life of continued religious observance outside the church parade.

Unlike the army and navy, where active service overseas after 1942 was the common currency, RAF chaplains' work was mostly undertaken on home bases. The RAF Chaplaincy service was relatively under-developed, having only been in existence since 1919, leading to problems with providing chaplains for all newly-established training schools. Therefore, Rev Maurice Edwards, the Chaplain-in-Chief, agreed, after persuasion from Rev M.E. Aubrey of the United Board, that thirty minutes per week should be set aside in the training curriculum for new recruits for religious and moral issues, and a Moral Leadership course was developed for this purpose. Pitched as it was at a generally better-educated milieu than existed in either of the other two main services, the course was demanding and intellectual. Rev John Hamilton recalled that it was run entirely by padres and included talks `from a clear theological perspective', covering four key topics; belief in God, in Jesus, in the Holy Spirit and the Holy Catholic Church. [287] A second course included understanding the Bible and a third related to Citizenship, covering leadership, sex and social issues.

Some aspects of the course were relatively abstract when compared to the content of padre's hours in the army. There was also a distinct evangelical bent.

[284] Blofeld, `Soldiers' Questions', 30 Jun 1944
[285] Ibid
[286] Ibid
[287] Talbot, *A Man Sent from God*, 2011, p.79

Hamilton confirmed that `Some men were brought to faith when they attended the Moral Leadership Course.'[288] However Air Vice-Marshall F.W. Cocks doubted its efficacy:

> I yield to no one in my admiration of the Chaplains who have so faithfully carried out this task. […] The plain fact is however that despite all that had been done in this direction these young men after they pass out into the fuller life of the Royal Air Force are not conspicuous either for their religious adherence or in many cases their moral standards.[289]

Compulsory church parades, padre's hours and other forms of religious instruction provided a continuity of collective worship for active Christians, even though the compulsion to attend could cause resentment for some. It was not the purpose of church parades or padre's hours to bring new converts to Christianity. Their existence, and the lengths to which chaplains and senior officers went to ensure their provision, does indicate a continuation of pre-war religious observance, and the parades do not appear to have damaged the faith of any active Christian. However, for this group, organised military religion failed to provide a sufficiently robust version of Christianity to meet their spiritual needs and therefore does not provide much indication of a potential post-war revival. This deficiency led to the formation of private prayer and Bible study groups indicating a desire amongst active Christians to maintain their faith and observance, thus providing a firmer foundation on which to build any post-war revival of Christianity.

Private Groups

Aside from the formality of the church parade, or the collegiate but non-devotional discussion group atmosphere of the padre's hour, many Christians formed their own study and prayer groups. These sprang up in home bases, on active service and in prisoner of war camps, and demonstrate the resilience of faith in wartime, with active Christians seeking out the fellowship of co-believers and organising gatherings to share worship. Some groups met on a timetabled basis, whilst for others, discussions about Christianity took place at ad hoc times.

[288] John Hamilton Papers, Neil Allison Private Collection, Letter to Neil Allison
[289] Quoted in Zahn, *Chaplains in the RAF*, p.198

John Broom was part of religious discussion group at the Beckett Park RAMC training depot in Leeds, which on 31st March 1940 numbered six people, including a padre. They discussed `Spiritual Issues of the War' and Broom reported:

> We had quite a good discussion without anything extraordinary being said, but Walter & I several times quoted texts to prove our points and to stress the fundamental need for salvation. The Padre is getting spliced next week-end, & though a decent fellow, dwells I believe a bit too much on Works & not enough on conviction of sin.[290]

The next week the group had swelled to fourteen attendees, including Anglicans, Methodists, Baptists, Elim Foursquares and both Plymouth and Exclusive Brethren. The discussion evidently took place in a public space, given the occasional interruptions Broom noted, demonstrating the mutual strength active Christians could draw from these gatherings:

> We had a lovely time, introducing our names, places from which we came, & denomination. "All are in Christ". We shall hold this meeting every week, & it's good to see everybody reading their Bibles. A few chaps started interrupting, but they soon desisted. A corporal and sergeant looked in & said that it was quite O.K.[291]

On board the RMS *Empress of India* bound for the Middle East, Neil Cochrane and some of his comrades formed a `Holy Club' which met nightly for prayer and Bible study. [292] The group invited a padre to a meeting, which he attended reluctantly but did not contribute to the discussion. On being asked to close the meeting with a prayer, he responded `"I'm sorry but I haven't brought my prayer book." So we prayed for him and for all the dying men he would shortly be called to minister unto.'[293] Therefore, on occasions the formation of private groups put into stark relief the inadequacy of officially sanctioned religious provision to meet the needs of active Christians.

Staff Sergeant Kenneth Woods, a Baptist serving in the RAOC, helped to form a Bible study circle on the RMS *Duchess of Atholl* in 1942. Originally, he and two

[290] John Broom, Letter, 31 March 1940
[291] Ibid, 6 April 1940
[292] MAC Archive, Robinson, Neil Cochrane
[293] Ibid

others approached the Anglican padre at the end of a church parade service to ask if he might lead the group. The padre claimed that the officer in charge of troops on the ship had said there was inadequate space for the group to meet, and a Second Lieutenant had challenged Woods and his colleagues, `surely the weekly service is enough?'[294] However this challenge transpired to be one designed to ascertain if Woods and his friends were sincere. The Second Lieutenant offered his cabin for the meetings and ordered the ship's printer to make some invitation cards. The circle met thrice weekly under the auspices of the chaplain, Rev C.P. Davies. Lance-Bombardier Edward Porter of Royal Artillery, who had been brought up as a staunch Methodist, was another who, when on active service, turned to a small circle of trusted comrades for religious discussion. `My spiritual development came through discussion with close friends in the proximity we lived in – particularly with Sgt. Denis O'Neil who was my close Catholic friend. I also at one time […] used to discuss religion with my great Methodist friend Sydney Fleming of Clapham Common.'[295]

A Christian Endeavour Society, based on interdenominational and evangelical principles, was established in prisoner of war Camp PG53 in Italy under the leadership of Staff Sergeant Tom Sedgewick, a Salvationist. Sedgewick explained to Rev Arthur Symonds, a United Board Chaplain, `Many different denominations are represented in our society – Church of England, Methodist, Baptist and Salvationists, but we are all one in Christ and Christian Endeavour.'[296]

Captain Ernest Gordon, a company commander with the 2nd Battalion, Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who found a deeper faith whilst a prisoner of the Japanese, was another who preferred Christian fellowship away from any formal trappings of organised religion, `It was interesting to note that during this period, the men were unmoved by the outward observances of the Church.'[297] A chaplain had been invited to give a series of talks about the outward forms of the church, but numbers soon dwindled, as the men were `dissatisfied.' Gordon formed a group which

[294] Kenneth Woods Papers, Private Family Collection
[295] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Edward Porter
[296] A.J. Symonds, *"You're free!" The Story of Life and Service in Campo PG 53* (London: Christian Endeavour Union, 1948), p.24
[297] Ernest Gordon, *Miracle on the River Kwai* (London: HarperCollins, 1963), p.183

discussed the fundamentals of Christian faith, and attendance grew steadily, `the intense interest and sympathy of my listeners kept me going.'[298]

Therefore, the inadequacy of officially-sanctioned religious provision in the armed services for men and women of an active Christian faith led to the formation of private prayer and Bible study circles. Sometimes these took place with the blessing and active support of a chaplain, but at other times people took control of their own expressions of religious observance and fellowship. This demonstrated that religious faith could be sustained and nurtured outside the formal structures of church attendance and denominational religious affiliation. It was a faith that was finding itself resilient to the vagaries of war and the inconsistencies of officially prescribed religious provision. The existence of these private groups indicates a continuation of religious belief and fellowship throughout the war, increasing the possibility of a revival after 1945, since many Christians had become more active agents in their own patterns of fellowship and prayer.

Religious Provision on Active Service

Whilst compulsory church parades on home service were widely resented by devout believers and nominal Christians alike, formal religious provision on active service was highly valued and drew frequent praise. Michael Snape noted that `the ministry of front-line chaplains was widely and sincerely admired and not least for its evident risks. […] Significantly, overall [Chaplain] losses were proportionate to the number of fatalities suffered by the British army during the Second World War.'[299] This primary importance of chaplains in the battlefield was championed by Montgomery, who appointed Rev Frederick Llewellyn Hughes as his Assistant Chaplain-General for the Eighth Army. Hughes was clear on the robust link between Christianity and soldiers, `A soldier who fights for the British way of life serves God and us, for he protects the freedom of the Church.'[300]

Hughes divided the role of the chaplain in a combat zone into seven elements:

1. Eve of battle services
2. Companionship at zero hour

[298] Ibid, p.184
[299] Snape, *The Royal Army Chaplains' Department, 1796-1953,* p.336
[300] Quoted in Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.125

3. Service during battles
4. Helping soldiers to normalise after battles
5. Burying the dead
6. Memorial services
7. Thanksgiving Services[301]

The evidence from active Christians of chaplains performing these duties in the field is always in expressed in a favourable manner. Colonel G. Lawton Moss, who had been brought up in the Church of Ireland, and who had led men for a period of two-and-a-half years in the North Africa, Sicily and Italy, contributed to a discussion on the work of padres in *The Spectator* magazine in 1943. He expressed indignation at the criticisms mounted against chaplains by a previous correspondent:

> Did he never see a padre doing his own work and the work of a doctor in an advanced dressing station? Did he never see a padre digging a grave with his own hands? Did he never see a padre who gave eleven services in one day and then the next day, all on different L.A.A. sites spread over 200 miles of desert? (The man in question was 61 years old.)[302]

In the navy too, chaplains were to be found in the thick of the action during engagements. Rev Harold Beardmore's advice to naval chaplains in action was to remain on the bridge of the ship, armed with a microphone in order to broadcast a running commentary down to ratings below decks.[303] However, for some this was too prescriptive and restricted their flexibility, leading Gordon Taylor to note that, `Gone were the days when general movement throughout the ship was possible, and the chaplain, like Scott in Nelson's *Victory*, was able to come and go from the blood-stained cockpit.'[304]

Rev Leslie Beckingham, chaplain to the 6th Airborne Division, gave communion to his troops `as often as possible.'[305] In addition there were more informal `simple talks about Jesus.'[306] However, he found that opportunities for full-scale field

[301] F.L. Hughes, `Chaplains and the Grand Assault', Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), 8th Army Papers
[302] G.Lawton Moss, `Letters to the Editor', *The Spectator*, 26 November 1943, p.504
[303] Rev. Harold Beardmore, *The Waters of Uncertainty: A Book for Naval Chaplains* (London: Mowbray, 1944), p.40
[304] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.437
[305] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.96
[306] Ibid

services were rare, and his pastoral ministry was lived out through `quiet conversations, offering a prayer and celebrating Holy Communion in small huddled groups.'[307] Once again, Christianity was being experienced in a very personal and immediate context, freed from the trappings of a full formal service. Provision of a Holy Communion on HMS *Hawkins* prior to sailing to the south coast for D-Day proved very popular, as, according to Rev David Walters who led the service, `The Captain and a good number of officers and men attended and some overflowed into adjoining space. […] I remember there were one or two Roman Catholics amongst them.'[308] On 3rd June 1944 a service was broadcast around the mess decks. Walters recalled, `Singing reverberated through the iron bulkheads of the ship and was enough to make the Devil quake.'[309]

Regularity of church service provision was more difficult to maintain on active service. However, Sergeant Norman Kirby, an Anglican, noted that, for the men in Montgomery's 21st Army Group in Europe in 1944, church parades were encouraged wherever possible.[310] It was Kirby's job, as a fluent linguist, to liaise with the local clergy for the use of their church. It did not matter if the church requisitioned was a Roman Catholic one, `War or no war the Commander-in-Chief insisted on having a service every Sunday.'[311] However, during a time of extreme stress, when having to wait for a Motor Unit to come and collect him from the ruins of the Battle of Falaise Pocket, Kirby contemplated the real meaning of life and death and warfare, `The odd church parade was no substitute for such an appraisal. It required five hours of solitary confinement in the company of ten thousand dead men to bring the real message of war home to me.'[312]

Norman Cotton, a Salvationist from Portsmouth serving with the 12th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers in North Africa, acted as a driver for a Baptist chaplain who would give three services each Sunday, one for each of the three battalions in the brigade. Despite later seeing action as a paratrooper in 1944, he recalled, `the best two and a half years of my service was as a companion to a very fine Christian, the

[307] Ibid
[308] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.447
[309] Ibid
[310] Norman Kirby, *1100 Miles with Monty: Security and Intelligence at Tac HQ* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), p.49
[311] Ibid
[312] Ibid, p.72

padre.'[313] However, Salvationist Ken Tout found that few services were arranged during his time in Northern Europe in 1944-5. The two he recalled involved singing from a standard hymn sheet, then being expected to leave as only Anglicans were permitted to stay for a communion service.[314] Ewen Montagu, of the Jewish faith and newly commissioned into the navy, recalled that, as he was not a Roman Catholic, the assumption was made that he would attend a Church of England service, including the recitation of the naval prayer. Montagu considered that `saying that prayer together was exactly right and a most moving experience.'[315]

John Broom attended a church parade in Egypt, held just before the Second Battle of El Alamein, `& listened to an elementary, albeit a sound address, on the Will of God. The previous Sunday I had listened to a homely talk on the subject of the woman who touched the hem of our Lord's garment: & afterwards had attended my first Army Communion Service, greatly to the enrichment of my soul.'[316] Broom found that services became less frequent as action approached, `services are few, usually about one a fortnight, owing to operational reasons.'[317] These early services were valued by Broom, although their irregularity was a cause for concern. One Roman Catholic who set high value on church services was Captain Hugh Dormer, an Irish Guardsman who had been educated at Ampleforth College. His diary during the preparations for D-Day recorded an evening mass said in an open field. [318] He recalled lighted fires `serving as a background for the supreme sacrifice that was being celebrated in the corner of the field.' The Crucifix on the table threw shadows across the ground which led Dormer to contemplate the coming sacrifice of the men in his unit. The greater emphasis placed by the Catholic church on ritual and symbolism appears to have remained a resilient force for Dormer.

The North African desert was the setting for a series of informal church services held on Easter Sunday 1943 on the command of Lieutenant-Colonel H.J.A. Thicknesse. Before the men of the 126 Highland Field Regiment RA went into action, Thicknesse accompanied his padre on his rounds as the latter held services with small groups of men wherever possible. At the venue of one of these gatherings, Thicknesse

[313] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive) Alan Robinson research papers, Norman Cotton
[314] Ken Tout Papers
[315] Ewen Montagu, *Beyond Top Secret ULRA* (London: Coward McGann and Geoghegan, 1977), p.18
[316] John Broom, Letter, 31 August 1942
[317] Ibid, 22 October 1940
[318] Quoted in Hastings, *A History of English Christianity,* p.386

`found the place selected was a snug corner amongst sand dunes and cactus hedges, apparently well-hidden from enemy observation.'[319] However, enemy shells started to land with ever-increasing closeness. Thicknesse and the padre decided that this could not disrupt the `whole-hearted worship of the risen Lord', and the latter started the hymn *Jesus lives; no longer now can thy terror, Death, appal us*. The shelling continued, as did the hymn in between shell bursts. Thicknesse considered this deeply symbolic, not merely the will to continue worshipping, but the challenge of the fear of death:

> "O death where is they sting?" is an easy thing to say on an Easter morning in peaceful conditions. But when Death answers quickly, "Here is my sting: can you take it?" – then that is a clear challenge. "You say your Lord is risen and has opened the way into everlasting life. You have nothing to fear of the life after death. Does that entitle you to speak lightly of death?" Well, yes, in theory perhaps it does. But how much too easy it has been, year after year, to quote the words of St. Paul [….] whose life of hardship and sacrifice enabled him to lift up his eyes and look clean over the head of death into the glory that lies beyond.[320]

Wing Commander Randle Mainwaring of the RAF Regiment, an evangelical Anglican, armed with his collection of hymn sheets for special occasions, conducted no-sermon services in Burma in the absence of a padre before night patrols went out. He claimed that the attendance at these voluntary services was nearly 100%.[321] However for some evangelical Christians such services, although highly valued in themselves, were not of sufficient frequency. On landing in Sicily with the Eighth Army in September 1943, John Broom detected that the increasingly intermittent provision of church services for a mobile army was concurrent with a decline in spirituality, at least for those with a nominal rather than active faith, `Men are not spiritually conscious and the war has been responsible for the death-blow to whatever flickerings of God they once possessed. I will have to go 3 miles for this service – so you can see that the "seeker after holiness" has, perforce, to exert himself.'[322] The

[319] Officers' Christian Union, *A Time for War and Peace*, (Aldershot: OCU, 1999), p.22
[320] Ibid, p.22
[321] Randle Mainwaring, *The Good Fight: A Christian's Rewards and Rejections* (London: Howard Baker, 1990), p.32
[322] John Broom, Letter, 26 November 1943

continuing value of the Christian faith to those for whom it was a deeply integral part of their lives, set against a waning interest for those who did not have such a strong belief in God, was exemplified by Broom's observation.

Chaplains and Evangelism

Another aspect of religious provision in the armed services that had the potential to promote a revival of Christianity following the war was the evangelistic tone of some chaplains. This remit was a contested aspect of a padre's work. In primary research conducted by Alan Robinson in the mid-1990s `Evangelism and conversion of the soldiers' was considered very low on a list of eleven priorities for army chaplains, as perceived by soldiers of all ranks from a range of Christian backgrounds.[323] However, some chaplains relished the opportunity for the expansion of Christianity which the war provided. Rev Ronald Selby Wright noted that `never before has the Church had such an opportunity for expounding and exhorting and explaining the Christian Faith.'[324] In a similar vein Bishop Chavasse of Rochester, himself an army chaplain during the First World War, sensed the potential of the collection of so many young men into military organisations, `The soldiers, sailors and airmen one meets everywhere challenge us with the opportunity of winning the manhood of our land for Christ.'[325]

This was not a task that could be overtly undertaken, as most men and women would resent such evangelical pressure when in compulsory proximity to its advocates. Lieutenant Clifford Lawson of the 4th County London Yeomanry stated that, `I do not think the average soldier would put up with this.'[326] Where people's religious outlook was enhanced by their contact with chaplains, it was not by direct proselytism. C.C. Cooper, who later became a Church of England ordinand, was influenced by the `proclamation of the Good News and their caring attitude' of two padres he came across in the Royal Armoured Corps, but took a dislike to another who, in Cooper's estimation, was more interested in being an officer than a Christian minister.[327]

[323] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files
[324] Wright (ed.) *Soldiers Also Asked,* p.v
[325] Selwyn Gummer, *The Chavasse Twins* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1963), p.138
[326] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Clifford Lawson
[327] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, C.C. Cooper

However, when a man was drawn towards conversion, or even moving from a nominal faith to a more devout and defined set of beliefs, the military chaplain could assist in this process. Lance Bombardier Edward Porter converted from devout Methodism, his uncle being a lay preacher, to Roman Catholicism in Italy in 1945.[328] He took formal individual instruction from Fr McGowan, a Catholic chaplain, meeting daily for around an hour. McGowan was even able to persuade a senior officer to allow Porter to continue at the training base for an extra two weeks to complete the course of instruction. Private William Robertson of the Lancashire Fusiliers began confirmation classes with his Anglican padre during the French and Belgian campaign of 1940. However, Robertson reflected that this was more an instructional process than a genuine sense of conversion and was fuelled by the fear of imminent danger. Shortly afterwards, `in Belgium in 1940 I was so afraid when Germans attacked and all around me were killed, and I prayed as Jesus was the only one to turn to and I vowed that should I survive the war I would serve Jesus to the end.'[329] Robertson never failed to attend church after the war and reflected `I was converted in that slit trench, 1940.' However, it was not until 1943 that he was finally confirmed, having assured the padre that this was for the right reasons, and not `to please girlfriends.'[330]

Resentment could be caused by some Roman Catholic chaplains attempting deathbed conversions. Captain Austin Muir, a Presbyterian in the RAOC who had attested as an Anglican `for convenience', witnessed a Roman Catholic padre, with whom he had previously shared bottles of whisky, offer to give absolution to a sergeant-driver who had been seriously wounded in a shell attack, should the driver make an immediate conversion to Catholicism.[331] Muir recalled, with evident approval, `The driver told him what to do, how to do it, and when, before he died.' Not all conversions from Anglicanism to Catholicism met with such resistance. Lance-Corporal Anthony Howard of the Field Service Police, captured at Dunkirk, described himself as a `middle of the road Anglican', who was converted to Catholicism aged 28 in 1944 after four years as a prisoner of war.[332] This was following attendance at a daily Mass held by Fr John Berry.

[328] MAC Archive, Robinson, Edward Porter
[329] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, William Robertson
[330] Ibid
[331] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Austin Muir
[332] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Anthony Howard

An occasional tendency towards aggressive conversion was confirmed by a Mass-Observation report which stated, `At one unit, the chaplain has confirmed over 1,000 men, and of these 900 – he is an Anglo-Catholic – have come to their first confession.'[333] The report went on to claim that army confirmations were `something of a racket', with pressure being brought to bear on the unconfirmed, and time off-duty being allowed to attend classes. The report did concede that the numbers involved did point to some genuine change of spirit, but that such examples were unusual.[334] Conversions to the Christian faith which did occur during wartime were not numerically significant. There was, as Clive Field has demonstrated, little evidence of a statistical boost in church membership or attendance in the 1950s, and for most men and women, any evangelising work of chaplains had little enduring effect.[335]

Religious Provision in Prisoner of War Camps

41,300 British troops were captured during the fall of France and Belgium in 1940.[336] With them went thirty chaplains, also taken prisoner. This ratio of 1:1376 is similar to that throughout the rest of the armed services. Further prisoners were taken by the Germans and Italians during the fall of Greece and throughout the North African and European campaigns. In the Far East, approximately 50,000 British servicemen were taken prisoner by the Japanese. They were to receive some measure of religious provision from fifty-five chaplains of various denominations who were also captured.[337] Thus, the ration in the Far East camps of 1:900 was lower than throughout most of the armed services.

Religious provision varied substantially depending on which of the Axis nations prisoners were captured by. Alan Robinson has noted that `The attitude of Italian, German and Japanese authorities towards POWs had a large impact on their experiences [including the] offering or withholding opportunity for religious observance.'[338] Article 16 of the Geneva Convention stated that prisoners of war should be given the freedom to practise their religious beliefs. The Red Cross was satisfied that most countries abided by this, although Japan often exempted themselves

[333] MOA, FR 1870A, `The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, p.16
[334] Ibid
[335] Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival?*, pp.20-37
[336] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.56
[337] Information provided by David Blake, Curator, Royal Army Chaplains' Museum and Archive, Amport House
[338] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.178

from this provision. Church services in captivity provided an element of much-needed continuity between life before and during incarceration. However, Robinson found that `very few POW memoirs mention chaplains, so it is difficult to assess the relationship between chaplains and officers.'[339]

The Japanese authorities were suspicious of chaplains and confiscated many religious tracts and hymn books. Services were limited, and details had to be passed in advance to the camp authorities. Whilst the Germans, with their long tradition of a Christian culture, were more tolerant towards religious activities in camps, the separation of officers and other ranks into different prisoner of war camps, Oflags and Stalags, meant that army chaplains were initially separated from the main body of their men. Rev G.F. Miller, a United Board chaplain captured during the retreat to Dunkirk in 1940, saw this as a `grievous loss.'[340] Despite this, Miller held a service attended by around sixty officers, with no hymn books available and just one Bible between them, `We were impressionable at this time, and the response to this simple service cheered me much; a fruitful ministry was opening up before me.'[341] Of his fellow chaplains, Miller recalled `Individually they were mostly good fellows, but collectively they were the most awkward team imaginable.'[342] After seven months the Germans relented, and some chaplains were allowed to visit the Stalags to minister to the other ranks.

Rev Arthur Symonds, a United Board chaplain captured by the Italians at the Fall of Tobruk in July 1942, reported that 95% of officers attended Sunday services at Camp PG53 in Italy.[343] Symonds recalled, `It seemed to me and to others with whom I spoke that there was a conscious grasp after God and Reality.'[344] Symonds' contribution to men's morale extended beyond his religious work. Like chaplains elsewhere, he organised entertainments, lectures, debates, Divine Services and an art club, as well as producing a hand-written newspaper. Bernard Pawley, a Christian at this camp, portrayed a positive view of his time there, albeit in a correspondence with Symonds' wife which might have been influenced by consideration of her feelings, `We were a jolly crowd. You'd never believe how much real fun we managed to have out of it, all continued chaffing and nagging. Six months in the same 2 sq. yds. with

[339] Ibid, p.189
[340] G.F. Miller, `Prisoner of War', *Baptist Quarterly*, April 1946, pp.9-16
[341] Ibid, p.9
[342] Ibid, p.10
[343] Symonds, *"You're free!"*
[344] Ibid, p.10

the same fellows and never a cross word! […] Arthur was the biggest and best influence in the room.'[345]

The available evidence from those taken by the Germans suggests that chaplains could evoke both admiration and censure. Rev David Wild, an Anglican chaplain held in Stalag CCA, recalled, `One well-educated man, a bank employee, serving as a sergeant in a TA Unit, said to me, "I enjoy the sermon every week, because I like to hear a serious subject treated seriously. During the rest of the week I hear nothing in my barrack room except trivial or bawdy comments."'[346] Charles Davies, a prisoner of the Germans, wrote to the *Methodist Recorder* in 1943 stating that over time, he had seen men turn to the Bible soon after capture, but as a normal pattern of life was established, and other reading material became available, they slipped back into a secular mindset.[347] However, Davies implied that men of a Nonconformist background had established their own patterns of worship, taking it in turns to preach from the Bible. He therefore resented the appearance of army chaplains as they disturbed these arrangements:

> Unfortunately, some of the chaplains who came to us discussed debatable points in their sermons which shook the faith of many and upset the harmony of the community for whose spiritual welfare they were responsible. On one occasion a learned gentleman discussed Darwinism, fossils, legends and parts of the Bible which he considered should not be taken literally. […] Again, the chaplain concerned should have remembered that he had a mixed congregation of at least 50% Nonconformists, there being no alternative service to his own.[348]

Thus, Davies points towards Christianity being a matter for the individual to sustain, in concert with like-minded comrades, rather than one that benefitted from the officially-sanctioned ministrations of a padre. The characteristic of active Christians preferring self-organised fellowship was reaffirmed in this instance. However, another individual, a member of the Plymouth Brethren, was able to reconsider his

[345] A.J. Symonds Papers, Neil Allison Private Collection, Letter from Bernard Pawley to Mrs Symonds
[346] David Wild, *Prisoner of Hope* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), p.28
[347] Charles W. Davies, `Inside a Prisoner of War Camp', *The Methodist Recorder*, 19 August 1943
[348] Ibid

fundamentalist beliefs in the light of a camp sermon by Rev David Wild, and subsequent discussion around a booklet by Congregationalist scholar C.H. Dodd.[349]

Rifleman John Eldridge, an Anglican serving the King's Royal Rifle Corps, who was captured in Greece in 1941, bemoaned the initial lack of any religious provision, beyond the receipt of religious pamphlets and books in Red Cross parcels. He wrote, `I get very depressed sometimes. […] I often wish there was a little church I could go to sometimes.'[350] This situation had been alleviated by December 1941 as Eldridge was able to attend a morning service `held by our newly-arrived Padre.'[351] Yet, like Charles Davies, Eldridge still felt spiritually constrained by the beliefs propounded by the chaplain on offer, `The Padre has some rather queer notions of Christianity which I find hard to understand.'[352]

In addition to the perceived shortcomings of the padre, Eldridge felt `if it weren't for one's comrades, one would go mad.'[353] However, prolonged and proximate exposure to the habits and foibles of other men would change this perspective. Eldridge became `tired of [the] backstabbing which goes on amongst 23 men. The intrigues rival those of any European court of the 17th and 18th centuries.'[354] Indeed Eldridge himself admitted to succumbing to such feelings of loathing, describing one man as a `menace to society.'[355] This became a persistent theme for Eldridge, with further diary entries noting the petty jealousies of the men, and his own dislike of his comrades.[356] In part this was due to, rather than despite of his Christian faith, as Eldridge admitted to becoming `short-tempered at anyone who does not accept Christianity.'[357]

Rev Jock Ellison Platt and Rev Joseph Hobling, respectively the Methodist and Anglican padres in Colditz, calculated their minimum combined congregation for services would number six, therefore they united their work. Their first communion service in December 1940 was attended by seven men in bitterly cold conditions. However, the importance of this act of collective worship was noted by Platt, `But no

[349] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.191
[350] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 12703, Papers of John Eldridge, *War Diary*, 28 September 1941
[351] Ibid, 19 December 1941
[352] Ibid, 30 January 1943
[353] Ibid, 11 October 1941
[354] Ibid, 29 April 1941
[355] Ibid, 6 July 1943
[356] Ibid, 22 December 1943, 13 January 1944, 31 March 1944
[357] Ibid, 6 May 1943

one complained. And my Presbyterian laddies were filled with rich joy. It was the first act of corporate worship they had taken part in since capture.'[358] On Christmas Day 1940 there were three different forms of worship available in the camp, Catholic High Masses at midnight and 8 a.m., an Anglican Holy Communion at 9.15 a.m. and a `usual type of nonconformist service with Christmas hymns and sermon' at 9.45 a.m.[359]

Camp services had an obvious edge which was largely missing from conventional army church parades. Platt argued, `Worship must have real meaning before a man will sit in a completely unheated church with the temperature outside twenty below.'[360] However, by the beginning of 1945, he admitted to finding it hard to maintain that real meaning in the face of years of physical, mental and moral fatigue, `Yesterday and today I have been wooing the divine afflatus, but it is a very flat sermon. What can one preach to men who have been captive for five years and are cold and hungry?'[361] Platt's answer to his own question was to preach once again against allowing bitterness to enter the heart, as it would make the heart and mind miserable and could cause extra pain to his flock.

For those captured by the Germans later in the war, the prisoner experience, and the religious aspects of it, assumed a more constructive aspect. Arthur Royall, of the 1st Battalion Glider Borne infantry unit, was captured in the abortive Operation Market Garden in September 1944. Royall was taken to Oflag 79 near Brunswick and admitted to the camp's `Theological Society' in November. As someone who had decided to train for post-war ordination, Royall was able to continue those studies whilst in captivity. Members of the society took part in a daily act of corporate worship and engaged in a `disciplined life of prayer and Bible readings.'[362] There were also lectures and tutor groups to help with studies. The difference in tone between Royall's experiences, which he termed, `Theology in the Bag', and those of Platt and Eldridge are striking, with the former seeing his time in incarceration as a sabbatical to prepare for his post-war career in the Anglican ministry, whilst the latter two enduring a morale-sapping half a decade with little spiritual stimulation and development.

[358]Margaret Duggan (ed.), *Padre in Colditz: The Diary of Ellison Platt* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1978), p.53
[359] Ibid, p.64
[360] Ibid, p.69
[361] Ibid, p.284
[362] Arthur Royall Papers, SWWEC

Men captured by the Japanese faced grim conditions; starvation, disease and death were rife, and the provision of military religion became something around which many men could find a focus in years of despair. As Midge Gilles argued, `In Far Eastern PoW camps religion was put to the test in a way that was missing from Europe. […] In the most brutal camps […] it was easy [for men] to feel they had been abandoned in a type of hell.'[363] Therefore chaplains would have to answer the most searching of questions from their men. Sergeant Bill McKenzie of the Manchester Regiment recalled two chaplains he encountered at Changi camp, Rev Noel Duckworth and Rev John Foster Haig, as being two examples of `Christianity, Humanity and Courage.'[364] Duckworth would tell stories of impending liberation drawn from seemingly reliable sources, helping to sustain morale, whilst Haig would visit the hospital quarters and sing to the patients, accompanied by a makeshift band consisting of two guitarists. In addition to the pastoral care these men were able to offer, bringing comfort to the sick and the dying, McKenzie saw them as evidence of God at work in the world, `I am convinced that they were chosen men, no ordinary men could have carried on in the manner they did, unless God had been with them.'[365]

Captain Andrew Sewell of the Royal Artillery recalled the resentment in certain quarters of the Roman Catholic padre Fr Kennedy, who would be instrumental in `death bed conversions of what in many cases were Scots Presbyterians.'[366] However Sewell himself found Kennedy `a valuable and helpful neighbour to me in a period where we think we all became involved in personal questions about God.'[367] Therefore Sewell, even though having experienced a traditional Anglican public school upbringing at Marlborough College, found the personal religious provision of a chaplain of a different denomination of great importance and comfort whilst a prisoner of war. Another with a high opinion of Roman Catholic chaplaincy in the Far East camps was Private John Wyatt, a former postman from Kent, who described the unusual step the Catholic padre took in giving a general absolution for all Catholics in the East Surrey Regiment as there was insufficient time to deal with each man

[363] Midge Gilles, *The Barbed Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoner of War in the Second World War* (London: Aurum Press, 2011), p.227
[364] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Bill McKenzie
[365] Ibid
[366] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Andrew Sewell
[367] Ibid

individually.[368] Whilst at Changi camp, Wyatt attended regular Roman Catholic services which were held by various padres in a small chapel the men had constructed, and was particularly comforted by an Easter Sunday communion with wine fermented from collected berries.[369]

E.W. Swanton, an Anglo-Catholic Major in the Bedfordshire Regiment, did not hold a high opinion of the Anglican padres in the work camps on the Thai-Burma railway, `The problem with many of the conventional military padres of these battalions was that they were middle of the road Anglicans, and they really turned into officers' padres, they were not really interested in the men.'[370] However for William Allchin, a lapsed Anglican, one church service whilst a prisoner of war in Singapore was a life-changing experience. He heard prayers for the enemy during a homily on the Sermon on the Mount, `it had a compelling power for me and though I was brought up in the church I felt a Christian in a new way.'[371] The message of turning the other cheek, loving your enemy and praying for those who persecute you struck a chord with Allchin. He began to learn Japanese and was able to intervene in subsequent misunderstandings between guards and prisoners to avert unnecessary interrogations and torture. [372] Stanley Dawson, writing soon after his release in 1946, highly valued the work of Anglican chaplain Rev Eric Cordingly, who `carried out his ministrations in that spirit so that his church was filled to overflowing for every voluntary service even during the week and many men either returned to religion or discovered its comfort for the first time in that church.'[373]

Conclusion

It is reasonable to suggest that Richard Holmes' contention that `Soldiers have tended to judge religion by the quality of its advocates' was as true of self-defining Christians as for the generality of people across the services.[374] Active Christians could consider those advocates both too evangelistic and too timid in their proclamation of the gospel; at the same time too associated with the army machine and too over-

[368] John Wyatt, *No Mercy from the Japanese: A Survivor's Account of the Burma Railway and the Hellships, 1942-1945* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2008), p.43
[369] Ibid, p.45
[370] David Rayvern Allen, *Jim: The Life of E.W. Swanton* (London: Aurum Press, 2004), p.125
[371] William Allchin et al, *Light of Experience* (London: BBC, 1977), p.138
[372] Ibid, p.141
[373] IWM, 3156, Stanley Dawson
[374] Richard Holmes, *Soldiers: Army Lives and Loyalties from Redcoats to Dusty Warriors* (London: HarperCollins, 2011), p.231

familiar with the men; too bound up with providing unwanted parades on home bases whilst services on active service were greatly appreciated. The robust seam of religiosity in pre-war Britain was reflected in the military religious provision of 1939-45. Whilst chaplains found themselves criticised and often derided when out of a war zone, when danger beckoned, or when years of incarceration had to be endured, their work gave men spiritual comfort and succour in times of great stress, as these situations perhaps not only drew the best out of the fighting men, but of their accompanying chaplains also.

All branches of the armed services made strenuous efforts to support religious provision for their new recruits. This was evident both numerically, in the attempts to provide effective ratios of chaplains to service personnel, and qualitatively in the wartime adaptations made to the ways in which chaplains and their flock could interact. The development of padre's hours frequently gave religion a more congenial aspect. Chaplains were seen by senior commanders and politicians as crucial agents in the development and maintenance of morale throughout the services, and often went to great lengths to provide face-to-face contact with those scattered over wide areas.

However, for many active Christians, this provision often lacked a clear spiritual focus, with much of the work of chaplains falling in between the rigid formality of a church parade, which had to cater for the complete spectrum of religious beliefs, and the informality of the social roles chaplains were often asked to undertake. Despite this, in combat zones, men of devout faith found chaplains' work to be of immense spiritual value, whilst frequently complaining about the minimal provision that was available due to circumstances. Despite not relying on military chaplains for sustenance and development of personal faith, nevertheless active Christians found reassurance in the high-profile religious presence in many battalions, vessels and squadrons. Men and women sought to supplement this provision with their own privately-organised prayer and Bible study groups, their own unofficial alternatives to the padre's hour.

The consistent profile of Christianity throughout all branches of the armed services would indicate the continuing importance of religion during the war. Despite the criticisms levelled at the compulsory church parade, it kept religion on the military agenda and therefore the period of the `long 1950s' was one which was not preceded by a spiritual breakdown within the armed services. Both official and unofficial

religious provision reaffirmed the faith of those who already possessed it, and frequently strengthened that of those for whom it had previously been nominal, a theme considered in chapter seven.

Chapter Three – Manifestations of Religious Faith

Introduction

The previous chapter established the importance of both formal and informal religious provision across the armed services in supporting the resilience of Christian faith among active Christians. Christian service personnel also displayed a continuing recourse to a set of contemporary religious tropes; an increasingly ecumenical atmosphere between the Protestant churches, the reliance on knowledge of the Bible and hymnody as expressions of faith, and the regularity and consistency of prayer as a means of remaining close to God. These aspects of faith assumed a greater importance as the war continued, whilst the regularity of Sabbath Observance greatly diminished for those on overseas service. Persistent evidence of expressions of Christian culture and practice from believers in the forces provides further justification for the case that the war did not see any weakening of faith, but that the challenges involved in maintaining Christian observance meant that, for many, faith was strengthened. Furthermore, being in close and prolonged contact with colleagues who did not always share their attitudes to sexual morality and popular entertainment, Christians often emerged from the war with greater tolerance of the personal morals and tastes of others who had proved themselves to be brave and noble comrades.

Ecumenism

During the 1930s, efforts had been made by many leading churchmen to find areas of common ground. Adrian Hastings claimed that `one of the most creative and decisively important developments was going on in the new intermediate area of the ecumenical movement.'[375] Increasing unity was a theme within, as well as across, denominations, with the formation of the Methodist Union in 1932 bringing together most of the disparate Methodist sects into one organisation. The Oxford Conference of Life and Work held in July 1937 forgathered representatives from many Protestant churches around Europe. From this the World Council of Churches was formed, with William Temple as a chief architect. In 1940 the Church Assembly, the governing body of the Church of England, passed a resolution welcoming the establishment of the World Council, and in 1942 a British Council of Churches was formed.

[375] Hastings, *History of British Christianity,* p.302

Increasing co-operation between Protestant Churches continued into the 1940s. Temple's appointment as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942 reaffirmed this unifying tendency and was welcomed by many Free Church leaders, partly due to his views on social issues, and his previous ecumenical work in the 1930s. The contemporaneous appointment of Cyril Garbett as Archbishop of York cemented this shift and meant that the highest offices in the Church of England were held by men with politically similar views to those held by many Nonconformists of the Christian socialist tradition. W. Thompson Elliott, Canon of Westminster Abbey, expressed a hope that the war would not be detrimental to increasing understanding between Churches across the world, `However unhappily the Church may be divided there is an essential one-ness among all who believe and call themselves Christians, and this one-ness is not destroyed by war, however deeply war wounds it.'[376]

Denominational niceties were becoming less distinct for those growing up in the 1930s. Council schools, which by 1938 were educating 70% of children in England and Wales, were prohibited from teaching any particular denominational catechism, with a more generalised emphasis on Bible stories, prayers and hymnody.[377] This more homogenised Christianity ran alongside a continuation of denominational distinctions between the Protestant Churches. Matthew Grimley identified a decline in conflict between the Anglican and Free Churches between the wars, but `A sense of a common English Protestantism emerged that did not erase denominational distinctions but, rather, was superimposed upon them.'[378]

This reduction in friction between Protestant denominations meant, as Alan Robinson identified, `heightened ecumenical sympathies from many army chaplains.'[379] For some in the armed forces, faith was enhanced due to the opportunities to move beyond the denominational boundaries within which they had been previously constrained. C.S. Lewis, who had moved from a position of atheism to a High Church Anglicanism in 1931, emphasised the point that denominational differences were frequently of little interest to ordinary Christians:

[376] Elliott, *Spiritual Issues of the War*, p.32
[377] J. Murphy, *Church State and Schools in Britain, 1800-1970* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p.125
[378] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.891
[379] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.187

> [T]he questions that divide Christians from one another often involve points of high Theology or even of ecclesiastical history, which ought never to be treated except by real experts [...] the discussion of these disputed points has no tendency at all to bring an outsider into the Christian fold.[380]

The war years also witnessed a significant change in the character of the BBC's religious output, as Hannah Elias recently demonstrated. The corporation perpetuated `a non-denominational Christianity that could be used and accessed at the listener's convenience […] a unique religious culture.'[381] Due to technological limitations causing a restricted amount of broadcast time, the BBC had to develop `an ecumenical presentation and celebration of the Christian faith on the airwaves, which allowed an unprecedented expansion in the practice of a non-denominational brand of Christianity.'[382]

Ecumenism in British Christianity during the 1930s and 40s was an issue not just for those at the summit of church hierarchies, `one in the collective consciousness of a small but sufficient Christian elite', but also one which found resonance in the wartime experience of many active Christians, who were removed from the milieu of their home denominational congregations for many years.[383] They would share training, home service and service overseas with men and women with a broad range of Christian beliefs and denominational ties. It was rare to find any great friction between people from different Protestant denominations or even between individual Protestants and Roman Catholics. However, whilst the last two groups became more understanding of each other's faiths, there remained an unwillingness in most instances to share worship, prayer or other devotional practices.

Increasing harmony between members of different Protestant Churches meant United Board chaplains officiating over an Anglican form of religious service encouraged by the RAChD.[384] They also participated in Anglican courses of instruction, whereas the Roman Catholic church refused to allow its chaplains to attend a training course in Chester, established at the behest of Bishop Haigh of Coventry and Archbishop Lang in 1940. This was despite the course including practical military

[380] C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1952), p.viii
[381] Elias *Radio Religion*, pp.47-8
[382] Ibid, p.53
[383] Hastings, *History of English Christainity*, p.309
[384] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.45

skills such as map reading, knowledge of military law and etiquette, and anti-gas training. United Board chaplains found the training was `greatly enriched by the spiritual ideals of their work set before them, by the intensity of the devotional life, and by the spirit of real Christian fellowship among men of all Denominations.'[385] Following this interdenominational Protestant training, Allison concluded that United Board chaplains `adopted more Anglican patterns of chaplaincy role and practice.'[386] Despite this apparent harmonisation of Protestant denominations within the military context, complaints were raised with the Bishop of Chester about Free Churchmen serving communion to Anglicans.[387] These complaints were passed to Lang, who in turn referred them to the Chaplain-General, Rev C. Douglas Symons, resulting in a threat to close the school unless intercommunion ended.

Whilst the school combined training for Anglican and Free Church chaplains, no such institution was established to train Roman Catholic clergy for army chaplaincy work, leading to accusations of Catholic exceptionalism. Canon H.A. King, a member of the Lower House of the Anglican Convocation, proposed that `the proper steps be taken to secure for the Army Chaplains of the Church of England the same privileges as are given to the Roman Catholic Chaplains.'[388] Whilst the latter operated entirely independently of other denominations, the amalgamation of Anglican and Free Church chaplains within the RAChD meant some of the former coming under the direct supervision of some of the latter. Concern was also expressed at the possibility of losing some potential Anglican clergy to the Free Churches. Rev Frank Woods, an Anglican chaplain, wrote to his father, the Bishop of Lichfield, claiming, `we shall lose yet more men from the C of E to the Free Churches.'[389] In fact these fears proved ill-founded, as by the end of the war four United Board chaplains, including the Rev B Vaughan Parry, a Baptist minister, had transferred to the Church of England, giving further proof of the underlying vulnerability of the Free Churches within a developing ecumenical narrative. Parry resigned from the RAChD in September 1941 giving his reason `on change of religion' and rejoined in January 1944 as an Anglican chaplain.[390]

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[385] W.H. Coats `The Outlook: Our Chaplains'. *Scottish Baptist Magazine,* 1st September 1943, p.1
[386] Allison, *United Board Chaplains,* p.54
[387] Ibid
[388] Robinson, *Chaplains at War,* p.79
[389] Ibid, p.127
[390] Information provided by David Blake, Curator, Royal Army Chaplains' Department Museum and Archive, Amport House.

According to Robinson, `The Church of England offered nonconformists a more robust set of beliefs and more satisfying liturgical patterns.'[391]

It was not only Anglicans who found grounds for complaint in the ecumenical compromises that the war demanded. The Baptist and Congregationalist Churches expressed concern that many men were being registered upon attestation as Church of England, as the NCOs charged with the task were unclear on the denominational distinctions.[392] Therefore, they claimed, the official figures indicated a relatively lower proportion of Nonconformists registering in the British Army compared to numbers in civilian life. John Broom had attended a Baptist Church through much of his youth, before his family switched to an independent Railway Mission. However, his army attestation form claimed him as an Anglican.[393] Many men were not aware of the existence of the United Board and may have assumed that the simple choice was between Protestant and Roman Catholic, with many who attested as the former being placed under the general umbrella of the Church of England by the registering sergeant.

Away from the political and organisational arguments in the higher echelons of the chaplaincy service, many chaplains prioritised the provision of an effective service, rather than the reinforcement of denominational boundaries. Rev George Fox, an Anglican Chaplain, and Rev O.D. Wiles, a United Board Chaplain who was also Deputy Assistant Chaplain General, provided an example of ecumenical co-operation. Fox wrote that Wiles was `a charming fellow, a Non-Conformist by churchmanship, but very sincere.'[394] The pair organised a Motor Church in North Africa, travelling jointly to meet troops for services then alternating sermons. Rev G.F. Miller, a Baptist chaplain who had been taken prisoner of war in France in 1940, worked with other chaplains to alternate Roman Catholic, Anglican and Free Church services as their German captors only allowed two to take place each week.[395]

Not all Anglican and Nonconformist chaplains enjoyed a smooth relationship. The Methodist Rev Platt, the Anglican Rev Hobling and the Catholic Fr Heard were able to co-operate on alternating religious services in Colditz. Nevertheless, Platt

[391] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.95
[392] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.62
[393] John Broom Papers, Author's Collection, Army Service Record
[394] Colin Fox (ed.), *The Wartime Diary of Rev George Fox* (York: Wilton 65, 1998), p.21
[395] G.F. Miller, `Prisoner of War', *RAChD Journal 7* (50), 1951, p.97

expressed frustration at the rigidity of the Anglican form of service he was frequently compelled to officiate over:

> I am at a loss to understand how the Church of England makes the celebration of Holy Communion foot the bill for almost any and every religious festival. A week ago, when we discussed the Christmas services, both Heard and Hobling were agreed that Holy Communion was the only suitable celebration. I contended, if not for something else, at least for something more. They were adamant, and so was I. So our union went by default today.[396]

Difficulties in ecumenical co-operation at an organisational level were also in evidence in the navy, with Adam McKinlay, Labour MP for Dunbartonshire, raising a concern in the House of Commons in late 1943 regarding a ban on Church of Scotland chaplains being able to serve on sea-going vessels.[397] From 17th November of that year the practice was amended, and United Board chaplains were able to be the sole religious representative on ships. This led Allison to assert that `The RN, traditionally the preserve of the Church of England, had begun to develop ecumenically through the war years', with Free Church chaplains able to conduct daily morning prayers and serve on sea-going ships.'[398] Gordon Taylor agreed that ecumenism became a growing feature of religious life in the navy, `Perhaps the need for Christian Unity is most sharply focused in a naval situation such as is revealed in the wartime navy lists, when death in action was a possibility at any time for the chaplains and those to whom they ministered.'[399] One humorous example of the co-operation between all Christian denominations was in the invitation issued for a joint party in Naples organised by Rev W.J. Lewis (Anglican), Rev Peter McCall (Church of Scotland) and Fr Walter Meyjes (Roman Catholic), signed by `The Bishop, the Cardinal and the Moderator.'[400]

The appointment of twelve female chaplains' assistants in June 1942, to serve under chaplains and support their work within the ATS, was an issue which caused further disruption in relationships between the Protestant Churches. The Methodist Church had been opposed to the idea and grudgingly provided four of the eventual

[396] Duggan (ed.) *Padre in Colditz*, p.64
[397] HC Deb 13 October 1943, vol 392, cols 867-8
[398] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.101
[399] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.463
[400] Ibid, p.443

thirty assistants to be appointed by the end of the war.[401] Of particular contention was the administration of the sacrament. As assistants in most churches were not ordained, this was not an issue, however Baptists could administer communion in their chapels. Due to the ongoing resistance within much of the Church of England to the promotion of women into positions of leadership, many Anglican chaplains' assistants received a warmer welcome from Nonconformist representatives than from their own denomination. Particular animosity came from Roman Catholic chaplains. Lady Easthaugh, one of the first assistants, recalled that one Catholic chaplain told ATS Catholics they should avoid her as a `very dangerous woman.'[402] In 1945 Viscount Stansgate, Secretary of State for Air, authorised the appointment of Congregationalist Elsie Chamberlain as the first fully-fledged female chaplain in the RAF. This led to further ill-feeling from the Church of England, with Archbishop Fisher of Canterbury, writing to Stansgate demanding to know what steps would be taken to prevent Anglicans from receiving the sacraments or taking orders from her. [403]

Despite disagreements at organisational level regarding the relationships between, and responsibilities of, chaplains of different denominations, active Christians in the armed services did not seek to transpose factional differences from their home background into their relationships with other Christians. Whilst stationed at an RAMC training depot in Leeds between March and December 1940, John Broom attended services held by an array of denominations; Church of England, Methodist, Plymouth Brethren and Congregationalist.[404] Often his choice was guided by such mundane factors as the amount of spare time at his disposal and his disposition to travel, frequently choosing the local Anglican church in Headingley as it was within walking distance of the camp. During his short stay in Whitby, a much smaller town, the only church which he attended, apart from compulsory church parades in the local Anglican parish church, was the Methodist Wesley Hall. For Broom, it was not the denominational label that mattered, but the desire to `go where the pure gospel is faithfully preached.'[405]

[401] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.67
[402] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.144
[403] Jane Williams, *First Lady of the Pulpit: A Biography of Elsie Chamberlain* (Lewes: The Book Guild, 1993), p.31
[404] Broom, Private Papers
[405] Broom, Letter, 15 March 1940

Notwithstanding this willingness to worship at a widely ecumenical range of churches, Broom still displayed a Nonconformist tendency to prefer low-church Anglican or Free Church forms of service. On 6th October 1940 he attended St. Chad's Parish Church, Headingley in the morning and Oxford Place Methodist Church in the centre of Leeds in the evening. At the latter venue there was a congregation of over 500 people which evoked his admiration, `This is a real live place & the class of people there is much higher.'[406] Broom also approved of the type of Anglicanism available at St. Chad's, `low church, no incense, bell ringing or tomfoolery whatever.'[407] In contrast he referred to the high churchmanship of another priest with praise mingled with censure, `He's a very good moral chap with deep religious convictions, but he is frightfully high church as you can well guess.'[408]

Dick Stokes, a Salvationist from the West Midlands, a flying instructor at the RAF's 68 Air School in South Africa, was another Nonconformist who felt comfortable worshipping at churches of different denominations. Walking the streets of Pretoria one evening with a comrade, the pair came across a Baptist open-air service:

> [F]ollowed them to their church and enjoyed the fellowship given. Ron was Church of England; I was SA, so we plumped for the Baptist church. The young folk had accepted us into their fellowship and we were taken out for supper most Sunday nights.[409]

Christians found themselves in an environment where it was more important to nurture the faith that held them together, rather than the doctrinal differences which divided them. W. Thompson Elliot had identified an increase in small group meetings of those of varied Protestant persuasions as a fruitful method of fellowship for those in the armed forces, an `experiment on inter-denominational lines [...] for it is through diversity of minds, actuated by a common desire, that the truth may most surely be brought home to us.'[410]

Eric Lomax, a Scottish Strict Baptist, was drawn towards fellow Christians of varied denominations whilst a prisoner of war of the Japanese, the necessity of finding

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[406] Broom, Letter, 8 October 1940
[407] Broom, Letter, 3 November 1940
[408] Broom, Letter, 6 December 1940
[409] Dick Stokes Papers, Private Family Collection
[410] Elliot, *Spiritual Issues of the War*, p. 39

a spirit to aid survival transcending what had become petty denominational differences:

> We could not talk about many intimate things together, but we could talk about religion, even though most of my fellow prisoners were members of the Church of England and I was a member of a Baptist sect. I recall exchanges of passionate letters between young men in the camp exhorting us all to greater spiritual effort. It was a way of encouraging the best in our humanity, and it helped us to survive.[411]

Albert Parker, a Signaller with the Royal Ulster Rifles who served in Northern Europe in 1944-5, recalled being `stuck in a rut' with his Christianity as an 18-year-old recruit, having been brought up in a conventional Anglican setting with the ability to recall by rote the orders of service, but having little appreciation of their deeper meaning.[412] Parker's army experiences brought him into contact with `all different sorts of people of different faiths and different beliefs, and communists who didn't believe in Christianity at all. It sort of challenged me and made me think.'[413] Parker took part in lengthy discussions with people subscribing to these different beliefs in a bar in Lübeck in the months following VE Day. These discussions led him to be more open to different points of view, helping his eventual transfer to the Methodist Church on his marriage in 1948.

Clive Cooper, an Anglican who became an ordained priest after the war, frequented canteens run by the Salvation Army, Church Army and Church of Scotland, and attended services held by men of other denominations.[414] Captain Austin Muir of the RAOC became generally more conscious of the spectrum of religious faith as a result of the war, and transferred his allegiance from the Presbyterian Church of Scotland to the Church of England in 1946 to align with his wife's denomination.[415] The distinction between Presbyterianism and Anglicanism was blurred for Rev Lovell Pocock, an Anglican naval chaplain. Whilst serving as a locum chaplain on SS *Staffordshire,* he was billeted with a rating who had never shared a cabin with a chaplain before, `Although a strict Presbyterian from Shetland, he would do all he

[411] Eric Lomax, *The Railway Man* (London: Vintage Books, 1996), p.103
[412] Albert Parker Papers, Private Family Collection
[413] Ibid
[414] MAC Archive, Robinson, Clive Cooper
[415] MAC Archive, Robinson, Austin Muir

could to help me with the Church Services and Church affairs.'[416] Pocock appointed the man to be his unofficial churchwarden.

Dudley Cave, a Driver with the RAOC who worked on the `Death Railway', recalled that 'Being a PoW gives one time to think and the real possibility of early death does incline the mind to think of matters usually left to old age.'[417] Cave had been confirmed as an Anglican and had been `a member of a Crusaders Bible class, although I never bought their evangelical brand of Christianity.'[418] However, he grew dissatisfied with the army treating churchgoing as a parade, so became a Methodist, but usually worshipped with Congregationalists in Changi, despite subsequently attending Anglican confirmation classes in camp in later 1944 'to find out what I was supposed to believe.'[419] These classes led him to entertain Unitarian beliefs but he continued to worship at Anglican and Free Churches during the rest incarceration. On his return to London after demobilisation, Cave was appointed lay assistant to a Unitarian Church minister.

If Protestants found it acceptable and often desirable to slip between denominational boundaries by attending services at different churches, or by sharing informal fellowship, war brought little harmony of religious experience between Protestants and Roman Catholics in the armed services. Prior to the Second World War the Roman Catholic religion had largely stood apart from the mainstream of British public life. Roman Catholicism had not been appropriated to form an element of state-sponsored national character. However, as Matthew Grimley has argued, unlike in previous centuries, national identity was not defined in opposition to the faith.[420]

This greater degree of acceptance of Roman Catholic voices occurred despite difficulties the Church had found in reaching a common consensus about Franco's seizure of power in Spain. Archbishop Hinsley of Westminster had declared himself staunchly in favour of the British policy of non-intervention, despite hoping that Franco would be victorious, whilst simultaneiously managing to dissociate himself

[416] Rev Lovell Pocock, *For Those in Peril on the Sea: A Chaplain's Life in the Royal Navy* (Upton-on-Severn: Self-Publishing Association, 1989), p.136
[417] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM) 6443, Private Papers of Dudley Cave
[418] Ibid
[419] Ibid
[420] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.891

from the views of the British Union of Fascists.[421] The positioning of the Roman Catholic Church as being sympathetic to a fascist coup had been reinforced by the acclamation in the mainstream Catholic press of General Franco as a Christian hero when he seized power in 1936, with the assistance of military support from the Nazi state. However, as demonstrated by James Flint, this praise was by no means universal across British Catholics, with *Blackfriars*, the monthly journal of the Dominican Order, arguing for a more nuanced response.[422] Therefore when the Second World War broke out, Hinsley was keen that British Roman Catholics should be seen to be solidly behind the national war effort. In his *Sword of the Spirit* broadcast in December 1939, he made reference to `our civilisation […] nourished and made by our Christian faith.'[423] The resultant *Sword of the Spirit* group, established in August 1940, was necessary to offset the propaganda that Hinsley feared would be unleashed against British Catholics if they were not seen to be in accord with the Protestant denominations in supporting the war. Two meetings were held in London in May 1941, one addressed by Hinsley and the other by Cosmo Lang and leading Free Churchmen, which the *Church Times* described as `a remarkable demonstration of a united Christian front, leading Churchmen and Nonconformists sitting at the same platform with Jesuit Fathers and a Cardinal in all the glory of his crimson.'[424]

Hinsley, Lang, Temple and W.H. Armstrong, the Moderator of the English Free Churches, were joint signatories to a letter to *The Times* urging Commonwealth governments to adopt Pope Pius XII's Ten Peace Points.[425] However this was to prove the apogee of Protestant-Roman Catholic relations. Hinsley had failed to convince many of his own colleagues of the desirability of such close co-operation. Archbishop McGrath of Cardiff banned the *Sword* from operating in his diocese, with opposition also being expressed by the Bishops of Shrewsbury, Hexham and Newcastle, and Clifton, among others.[426] In addition, many leading Protestants, including George Bell, remained sceptical over the true depth of such ecumenical manoeuvres. The Vatican

[421] Peter Hebblethwaite, `Into the Mainstream with Cardinal Hinsley', *New Blackfriars,* 69 (1987), p.347
[422] James Flint, `"Must God Go Fascist?": English Catholic Opinion and the Spanish Civil War', *Church History,* 56 (1987), 364-372
[423] Quoted in *The Tablet*, 16 December 1939, p.21
[424] *Church Times*, 16 May 1941, p.4
[425] *The Times*, 21 December 1940, p.5
[426] Kester Aspden, *Fortress Church: The English Roman Catholic Bishops and Politics, 1903-63* (Leominster: Gracewing Publishing, 2002), p.243

reprimanded Hinsley and ordered The *Sword of the Spirit* to be split into distinctive Catholic and Protestant strands later in 1941, with the latter being renamed *Religion and Life*.

The *Church Times* also railed against the *Sword*, castigating it as a weapon for `exclusively Roman Catholic piety and propaganda.'[427] Hitler's invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, and that empire's resultant incorporation into the Allies, provided a further disconnect between the British war effort and Catholic propaganda, with George Orwell noting of the bulk of domestic Catholic hierarchy and intelligentsia, `Their hatred of Russia is really venomous, enough even to disgust an anti-Stalinist like myself.'[428] However, as Philip Williamson argued, Hinsley's actions had meant that the Roman Catholic Church on the British mainland `was admitted into the religious conception of the British nation' and this sometimes transmitted itself into co-operation between Catholics and Protestants in the armed forces.'[429] The communication channels had been opened at the highest levels and opened the way for a greater degree of mutual understanding than had previously existed.

Williamson's contention is borne out by the testimony of active Christians in the armed forces. As a boy Ken Tout had been warned by his mother not to walk on the pavement outside the Roman Catholic church in Hereford, for fear of coming under the influence of the priest. However, he recalled that, in battle, denominational labels mattered little, and men of all faiths drew closer in the war.[430] Lance-Corporal Vernon Parry of the Royal Engineers, who had attended a Welsh Independent chapel regularly before the war, and who served with the Royal Engineers from 1944 to 1947, showed no such distrust of Catholic places of worship and forms of service. He visited Bayeux Cathedral in 1944 and admired its `magnificent decoration.'[431] Before his demobilisation in 1947, Parry also visited the Vatican during a short leave break in Rome and found himself invited by a group of American soldiers to join them for an audience with Pope Pius XII, for which he stood in the front row. So as not to cause

[427] *Church Times*, 15 August 1941, p.7
[428] George Orwell, `London Letter', *Partisan Review* November-December 1941 <https://danymihalache.files.wordpress.com/2009/11/george-orwell-the-collected-essays-journalism-and-letters-26-london-letter-to-partisan-review.doc> (accessed 1 October 2016)
[429] Williamson, `National Days of Prayer', p.356
[430] Ken Tout Papers
[431] Vernon Parry Papers, Family Collection

offence and to be able to follow the actions of others during the audience, Parry purchased some rosary beads.

Alec Guinness, who received a Royal Navy commission in 1942, vacillated between High Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism throughout the war. He wrote in metaphorical terms of being in the `wrong camp' and `not sure to which Regiment I belong.'[432] Guinness thought he ought to belong to the `crack' Roman regiment, but could not quite manage the standards needed to be a member, whilst the other Anglican one, `although full of wise and good nice and friendly men – well, it's a bit of a rabble.'[433] In addition, he contrasted the corruption of the Roman Catholic Church, to the reliability of Anglican Church, the former being `more fun, but not such good sense.'[434] Like Parry, Guinness was another who enjoyed an audience with the Pope and was `bowled over by his gentleness and charm', considering the pontiff to have a saintly demeanour.[435] Even John Broom, from an evangelical Railway Mission background which distrusted any overt displays of High Anglicanism, much less Roman Catholic ritualism, spent time in 1943 with his battalion's Roman Catholic padre whilst learning Italian and noted approvingly that the latter `does not parade his religion.'[436]

Nevertheless, these harmonious relationships between Protestants and Roman Catholics were by no means universal. For example, Sergeant Edward Sinclair, an Anglican serving with the 149th Field Ambulance recalled how `a very courageous Padre', the Roman Catholic Fr Nesbitt, would refuse to conduct burial services in Normandy for Protestants, the job falling, in the absence of any other chaplain, to the Regimental Sergeant Major. This policy had an `unfortunate effect […] on those of more liberal Christian beliefs.'[437] Ironically Fr Nesbitt was killed whilst erecting crosses to soldiers who had been hastily buried where they had fallen.

Captain Andrew Sewell, a Presbyterian, who was a prisoner of war of the Japanese, reflected that his faith widened by his experiences and exposure to a wider

[432] Piers Paul Read, *Alec Guinness: The Authorised Biography* (London: Simon & Schuster, 2003), p.141
[433] Ibid
[434] Ibid
[435] Ibid, p.178
[436] Broom, Letter, 4 August 1943
[437] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Edward Nelson Sinclair

circle of influences. One of these influences was a Roman Catholic, Padre Kennedy, whom Sewell found `a valuable and helpful neighbour.'[438] James Driscoll, although an evangelical Anglican who in later life became a lay preacher in the United Reformed Church, noted with approval the devout Catholicism on display in the Dutch town of Weert, with the majority of the population attending Sunday Mass and avoiding `idle pleasure and unnecessary work.'[439] Driscoll also formed a favourable impression of Catholicism during a stay in an convent, leaving the institution loaded with food and blessed by the prayers of the nuns, `Well whatever we may think of the Roman religion these women were sincere and one of them was actually crying because we were going and every man jack of us was sorry to leave.'[440]

However, many Protestants took a more nuanced view of the Roman Catholic Church. Lavinia Holland-Hibbert, the daughter of a staunchly Anglican churchwarden, attended a Mass at the Duomo in Naples in 1944 whilst serving as a staff officer in the ATS with the 15th Army Group. Whilst expressing disapproval that she had to pay for her chair, she was impressed by the devotion of the worshippers and the way in which faith was passed down to children at an early age.[441] Later the same year, she observed an audience with the Pope. Whilst being impressed by the manner in which he addressed his audience, Holland-Hibbert felt that he displayed an underlying tolerance of the Axis Powers:

> I couldn't help remembering the things he had said or rather not said in the past. His first greeting to us in Rome was just a thanksgiving, that, thanks to the discipline and goodwill of both sides, Rome should have been spared the horrors of war. Twice he emphasised "the both sides", in no way a welcome to us.[442]

Therefore, the ecumenical efforts which had been made by Protestant Church leaders during the 1930s were strengthened by the enforced comradeship between men and women of different Protestant denominations during the war. This unity would find greater resonance in the interdenominational evangelical missions of the 1950s. Whilst there were few expressions of unity between Protestants and Catholics, a

[438] MAC Archive, Robinson, Andrew Sewell
[439] James Driscoll Papers, Private Family Collection, Letter to Kathleen Driscoll, 19 September 1944
[440] Ibid
[441] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 6468, Papers of Lavinia Orde
[442] Ibid

greater degree of tolerance and understanding grew between members of those two branches of Christendom.

Expressions of faith through the Bible and Hymnody

Another facet of religious culture which underpinned the resilience of wartime faith in was knowledge of the Bible, the Book of Common Prayer and hymnody. Matthew Grimley has suggested that an emphasis on these works, as symbols which straddled the Anglican and Nonconformist traditions, was used to affirm England's common religious heritage.[443] A 1938 editorial in *The Times* claimed that the English Bible had `contributed, as no other force has done in a like degree, to what is best in the national character.'[444] The central importance of the Bible was affirmed in political circles, with the recently-retired Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin pronouncing `You cannot begin to understand the Englishman until you try to realise the impression left on him generation after generation by the English Bible.'[445] Ron Hassner examined the extent to which participants in twentieth-century warfare were able to sustain and draw upon religious ideas and practices, such as Bible reading, prayer and collective hymn singing. He hypothesised that there were three main contingent factors which affected the resilience of such tropes.[446] Firstly, the level of commitment to war aims, secondly the extent of exposure to particular forms of battlefield trauma and thirdly societal attitudes to the war and its overall success.

For many Christians, especially those from the Protestant denominations, the Bible was central to their mediation of the war. On overseas service, when collective worship was intermittent at best and impossible at worst, the scriptures could be read in solitude or in small groups. Some approached their Bible study in a systematic manner, following the pattern of readings set out in guides such as the *Daily Light*, a devotional compendium of daily ten-minute scripture readings and reflection, whilst others drew on individual portions of scripture which reflected their current circumstances. Michael Snape averred that `evangelically minded chaplains remained active in promoting the reading and study of scripture.'[447] However, many men and

[443] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.895
[444] *The Times*, 18 June 1938, p.15
[445] Stanley Baldwin, *An Interpreter of England: The Falconer Lectures* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), pp.19-20
[446] Ron E Hassner, *Religion in the Battlefield* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2016), p.132
[447] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.233

women needed little encouragement from chaplains to continue to hold the words of scripture in high esteem during their war. The British and Foreign Bible Society provided 300,000 copies of a special edition of the New Testament, available in khaki, navy blue and air force blue.[448] Inside, King George VI had written, `For centuries the Bible has been a wholesome and strengthening influence in our national life, and it behoves us in these momentous days to turn with renewed faith to this Divine source of comfort and inspiration.'[449] In addition the society, along with the Scripture Gift Mission, issued hundreds of thousands of pocket editions of the full Bible, as well as individual Gospels. 30,000 New Testaments were distributed to British soldiers via army chaplains during the Normandy campaign.[450]

Field-Marshal Montgomery's Christmas 1944 address to the 21st Army Group twice quoted the Bible, firstly in assigning the victories since 6th June to God through reference to Psalm 118, `This was the Lord's doing, and it was marvellous in our eyes', and secondly as a celebration of the spirit of Christmas found in Luke 2:14, `Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.'[451] Further down the ranks, Christian servicemen saw their pocket Bible as essential a piece of kit as any issued by the military authorities. When Eric Newby, who had been captured by the Italians after a failed Special Boat Service mission, and his comrade `James' had to leave behind most of their kit when attempting to evade capture as escaped prisoners of war in Italy in 1943, the only book they took with them was the Bible.[452]

Practical Christianity, the magazine of the Officers' Christian Union, carried an article in its July 1945 edition demonstrating the value of the Bible for many of its members throughout the war. Captain Flood stated that his wife's Bible reading on the day of his capture by the Germans at Dunkirk was from Jeremiah 31:16, `Refrain thy voice from weeping, for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.'[453] Captain John de Laine felt that Psalm 91:1-7, with its promise of God's protection, was fulfilled throughout his five-and-a-half

[448] James Moulton Roe, *The British and Foreign Bible Society, 1905-1954* (London: British and Foreign Bible Society, 1965), p.410
[449] Ibid
[450] Max Hastings, *Overlord: D-Day and the Battle for Normandy 1944* (London: Michael Joseph, 1984), p.417
[451] B.L. Montgomery, *21 Army Group: Personal Message from the C-in-C* (Belgium: 1944)
[452] Eric Newby, *Love and War in the Apennines* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1971), p.212
[453] `In Prison Camp and Unit', *Practical Christianity*, July 1945, p.7

years as a prisoner of war in Germany.[454] First Officer Pratt of the WRNS was apprehensive on her enlistment into the OTC that she would not live a worthy Christian lifestyle, but was encouraged by her reading of Isaiah 41:10, `Fear thou not for I am with thee […] I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.'[455] An anonymous Subaltern reported how his Brigade Major suggested that he read aloud from his Bible each evening round the camp fire during a strenuous march over the Manipur Hills in Assam, `It was the feeling of impending danger that made these officers turn to the Word of God.'[456]

Men could find a refreshed interpretation of familiar words of scripture whilst enduring the privations of Japanese captivity. Eric Lomax found the apocalyptic nature of Book of Revelation a source of reassurance whilst working on the Thai-Burma railway:

> The Book of Revelation continued to exalt me. […] Its vision of apocalypse and of last things, of a world falling apart only to be recomposed in light and happiness, had been at the heart of the Chapel's belief. […]. Nothing since my arrival in Malaya had persuaded me that disaster could not strike; that empires could not disintegrate; or that human beings could not find themselves helpless in extreme situations.[457]

Whilst watching two men being savagely beaten for around forty minutes by a group of Japanese NCOs, Lomax evoked the experience of British Christian martyrs of the past to steel him for his own punishment, `The expectation was indescribable; a childhood story of Protestant martyrs watching friends die in agony on the rack flashed through my mind.'[458] In the delirium which followed his beating, Lomax experienced learnt religious phraseology streaming through his consciousness:

> Behold I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him […] I am the Alpha and Omega the beginning and the end the first and the last and did those feet in ancient time walk upon England's mountains green. O for that warning voice which he who saw. The

[454] `Ibid, p.8
[455] `Ibid, p.9
[456] `Behind the Japanese Lines: The Hand of the Lord in Burma', *Practical Christianity,* March 1945, p.1
[457] Lomax, *The Railway Man*, p.102
[458] Lomax, *The Railway Man*, p.119

> Apocalypse heard cry in Heaven aloud. Yet man is born into trouble, as the sparks fly upwards.[459]

Therefore, in the throes of a near death experience, Biblical phrases became interspersed with religious phraseology from Milton and Blake and proved instrumental in Lomax's will to survive.

In a similar vein, for Captain John Leech, the Bible when contemplated in captivity was transformed in significance from `an admirable collection of interesting folk-lore […] it became […] the living Word of God.'[460] Bombardier Stanley Warren of the 135th Field Regiment, who had worked as a commercial artist before the war, found the creation of five murals to be spiritual experience. The artwork, painting in the Roberts Hospital in the Seralang Barracks, depicted scenes from the life of Christ, each one boldly titled with a Biblical quote, including the apposite `Father, forgive them for they know not what they do', and `This is my blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many.'[461]

Albert Taylor, an Anglican, recalling his Far East prisoner of war experiences to a church youth group some forty years later, recounted how a `lovely verse in Psalm 61 [...] became very real to me in those years, "From the ends of the earth will I cry unto thee when my heart is overwhelmed. Lead me to the rock that is higher than I."'[462] Taylor also found strength in his sister's quotation of Psalm 91, on the theme of the Lord providing refuge and deliverance, in a letter he received whilst in camp:

> Bearing in mind that we had starvation to put up with, men died because they hadn't enough to eat, men died of malaria and black water fever and cholera and dysentery and all kinds of other things. […] In less than twenty-four hours of entering that camp in despair my attention was drawn, from the other side of the world with perfect timing, to Psalm 91.[463]

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[459] Ibid, p.140
[460] `In Japanese Hands', *Practical Christianity*, March 1946, p.7
[461] Peter W. Stubbs, *The Changi Murals: The Story of Stanley Warren's War* (Singapore: Landmark Books, 2014), p.48
[462] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 19912, Papers of Albert Taylor
[463] Ibid

Captain Harold Churchill, an Anglican RAMC doctor, recalled borrowing a small Bible from a colleague in a Japanese prisoner of war camp.[464] The colleague admitted to never having read the Bible through, so Churchill recited the words from Luke Chapter 10, `A certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion on him and he went to him.' This passage was reread to another colleague who entered the hut who then realised that this was the approach the men in the camp had towards each other; the relatively healthy doing the work of the sick. Thus, the Bible helped two non-believers to relate their circumstances to the famous parable. Churchill also drew on his memory of hymnody during his incarceration, quoting from a song which spoke of Christ's crucifixion, *There is a Green Hill Far Away*.[465] Therefore Churchill combined notions of prisoners playing the part of the Good Samaritan, along with overtones of Christ's sacrifice at Calvary, self-sacrifice to save others being a common theme amongst Far East prisoners of war. Like Stanley Warren's murals, equating the suffering and sacrifice of the British soldier to that of Christ echoed a recurrent theme from the British Army of the First World War.[466]

Lance-Bombardier Joe Blythe of the Royal Artillery, a Methodist lay preacher who endured three and a half years as a Far East prisoner of war, drew strength from seeing his plight and those of his comrades in Biblical terms, `But the Children of Israel were rescued from their fate by a wonderful miracle, so why not us? After all, God does know about us, and about all our needs and requirements, surely he is able to deliver us from the hands of our enemies.'[467] Gunner Herbert Bareham of the 48th Light Anti-Aircraft Regiment of the Royal Artillery, who spent much of his captivity in Fukuoka prisoner of war camp in Japan, had made it `the habit of my life', to observe the terms printed on his membership card for the Pocket Testament League, `to read a portion of the Bible each day […] and to carry a Bible or Testament with me wherever I go.'[468] Bareham retained his Army Prayer Book right through his time in captivity, even having an official Japanese stamp placed in the front.

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[464] Sue Palmer (ed), *Prisoners on the Kwai: Memoirs of Dr Harold Churchill*, (Dereham: Larks Press, 2005), p.35
[465] Ibid, p.40
[466] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, pp.42-44
[467] Joe Blythe and Kathleen Blythe, *Survival through Faith in Adversity: The Wartime Diaries of Joe Blythe, a Prisoner of War under the Japanese Empire* (Privately Published, 2000), p.42
[468] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 5206, Private Papers of Herbert Bareham

Private Douglas Firth, a Baptist from Yorkshire who served in the RASC, traded cigarettes to obtain a Bible whilst a prisoner of war. These `Passages of Scripture with the promises of God, and the memory of the Christian friends at my local Baptist church back home, knowing how they would be faithfully keeping me in their prayers, gave me hope.'[469] Firth recounted how his Bible would often fall open at Romans 12, a passage on the subject of not repaying evil with evil, rather overcoming it with good, which he memorised to reinforce his faith. The Bible `became a source of strength and inspiration for me and helped me maintain my faith in God's Almighty power.'[470]

The Bible was also a feature of a resilient faith for many prisoners of war held by the Germans. Lieutenant-Colonel B.H. Bonham Carter, an Anglican, wrote, `I shall be glad when my Bible comes through. I miss that.'[471] A naval prisoner of war, captured by the *Admiral Scheer* in November 1940, reported how the Bible that he retrieved when taken was borrowed throughout the day by his men. [472] He began to pray to be rescued, but then realised it was a greater thing to fulfil God's will, an understanding which brought him peace of mind. He later started a Bible study group in a prison camp to which twenty-five men came.[473]

Bible passages also provided succour during times of extreme anxiety or danger. Captain Edgar Beresford Mash, of the Army Dental Corps, an evangelical Anglican, felt that God spoke to him through the Bible via a series of *Daily Light* readings. Both Mash and his wife found constant guidance from the passages from the time of his mobilisation in September 1939 through to the conclusion of Operation Dynamo in 1940, `I found God was speaking to me […] this is not an extravagant claim based on some religious emotion. […] God delights to talk with us as we wait before Him, particularly through his own Word.'[474] In October 1939 he read 2 Chronicles 20:17, `Ye shall not need to fight in this battle, stand still and see the salvation of the Lord', and took this as a sign that he would not be sent overseas until he was ready to endure the experience.[475] His reading of Genesis 28:15, `Behold I am

[469] Douglas Hammond Firth, *Tapestry Story of the Kwai* (Privately Published, n.d.), p.12
[470] Firth, *Tapestry Story of the Kwai*, p.25
[471] Quoted in Officers' Christian Union, *A Time for War and Peace*, p.21
[472] `Prisoners of War', *Practical Christianity*, September 1945, p.17
[473] Ibid
[474] H.E. Beresford Mash, *Up from the Gates: A Story of Divine Dealing at Dunkirk* (London: Marshal, Morgan and Scott, 1941), p.14
[475] Ibid, p.16

with thee and will keep thee in all places whither thou goest and will bring thee again into this land', brought Mash an assurance that whatever fate held in store for him during the war, he would return home safely.[476] On the Tuesday prior to his evacuation from Dunkirk, Mash's wife repeatedly turned to Genesis 32:28, `for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed', as assurance that her husband would return safely.[477] For the next two days she re-read the same passage, apparently mistaking which *Daily Light* texts were set for those days. For her, this was a sign from God re-emphasising that her husband would be delivered.

R.H. Stanley, who orally recorded his war experience with minimal biographical details, found literal meaning in the Psalms whilst in a dangerous predicament. Cut off from his comrades during the British Army's evacuation from Greece, and seeking shelter under a bush, Stanley's Bible was still wet from a recent attempt to board a Greek trawler. This meant that some pages had stuck together, meaning that the Bible repeatedly opened at Psalm 71. Stanley recounted that `God was trying to speak to me […] through Psalm 71 […] I'm sure that I was guided to read Psalm 71.'[478] The message about putting one's trust in God and salvation and deliverance `out of the hand of the wicked' meant he `emerged […] with entirely new spirit and hope in my heart. […] I was convinced there was going to be […] a way out of Greece.'[479]

A similar predicament was recorded by Anglican Douglas Milmine, a future Bishop of Paraguay, who served in the RAF Volunteer Reserve. Having parachuted into Holland during the 1943 Ruhr offensive, he spent seven days stranded behind enemy lines. Milmine lay on a grassy bank and fixed on 1 John 5:12, `He that hath the Son hath life and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.'[480] Milmine considered this not just a comfort for that hour, but an inspiration for the future, `Here is the message men need to-day, and if I ever get home it must be my life's theme.'[481] Regular use of the Bible across members of the British armed forces was also noted by many chaplains. Rev John Humphries, a Methodist chaplain attached to 84 General

[476] Ibid, p.20
[477] Ibid, p.21
[478] Wetherby, Second World War Experience Centre (SWWEC) LEEWW 2008.32.71, Interview with R.H. Stanley, *Come Over to Macedonia and Help Us*
[479] Ibid
[480] Officer's Christian Union, *A Time for War and Peace*, p.22
[481] Ibid

Hospital through the North-West Europe campaign of 1944-5, tended to a badly wounded man whose foot had to be amputated. The soldier had a New Testament and picture of his family in his breast pocket, `a combination that will take some beating! For it represents the highest love amongst humans and the divine love of God the Father.'[482]

Ken Tout, struggling to sleep en route to embarkation in Normandy, drew an analogy between his situation and the text from Matthew 8:20, `The Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head.'[483] However, Eric Newby, a self-confessed nominal Christian, struggled to find inspiration in the Bible in his possession:

> I read parts of the New Testament and the Book of Psalms and used the rest of the Old Testament as a sort of lucky dip, opening it each morning at random and putting my finger on a particular verse which was supposed to furnish information about the coming day; and if the prognostication was too bad, having another go.[484]

Therefore, for many active Christians, the Bible was perceived as directly relating to individual situations, but for others who were less committed, the wartime was not a transformative experience in bringing them closer to its contents.

John Broom was another who found persistent reassurance from the Bible's application to his war experiences. From the very beginning of his war service, his family had ensured that he would understand his wartime journey through the prism of God's word. Before he left his home in Colchester for initial training, Broom was presented with a pocket Bible, in the front of which his mother had inscribed the following verses:

> And when He putteth forth His own sheep, He goeth before them. (John 10:4)
>
> Kept by the power of God. (1 Peter 1:5)
>
> In all thy ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct thy paths. (Proverbs 3:6)[485]

[482] London, Imperial War Museum, (IWM) 11797, Papers of Reverend John H. Humphries, War Diary, 25 June 1944
[483] Ken Tout, Private Papers
[484] Newby, *Love and War*, p.204
[485] John Broom Papers, Author's Collection, Pocket Bible

Letters sent by Broom to his mother made frequent use of Biblical texts to contextualise the situations they faced throughout the war. He referred his mother to the keeping power of God, chastising her for letting the fear of Luftwaffe bombing raids lead her to make plans for evacuation to the West Country.[486] He emphasised that the Bible should be used as literal truth in such matters, `Perfect love casteth out Fear. You know theoretically, as many of these quotations as I do, & very likely more, but that isn't much comfort. Why don't you try & believe them as absolutely & infallibly true facts?'[487]

Broom also found guidance in the texts printed on a set of writing paper his mother used for correspondence. In December 1941, with his embarkation overseas imminent, the four texts on the leaves of one letter spoke to him of his situation:

> Behold God is my salvation: I will trust, & not be afraid: for the Lord Jehovah is my strength & my song. Isa 12 2
>
> The man that feareth the Lord – shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord. Ps 112 1&7
>
> And the Lord shall guide thee continually…& thou shalt be like a watered garden, & like a spring of water, whose waters fail not. Isa 58 11
>
> My grace is sufficient for thee: for My strength is made perfect in weakness. II Cor 12 9.[488]

As Broom neared Egypt, he blended references from the Bible to provide reassurance to himself and his mother that his faith was holding fast, `Happy are they whose trust in the Lord their God, whose hearts are not troubled, are not afraid: & are afflicted, but not overwhelmed, are anxious but not cast down.'[489] Following this amalgamation of allusions from Jeremiah, John's Gospel and 2 Corinthians with hints of Psalmist phraseology, Broom then turned to Genesis 28:15:

> You will remember the words given to Jacob: "And behold I am with thee, & will keep thee in all places whither thou goest, & will bring thee again unto this land". I have identified myself with this, apprehending the promise literally

[486] Broom, Letter, 14 July 1940
[487] Broom, Letter,, 14 July 1940
[488] Broom, Letter, 3 December 1941
[489] Broom, Letter, 25 June 1942

> and fully, attaching however a spiritual meaning to the last clause, as the land which is fairer than day.[490]

Richard Schweitzer identified a tendency among Great War soldiers to see religious landscapes both in western Europe and the Middle East.[491] Although not so apparent in the Second World War, examples still exist. John Broom was comforted by his mother having quoted Psalm 78:53 in a letter, `He led them on safely, they feared not', as he wrote on the eve of the Second Battle of El Alamein of his current sojourn in Egypt.[492] Broom saw himself as `following Moses & Joseph into Egypt', and the sight of a `native […] sitting on a donkey trotting along the highway [was] typically Biblical.'[493] Harold Churchill was another who saw reflections of a biblical landscape whilst travelling inland through India from Bombay, `The landscape that moved past me belonged to the early days of the world's history, recalling the Old Testament patriarchs.'[494]

Some Christians noted the destruction of the religious landscape of Germany. Whilst advancing through Münster with the 21st Army Group in April 1945, Norman Kirby saw how `our tyres and tank tracks crunched and pulverised the carved stone faces and limbs of medieval statues. Saints and angels destined by their artist for the pinnacles of Münster Cathedral now lay broken in the dust.'[495] A light-hearted view of the religious landscape in France was given by Ken Tout, who on being told that the tank under his command was to rendezvous with his squadron at the Jerusalem crossroads, outside of Bayeux, had to `resist the temptation to ask whether that is on the Calvary side of Jerusalem. It could be too flippant. Or it could be terribly relevant.'[496]

Whilst Bible reading and recall were largely internalised expressions of religious observance, the singing of hymns was a more overtly collective aspect of religiosity. Michael Snape referred to the `phenomenal popularity of hymn singing' as an indication of the strength of diffusive Christianity in the British soldier of both

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[490] Ibid
[491] Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*
[492] Broom, Letter, 22 October 1942
[493] Ibid
[494] Palmer (ed.), *Prisoners on the Kwai*, p.12
[495] Kirby, *1100 Miles with Monty*, p.122
[496] Ken Tout, *Tanks Advance: Normandy to the Netherlands 1944* (London: Grafton, 1989), p.53

world wars.[497] Popular national culture was infused with the singing of hymns, such as the ritual of *Abide With Me* before the FA Cup final. Audience research showed the BBC that hymn singing would prove essential in any religious broadcasts via the Forces Programme.[498] Hymns could evoke feelings of nostalgia as they had usually been learned in youth and were often accompanied by rousing melodies and expressed noble and uplifting sentiments. One of the first acts of the two Protestant padres at Colditz, Platt and Hobling, was to set to work copying hymns out of `the only two English hymnbooks in this camp, his *Ancient and Modern* and my *Methodist Hymn Book*.'[499] They wrote to the Berlin branch of the YMCA requesting a parcel of American or English hymnbooks, as `the singing of hymns is so refreshing, and has proved so great a blessing to those who gathered for worship last Sunday, that a hymnless service is unthinkable.'[500] On Christmas morning 1940, Platt noted that spirits were low in his dormitory, so took it upon himself to start singing a carol. As he launched into `*Yea, Lord, we greet thee, born this happy morning* [...] a dozen voices were upraised, the lumps disappeared from our throats and the standard for the day was set.'[501]

Captain Peter White of the King's Own Scottish Borderers, an Anglican, drew comfort from the words of the Mary Baker Eddy hymn, *Feed My Sheep*, `I will listen for thy voice lest my footsteps stray', after surviving the danger of a minefield during the Normandy campaign. He contended that what really counted was `adherence in consciousness to that straight and narrow pathway of security which lies in the acknowledgement of a supreme power which is spiritual and not explosive.'[502] Hymnody could also be used in uplifting and morale-affirming circumstances. Captain Bob Midwood, from a traditional Anglican background, took his unit, the 22nd Pathfinders, to the 700th Anniversary Service in Salisbury Cathedral prior to D-Day and noted on the back of his programme `Good hymns, eh? The lads did give 'em what for too!'[503]

[497] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.53
[498] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, p.273
[499] Duggan (ed.), *Padre in Colditz*, p.52
[500] Ibid, p.56
[501] Ibid, p.64
[502] Peter White, *With the Jocks: A Soldier's Struggle for Europe, 1944-45* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 2002), p.201
[503] Capt. Bob Midwood, Private Papers, Midwood family collection

Douglas Firth possessed a battered *Ancient and Modern* hymn book which he used when packed into overcrowded insanitary conditions for transportation to the Thai-Burma railway, `To keep our spirits up we sang army songs and hymns.'[504] During his time constructing the railway, two songs which assisted Firth to maintain both faith and morale were *Abide with Me* and *O God Our Help In Ages in Ages Past*, the words of which `took me away from the terrible daily happenings, beatings […] daily funerals of my fellow prisoners.'[505] Randle Mainwaring was another who found direct solace from hymnody whilst sailing through U-boat infested waters in the Mediterranean, `I conducted hymn singing on a Sunday evening in the crowded ship's lounge when we sang, with extra feeling, *O hear us as we cry to Thee, for those in peril on the sea*.'[506]

Private Alistair Urquhart, who experienced some flickerings of faith whilst a prisoner of war, recounted an episode which took place when he and his comrades were floating on the open sea after the Hell Ship transporting them had been sunk. The group began to sing *Rule Britannia*. Urquhart recalled, `But this was a strange freedom and as the situation worsened the song changed and the poignant words of the great hymn, *Abide with Me* drifted across the South China Sea. It was very moving, and I still cannot bear to hear that hymn in church.'[507] Lieutenant Owen Eva of the 9th Battalion of the Royal Northumberland Fusiliers was another who drew spiritual sustenance from collective hymn singing. He recalled how, on Christmas Day 1944 at the River Valley Camp near Singapore, the Australian Padre Kellow organised a camp choir which rose early to sing carols:

> Waking up to the sound of men singing "Hark the herald angels sing" outside our hut instead of Japanese guards shouting was a wonderful start to the celebration of Christmas. In fact it was a day of real Christmas rejoicing. There was a Christmas service in the open air with hearty if not always tuneful renditions of carols which somehow helped to bring home to me and to others the truth that "God is with us."[508]

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[504] Firth, *Tapestry Story of the Kwai*, p.2
[505] Douglas Firth, *The Spirit of the River Kwai* (Privately Published, 1995), p.21
[506] Randle Mainwaring, *The Good Fight: A Christian's Rewards and Rejections* (London: Howard Baker Press, 1990), p.31
[507] Alistair Urquhart, *Forgotten Highlander: My Incredible Story of Survival During the War in the Far East* (London: Abacus, 2009), p.235
[508] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 2381, Papers of Owen Eva

The comfort John Broom drew from hymnody increased as he embarked from Glasgow in May 1942, `Peace, perfect peace, my future all unknown: Jesus I know, & He is on the Throne', a paraphrasing of the Edward H. Bickerseth Jr hymn.[509] In August of the same year he referred to *God Hath Not Promised* by Annie Flint, `But he hath promised strength from above, unfailing sympathy, undying love', which he thought `What a tonic! What a tune!'[510]

Salvationist Neil Cochrane recalled an episode on a troop ship bound for the Middle East which suggests that hymn singing was a regular part of communal army life for some:

> During the voyage to the Middle East, most of the men of the `Holy Club' I referred to were members of the medical corps and were called upon to help in the `sick bay.' The ships' purser was taken there after collapsing and one of our group (also a Salvationist) was on duty one evening when we sung our hymns. As we concluded with our favourite song, `*When the roll is called up yonder*.' The bugles sounded `lights out.' The next morning, Stan told us that at that moment he was ministering to the Ship's officer when the man smiled, and peacefully answered the call.[511]

R.H. Stanley recalled one comrade, Harry Duckworth, playing Christian hymns and choruses on a ukulele whilst German stukas attacked their troop ship, an act of overtly Christian defiance when in danger. [512] For many men who were not regular churchgoers, the choruses of popular hymns were still memorable from younger days spent in Sunday Schools. The Crusader Union, an interdenominational youth movement, convened a meeting in the autumn of 1945 at which men who had been released from prisoner of war camps were invited to speak. One man reported the singing of choruses to popular hymns, minus the verses, in camp due to the lack of hymn books.[513]

Therefore, phrases from the Bible and well-known Christian hymns remained with men and women as a constant source of spiritual comfort and strength. More so

[509] Broom, Letter, 21 May 1942
[510] Broom, Letter, 31 August 1942
[511] MAC Archive, Robinson, Neil Cochrane
[512] SWWEC Archive, R.H. Stanley
[513] `Prisoners of War', *Practical Christianity*, September 1945, p.13

than acts of collective worship and fellowship, they could be drawn upon whatever the circumstance. The evidence from the testimonies of active Christians is that Bible-reading and placing their experiences in the context of familiar Bible verses remained a strong feature of their mental landscape. Opportunities for hymn singing were taken in the battlefield and in prisoner of war camps, with the more supplicant hymns proving popular in such circumstances. For active Christians in the armed services, a firm foundation in the fundamentals of Christian literacy enabled them to sustain their faith through an array of wartime situations. This provides further weight to the argument that, for this milieu, the basic tenets of their faith proved resilient to the challenges of war, and in many cases were enhanced, thus emerging from the conflict into the 1950s in a healthy condition.

Prayer and Providentialism

Regularity, consistency and sincerity of prayer were prominent tokens of faith which were strongly in evidence amongst Christians during the war. Sean Longden's assertion that `it was only at times of greatest stress that most turned to prayer' was certainly not the case for committed Christians.[514] For them, prayer was at the centre of their relationship with God and their negotiation through the vicissitudes of war. There is evidence that prayer was given greater prominence by those serving in the armed forces than across the general population. Sampling the opinions of a panel of voluntary informants, a Mass-Observation report stated that approximately half of them never prayed.[515] A further report found that personal prayer amongst the civilians interviewed was predominantly given over to the subjects of loved ones and self, with only one in ten people praying for those in danger or peace, and an even smaller number offering prayers for the nation, politicians or victory, the last figure declining to one in fifty of those polled.[516] However, an M-O report on the RAF found that 75% of men had prayed at some point for loved ones, personal safety, or wider concepts such as victory or peace.[517]

Whilst recognising that Mass-Observation's National Panel was a self-selecting group which tended towards the young, urban and metropolitan and left-

[514] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils,* p.36
[515] MOA, FR 1566, `Religion and the People', January 1943
[516] MOA, FR 1525, `Religion and the Future', 1942, p.5
[517] MOA, FR 622, `RAF Trends', 1941

leaning, these figures suggest a greater reliance on one of the basic tools of Christian faith in RAF than for the civilian population as a whole. Michael Snape has suggested that prayer was a consistent feature of religious culture in the army, wherein a `firm sense of the value and efficacy of prayer seems to have been a constant rather than an occasional factor for many soldiers.'[518] Philip Williamson noted that Churchill was an enthusiastic supporter of National Days of Prayer, as these special acts of supplication and worship placed Britain on a moral high ground.[519] Even before the war, favourable outcomes for Britain had been linked to such days. The signing of the Munich Agreement of 1938 was seen by Archbishop Lang as God heeding Britain's plea whilst Temple ascribed the miracle of Dunkirk to God's response to the National Day of Prayer in May 1940.[520] However for many, the purpose of prayer was to invoke God to do His will, rather than the will of the supplicant. King George VI, speaking on D-Day, remarked, `we ask not that God may do our will, but that we may be enabled to do the will of God.'[521]

Leslie Weatherhead recognised the dichotomy between the individual's wish to pour out their personal troubles, commending their loved ones to God through prayer, and a situation in which God was engaged in the task of judging the nations, those nations being intent on destroying each other. For Weatherhead, it was important to avoid agonising over the epistemological justification of the prayer but simply to `When in doubt, pray.'[522] Prayers could be foolish, selfish, sentimental or have unattainable outcomes, but the mere act of talking to God brought the individual closer to Him. This was evident in many prayers offered up by active Christians during the war.

That is not to say that prayers could not speak of national and international matters. Whilst providentialism on an individual level had lost some currency during the Great War due to the widespread experience of death, on national terms it still remained, albeit on terms in which, according to Matthew Grimley, `bellicose assertions of divine favour were unfashionable.'[523] However, the idea of national

[518] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.52
[519] Williamson, `National Days of Prayer', p.325
[520] Ibid
[521] Quoted in Warren F. Kimball (ed.) *Churchill and Roosevelt, Volume 3: The Complete Correspondence* (Princeton University Press, 2015), p.158
[522] Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in Wartime*, p.86
[523] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.903

providence was revived in a more assertive manner in the war, with writers such as Arthur Mee and Herbert Butterfield able to position Dunkirk as a providential deliverance.[524] Paul Addison has demonstrated how Churchill joined in with this chorus of seeing divine intervention as being influential on the course of the war.[525]

There is ample evidence that prayer was a key religious instrument for Christians across the military services. The 1945 annual meeting of the Officers' Christian Union welcomed many speakers who referred to the hand of God at work in battle and in prison camps. A Captain Flood stated that the Christians held in his Oflag had been conscious of the support of prayer from their comrades.[526] First Officer Pratt of the WRNS recalled that the other women in her unit approached her on the day after D-Day to lead their response to the King's call to prayer.[527] Rev Peter Johnstone, an RAF Chaplain in Persia Iraq Command had led a prayer group for eighty-five men.[528] A meeting of young soldiers and civilians in Leeds in 1940 discussed keeping near to God by prayer.[529]

Many displayed a belief in God's providential interventions in the war. Some, including Bishop Chavasse of Rochester, saw the calm weather at Dunkirk as a miracle, and a direct answer to the recent National Day of Prayer.[530] The National Day of Prayer held on 23rd March 1941 led John Broom to record it was `rather significant that Jugoslavia's bloodless revolution & the fall of Keren & Harar should follow on the day of prayer like Dunkirk did before.'[531] The closeness to God through prayer led Broom to the view that divine providence would ensure that individuals, as well as the nation, were in the hands of God during wartime. In the spring of 1940, he expressed a firm belief that whatever the outcome, it would be God's will, `I wonder how the war will take shape. Everything is so uncertain except the certainty that God still reigns in the Heavens though not in the earth. So we mustn't get depressed but hope on &

[524] Arthur Mee, *Nineteen Forty: Our Finest Hour* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941); Herbert Butterfield, *The Englishman and his History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1944), p.11
[525] Paul Addison, 'Destiny, history and providence: the religion of Winston Churchill', in Michael Bentley (ed.), *Public and Private Doctrine: Essays in British History Presented to Maurice Cowling* (Cambridge, 1994), p.249
[526] `In Prison Camp and Unit', *Practical Christianity*, July 1945, p.6
[527] `In Prison Camp and Unit', *Practical Christianity*, July 1945, p.9
[528] `In Prison Camp and Unit', *Practical Christianity*, July 1945, p.9
[529] Broom, Letter, 20 September 1940
[530] Gummer, *The Chavasse Twins*, p.140
[531] Broom, Letter, 28 March 1941

trust in God FOR EVERYTHING.'[532] The tendency of the war to strengthen faith among those of firm belief was demonstrated by Broom's exhortation to increase one's reliance on God, `We must trust in God as never before. "Oh trust in the Lord and he will provide". I know you are trusting, Mum, dear, & that you have resigned to His keeping all that you have & are. Isn't His Eye upon the sparrow? So shall He watch over us all, all the day long.'[533] Thus, for Broom, God was a public and private source of protection.

A belief that the Dunkirk evacuation had been divinely inspired was expounded by Rev T.H. Lovegrove, a United Board chaplain serving with the 6th Battalion Green Howards. Lovegrove delivered a sermon in preparation for D-Day, citing God's continued intervention throughout British history at times of crisis, offering the examples of Dunkirk, the Spanish Armada and the defeat of Napoleon.[534] On a personal level, Captain Edgar Beresford Mash subtitled his testimony of his escape from Dunkirk *A Story of Divine Dealing*.[535] Lavinia Holland-Hibbert of the ATS, at the time a driver for the 61st Divisional Headquarters at Oxford, found an increased personal strength due to her involvement in the May 1940 National Day of Prayer. For her, it was through resilient and determined individuals that the war would be won:

> I say it is difficult to understand how prayer helps, if we must undergo the consequences of our evil- what man sows, so shall he reap. But at the moment my solution is that prayer can strengthen us all individually, to fit us to do our job as well as possible, and so if we all pray, and for others, we shall all do our jobs perfectly, so we must win in the end.[536]

Senior military figures expressed the view that pivotal wartime episodes were the result of God's providential protection of Britain. Following the sinking of the *Bismarck* on Whit Sunday 1941, a thanksgiving service was held at which Admiral John Tovey remarked `For many years I have been a great believer in the power of prayer. During the last few days I've prayed as I've never prayed before.'[537] This prayer had led, in the view of Tovey, to God's direct intervention in the engagement,

[532] Broom, Letter, 16 April 1940
[533] Broom, Letter, 25 June 1940
[534] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC) Archive, T.H. Lovegrove, `The God of Battles' Unpublished sermon, 5th June 1944,
[535] Mash, *Up from the Gates*
[536] IWM, 6468, Lavinia Orde
[537] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.440

`I firmly believe that the result of this action was due to Divine guidance and protection.'[538] Lieutenant-General William Dobbie, a devout Plymouth Brethren member and Governor of Malta during the siege of 1940-2, was another who attributed a military success to God's intervention. Dobbie appealed to the largely Roman Catholic Maltese civilians and the troops under his command to turn to God in his special order of the day, issued during the early days of the siege.[539] In doing so Dobbie reinforced the link between prayer and providence, `with God's help we will maintain the security of this fortress. I therefore call upon all officers and other ranks humbly to seek God's help, and then, in reliance upon Him, to do their duty unflinchingly.'[540] For Dobbie, God was `all-powerful […] and was fully able to help me through my present difficulties, and to bring Malta through her trials.'[541]

General Alan Brooke, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff from 1941 onwards, had, according to David Fraser, a `belief in God as a support and benevolent unchanging guide [which was] a fundamental part of his existence.'[542] On his appointment as CIGS in November 1941, he recorded in his diary `I pray God from the very bottom of my heart that he may give me guidance and be at my side in the times I may have to go through.'[543] In a post-war annotation made to his diary entry of August 7th 1942, having learnt that Lieutenant-General William Gott had been killed in an air crash, thus meaning Montgomery could be appointed to command the 8th Army, he wrote `It seemed almost like the hand of God suddenly appearing to set matters right where we had gone wrong. […] I am convinced the whole course of the war might well have been altered if Gott had been in command of the 8th Army.'[544]

Douglas Firth sought personal protection through prayer to bear the suffering of working on the Death Railway. Firth `thanked God for answering my prayers with the fulfilment of coming home to my loved ones.'[545] Firth had also been sustained in his later years in captivity by the knowledge that his father was praying for him daily

[538] Ibid, p.440
[539] Lt-General Sir William Dobbie G.C.M.G., K.C.B., D.S.O., *A Very Present Help* (London: Marshal, Morgan and Scott, 1945), p.10
[540] Ibid, p.11
[541] Ibid, p.11
[542] David Fraser, *Alanbrooke*, (London: HarperCollins, 1997), p.48
[543] Field Marshal Lord Alanbrooke (Alex Danchev and Daniel Todman eds.), *War Diaries, 1939-45* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 2001), p.199
[544] Ibid, p.295
[545] Firth, *Tapestry Story of the Kwai*, p.1

during his morning coffee break. Firth worked this out to be 6.30pm Siam time, and felt the closeness of his father through prayer at that hour.[546] Firth also referred to the possession of a tin of salt, gained whilst bartering goods, as `providential', as it was used to treat leg ulcers and avoided the possibility of him having a limb amputated.[547]

Providentialism was also understood by active Christians in extreme danger. An anonymous subaltern serving with the Chindits ascribed his men's safe landing behind Japanese lines to the `miraculous immunity [of] the protecting hand of the Lord.'[548] He also referred to an occasion when the Japanese left a large track unguarded thus enabling their escape from a critical position, `the Lord stepped in.'[549] R.H. Stanley, whilst in hiding in a gravel pit outside Athens in 1941 amongst other troops trying to escape from German occupied Greece, told an Australian that he was a Christian and had just had a `conference with my Commander-in-Chief, Lord Jesus Christ.'[550] Corporal George Iceton, an Anglican operating as a driver with the Durham Light Infantry, recalled two occasions when he had decided not to park his lorry in a position which was then shelled, citing God's protection for him at those moments.[551] In addition, his uncle, a Methodist preacher, twice prayed that Iceton would receive a `blighty wound', and both times those prayers were considered answered; the first occasion in 1940 which meant he missed the final days of the Dunkirk evacuation, and the second in 1943 in Sicily which led to his fitness category being downgraded as only fit for home training duties for the remainder of the war.

Lieutenant Owen Eva experienced a moment of revelation through prayer during a dangerous sea voyage from Singapore to Saigon whilst a prisoner of war of the Japanese. Knowing that if a torpedo were to hit the cargo ship *Fujinoord*, the chances of survival were infinitesimally small, Eva turned to prayer:

> Praying in the hold that night I became very conscious of the presence of God, and with it the certainty of being safe in his care. This was not a sort of feeling that we would survive; it was the certainty that if I lived it would be because God still had work for me to do in the world and if I died then I was safe in his

[546] Firth, *The Spirit of the River Kwai*, p.17
[547] Ibid, p.16
[548] `Behind the Japanese Lines: The Hand of the Lord in Burma', *Practical Christianity*, March 1945, p.2
[549] Ibid, p.3
[550] SWWEC, LEEWW. 2008.32.71, R.H. Stanley
[551] London, Imperial War Museum, (IWM), 11398, Interview with George Edward Iceton

> care. I knew I could let go of fears and worries and trust in God's love and power. Then I went off to sleep and had my one and only good sleep of the voyage.[552]

The efficacy and purpose of prayer was sometimes questioned and misunderstood by recent converts to the Christian faith. Sergeant Jack Farrow, confirmed as an Anglican in Changi camp, viewed prayer as a way of having one's need met, noting in 1943 `queues to get into church resembled […] the London Empire. I wonder when on their knees in prayer what are they asking for, there are so many needs.'[553]. Following his confirmation, Farrow drifted away from Christianity during his incarceration and post-war life.

Prayer, both communal and individual, provided a strong foundation from which active Christians in the armed services could remain close to God. For them, religion was not merely a weekly ritual, but a living faith, one in which the individual could feel God forever close at hand. Many slipped between a Calvinistic perspective of God's will already being predetermined, with the purpose of prayer being to ask for the strength to be able to remain steadfast in the unveiling of that will, whereas on other occasions a more Arminian approach was evident, with the idea that the course of events, both personal and collective, could be influenced by prayer. Often active Christians did not operate within these theological polarities, but were able to elide the two, praying to God both as the architect of events, but also as a divine presence who would listen to the prayers of his faithful to keep them safe. Wherever active Christians stood along that continuum, it is clear that a consistent recourse to prayer enabled them to mediate their experiences of war, and there is little evidence of any loss of faith within this group arising from any crisis of confidence in the power of prayer.

Sexual Morality

According to Michael Snape, the widespread deterioration in civilian moral standards between the two World Wars was more noticeable than any perceived loss of faith, and the `most significant symptom of religious change' during that period.[554] The 1930s saw a growth in gambling and alcohol consumption, a widespread

[552] IWM, 2381 Owen Eva
[553] J.N. Farrow, *Darkness before the Dawn: A diary of a Changi P.O.W., 1941-1945* (Peterborough: Stanford House Publishing, 2007), p.205
[554] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.187

acceptance of contraception and an increase in the divorce rate. More Sabbaths were spent on non-religious leisure pursuits such as cinema-going, the playing of sports and motor trips, leading to a diminution of the traditions of the British Sunday. During the 1930s, the British Churches concerned themselves with these matters of public morals and personal behaviour, although there was a divergence of views both across the churches and amongst individual Christians, with the Anglican Church being more tolerant of birth control than the Roman Catholic Church, but the situation being reversed in discussions on gambling.

Even before the war, the gap between church teachings and personal lifestyles was widening. According to Callum Brown `A poised ambivalence and hypocrisy reigned over the governance of British moral law between the mid-1930s and the late 1960s.'[555] By 1939 moderate drinking was actively condoned, with the pub often being the shown as the centre of British resolve to beat the Nazis.[556] However, many church leaders disapproved of what they saw as an increasing moral laxity. Rev David Kyles, Secretary of the Drummond Tract Enterprise and author of many Christian publications, wrote that `we have seen a moral paralysis creeping over our people [with] a remarkable surge of pleasure-seeking, heightened by a not disinterested devil's brew of press, cinema, wireless, tobacco and drink combined, gambling and other vice industries.'[557] For Paul Fussell this increasing moral laxity was accentuated by the experience of warfare, which served to damage `intellect, discrimination, honesty, individuality, complexity, ambiguity and irony, not to mention privacy and wit.'[558] However these retrospectives were not always shared by contemporary Christian commentators. C.S. Lewis argued that morality should not be conflated with faith, `I think all Christians would agree with me if I said that though Christianity seems at the first to be all about morality, all about duties and rules and guilt and virtue, yet it leads you on, out of all that, into something beyond.'[559] In contrast Hensley Henson stated that `Morality is every man's concern, and the general tendency to

[555] Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p.83
[556] Ibid
[557] Quoted in Ibid, p.87
[558] Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behaviour in the Second World War* (Oxford, OUP, 1989), p.ix
[559] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p.135

repudiate the traditional morality of Christendom, which is now everywhere apparent, has added to its consideration a new and painful urgency.'[560]

Despite this loosening of moral standards elsewhere, it was still expected that active Christians would uphold certain standards of behaviour. Captain Hedley Verity of the Green Howards, whose father was a Congregationalist lay preacher and mother a Sunday School teacher, was described posthumously by his commanding officer as `a fine example of the real Christian. He was a man clean-living and clean-speaking, charitable and quick to help others. […] He had good manners.'[561] When Christians did not adhere to such standards it remained noteworthy even many decades later. Lieutenant A.R.W. Grimley, an Anglican in the Royal Artillery, recalled a chaplain who told lurid stories and did not pay his share of mess bills.[562]

Church leaders generally took a strong line against any hint of a loosening of sexual morality. In a series of talks given in 1931, but republished during the war, William Temple claimed that `sex is holy as well as wholesome' being a means of co-operation with God in bringing new life into the world.[563] Therefore it should be no more a subject for humour than was the Holy Communion. It was an act that should only take place within the context of a lifelong spiritual union. The advice of the Salvation Army to its members in the armed forces echoed the view that sex was no subject for amusement or barrack-room banter, `Every time you keep out of the unclean jest […] your light is shining in a corner where darkness is great.'[564] Hensley Henson argued that Christianity existed in sharpest collision with non-Christian society in the area of sexual morality, because of religious teaching on the equality of the sexes, marriage, the family and parenthood.[565] He was moved to comment in private correspondence that, in forcing King Edward VIII to abdicate over his wish to marry Mrs. Simpson, `we shall have conspicuously rebuked the disgusting sexual laxity of America.'[566] However such sentiments were to a great extent tilting against the prevailing wind. For example, the cartoon strip *Jane*, which had been launched by

[560] Herbert Hensley Henson, *Christian Morality, Natural, Developing, Final: Being the Gifford Lectures, 1935-1936* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1936), p.v
[561] Sam Davies, *Hedley Verity: Prince with a Piece of Leather* (London: Epworth Press, 1952), p.59
[562] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, A.R.W. Grimley
[563] William Temple, *Christian Faith and Life* (London: SCM Press, 1957), p.49
[564] General Carpenter, *New Battlegrounds* (St. Albans: The Campfield Press, 1941), p.11
[565] Henson, *Christian Morality*, pp. 188-211
[566] Quoted Grimley, *Citizenship, Community, and the Church of England*, p.191

the *Daily Mirror* in 1932, had, by 1939, become increasingly saucier, with the eponymous heroine frequently shedding her clothes.

However, a wartime situation, where urgency, fear and fatalism often went hand in hand, threatened to lead to a sharp decline in sexual morals. Sigmund Freud had claimed that war threw off the repressions which normal society imposed on the human sex drive.[567] However, proving this contention has proved problematic. John Costello's attempt to study sexual behaviour in the Second World War was `complicated by the conflict of conviction, the confusion of personal memory and the imprecision of psychological interpretation.'[568] It is an aspect to which most Christian service men and women made scant allusion in their own experience, and little more in their observation of the behaviour of others. It is therefore challenging to establish whether they formed part of the `many' identified by Costello as being liberated from traditional inhibitions.

Some historians have contested the notion of a widespread liberation from a traditionally repressive moral framework. Sonya Rose argued that, far from being an era of increasing freedom, greater emphasis was placed on a moral discourse of a conformity of behaviour, particularly relating to young women.[569] Therefore there existed a paradox of increased opportunities for looser sexual conduct, but an enhanced censoriousness against those engaging in it. Adrian Bingham argued that wartime campaigns to raise awareness of venereal diseases, organised by the Ministry of Health and the *Daily Mirror,* marked an important moment in the public discussion of sex in the UK.[570] An editorial argued `Let no one be afraid to speak out boldly on the spiritual side. Moral values have been falling rapidly in recent years, and it is time that the real cause of the "social evil" should be stated for what it is.'[571] The newspaper advocated that men should maintain their celibacy until marriage, and faithfulness thereafter.

Calls to moderate sexual behaviour were frequently ignored. The divorce rate went up from 1:100 marriages in 1939 to 5:100 by 1945, whilst illegitimacy rates

[567] Sigmund Freud, *Reflections on War and Death* (New York: Bartleby and Co., 1918)
[568] John Costello, *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values, 1939-45* (London: Collins, 1985), p.9
[569] Sonya O. Rose, `Sex, Citizenship, and the Nation in World War II Britain', *The American Historical Review*, 103 (1998), 1147-1176
[570] Adrian Bingham, `The British Popular Press and Venereal Disease during the Second World War', *The Historical Journal*, 48, (2005),.1055-1076
[571] *Daily Mirror*, 10 August 1942, p.3

tripled from 5.5 births per 1000 to 16.1 per 1000 over the same period.[572] Between 1942-5 petitions for divorce on the grounds of adultery rose by 100% year on year.[573] By February 1943 there had been a 70% rise in cases of venereal disease reported in Britain since 1939.[574] Writing in the immediate aftermath of the war, G. Stephens Spinks declared that marital infidelity had become an accepted social norm due the disturbed social conditions of wartime.[575] For Bishop Barnes of Birmingham `Totalitarian war […] was the enemy of social morality.'[576] Families were broken up, with fathers absent on war service and mothers working long hours away from their children. Often, young unmarried women were taken from home and billeted under conditions which `encouraged promiscuity.'[577] To combat this advance of licentiousness, Bishop Furse of St Albans called for the sale of contraceptives to be restricted to married men who could produce a medical certificate.[578] Bishop Fisher of London wrote `All sexual intercourse except between man and wife is a sin.'[579]

Concerns were expressed that the British Army was playing host to a lapse in moral standards.[580] During the war, men were forced into prolonged and enforced separation from their wives, leading to unfulfilled longings and a corresponding increase in illicit liaisons for both parties. For many active Christians, particularly Nonconformists, denominational ties had meant social experiences being closely bound up with church activities. The Salvation Army observed that prior to the war, men's female circle had been largely restricted to family members and women in the local corps. However, in the services the separation from these influences could lead to `a false conception of [a woman's] place and function in society tak[ing] root […] As a result there is the widespread idea that women's chief purpose is to provide diversion and the satisfaction of physical desires.'[581]

As prostitution on the home front flourished, the War Office sought to make the issue of venereal disease a purely medical matter, but William Temple, under

[572] Costello, *Love, Sex and War,* pp.274-5; p.277
[573] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues,* p.114
[574] Bingham, `The British Popular Press and Venereal Disease', p.1055
[575] G. Stephens Spinks, *Religion in Britain Since 1900* (London: Andrew Dakers Limited, 1952), p.223
[576] Quoted in Machin, *Churches and Social Issues,* p.115
[577] Ibid
[578] Ibid, p.116
[579] Geoffrey Fisher, *Thorny Problems* (London: PMC, 1943), p.81
[580] Costello, *Love, Sex and War*, p.356
[581] Carpenter, *New Battlegrounds* p.16

pressure from senior bishops, complained to Bernard Paget, Commander of Home Forces, that advice issued to troops on how to avoid catching VD amounted to `how to be incontinent with the greatest possible safety.'[582] Despite such protests, the army continued to accept that VD was an infection to be treated in order to get men back into action as quickly as possible, rather than an affliction to be condemned as a consequence of lax morals. There developed a widespread perception amongst servicemen that part of the reason for the churches appearing to be out of touch with the masses was their suppression of teaching about sex.[583] Adrian Bingham stated that `Being sexually informed – and by extension, sexually responsible – was coming to be seen as an essential part of modern citizenship.'[584] This presented a problem for the churches' teaching on marriage. Eric Lomax became engaged to his nineteen-year old fiancée before embarking for the Far East against the wishes of both sets of parents. Reflecting that both he and his bride to be were emotionally immature, `the Chapel gave us a false sense of rigid maturity.'[585]

Sexual activity amongst troops stationed away from their domestic loves for long periods of time had been a perennial cause for concern in the upper echelons of the military. This was often not out of any moral concern, but the effect VD could have on morale and fighting effectiveness. Between the wars General Montgomery had attempted to provide supervised brothel facilities for troops on overseas service, but this practice was frowned upon by his superiors as being `wild, seditious and eccentric.'[586] However during the war some brothels were made 'in bounds' in Cairo to address the alarming number of VD cases. Just one of the seven VD centres attached to hospitals in the city attracted 954 patients in a six-month period across 1941-2, each case occasioning a stay of between ten and twenty days.[587]

The attitude of Christian service men and women in the armed forces towards the sexual behaviour of their comrades was markedly less strident than the pronouncements of the Churches. Some chaplains in close contact with their men felt more comfortable talking to them about sex in the less formal atmosphere of padre's

[582] Quoted in Machin, *Churches and Social Issues,* p.118
[583] Blofeld, `Soldiers' Questions', p.8
[584] Bingham, `The British Popular Press and Venereal Disease', p.1073
[585] Lomax, *The Railway Man* , p.48
[586] David Weir, `Leadership in a Desert War: Bernard Montgomery as an Unusual Leader', *Review of Enterprise and Management Studies*, 1, (2013), 11-22
[587] Artemis Cooper, *Cairo in the War, 1939-1945* (London: John Murray, 1989), p.119

hour, but others did not feel able to take on the subject. According to Michael Snape, sex, prostitution and VD were rife on the European mainland for troops, but `the chaplains' stand for fidelity, purity and self-control was generally at odds with the more pragmatic approach of the military authorities', which included sex education, free contraceptives and regulated brothels, alongside punitive sanctions against those infected.[588] Nevertheless, Alan Robinson has suggested that some army chaplains became more tolerant of `sex-hunting NCOs' during the war, demonstrating a tendency to separate the sin from the sinner due to their admiration for the men's personal bravery.[589] For example, Rev Harry Lannigan, MC, a Methodist chaplain, reflected:

> During the course of the war my theology and absolute morality suffered a complete turnover. Having been brought up to believe that sin was indivisible and that sins are easily identified, e.g. drinking, gambling, sex, etc. I soon discovered that this was too easy. Hard-drinking, sex-hunting N.C.O.s and W.O.s proved themselves so often. Many could and did give their lives for others. This was a salutary experience, teaching me the truth of the biblical saying: "The Lord does not see as man sees; men judge by appearances but the Lord judges by the heart." It was quite clear to me that there were no moral absolutes.[590]

Men resented being preached at and told what moral standards they should uphold. One anonymous infantryman complained of a chaplain's sermons containing too much `condemnation of almost every form of recreation, and in particular "sex and alcohol"'[591] Richard Holmes cited a padre who distributed pornography in order to reduce the longing for sex and the consequent visiting of brothels and increased VD.[592] Naval chaplain Rev Colin Stephenson hinted at a degree of sympathy with the temptations which fell the way of the sailor. Whilst waiting for an appointment with

[588] Michael Snape, `War, Religion and Revival: the United States, British and Canadian Armies during the Second World War' in Callum G. Brown and Michael Snape (eds.) *Secularisation in the Christian World: Essays in honour of Hugh McLeod* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), p.147
[589] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.100
[590] Joan Clifford, *Thank You Padre: Memories of World War Two* (London: Fount, 1989), p.136
[591] MOA, 1870A, `The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, p.18
[592] Holmes, *Soldiers*, p.261

the Chaplain of the Fleet, `every now and then a pretty Wren came to powder her nose. I wondered if I was being given a preliminary test to see if I was safe with Wrens.'[593]

Those charged with upholding examples of moral behaviour in prisoner of war camps were not immune to feelings of sexual longing. Rev Ellison Platt heard an Italian soprano sing on the radio. It `reminded me of how pleasant a woman's voice can be. Until Signora brought the want out of my subconscious into broad daylight, I had not known how great the want was.'[594] Platt appreciated the sexual straightjacket placed on the men in his care. After a rendition of some risqué songs during an evening sing-song, he wrote `But if I, a seasoned man and a padre to boot, find myself mechanically repeating snippets of song, the morals of which are at all times to be deplored, what may I not expect from the boys in the Stalags whose sex urges burn with the all-consuming passion of youth.'[595] A letter sent from Colditz to Ginger Rogers was published in the *Los Angeles Observer* in 1940, evincing a deluge of letters to British officers in the camp containing provocative photographs from young American women keen to meet the captives upon their release. Platt, despite his Methodist morals, was moved to note in January 1941 `We hope for lots more. Their entertainment value is high indeed.'[596]

Not all chaplains were as tolerant of expressions of sexual interest outside of the bonds of marriage. Rev Ronald Selby Wright repeatedly returned to the theme of sexual promiscuity during his radio broadcasts. He took a strong line against those, male or female, who knowingly engaged in intercourse with a married person, thus breaking up families and becoming `traitors to their country.'[597] Even sexualised talk and entertainment were to be condemned, `Lust, and dirt and smut are forms of blasphemy', and men in the services were advised to switch conversations away from such topics if they could.[598] Wright concurred with the view that public discourse and education were sadly lacking in this area, claiming that three-quarters of the trouble was due to ignorance, with sex not being broached at home, in schools or in the churches.[599] Therefore, the sexual urge was often appreciated and sometimes shared

[593] Colin Stephenson, *Merrily on High* (New York: Morehouse-Barlow Co., 1973), p.103
[594] Duggan (ed.), *Padre in Colditz*, p.56
[595] Ibid, p.74
[596] Ibid, p.78
[597] Ronald Selby Wright, *The Greater Victory: Broadcast Addresses by the Radio Padre* (London: Longman, Green & Co., 1943), p.40
[598] Ibid, p.48
[599] Ibid

by many chaplains charged with upholding a general level of morality amongst their men, despite the public condemnation of the sexual instinct outside of marriage by Wright. The evidence from Christians in the armed services points to a general overcoming of sexual temptation, alongside a widespread tolerance of the behaviour of others.

Sean Longden claimed that the army was full of young men with little or no sexual experience, with many eager to learn but others remaining innocent.[600] One of the latter was Ken Tout, who recalled sex being much talked about, but in terms of romantic love rather than `frank, physical talk.'[601] John Wyatt eschewed the `delights' on offer at the New World Club in Singapore out of consideration for his fiancée and `my good Catholic upbringing.'[602] Captain Christopher Bulteel of the Coldstream Guards, who was undergoing a journey towards conversion by 1942, ignored the advances of local girls in Durban, branding them `Tarts.'[603] When taken to a dance by his Durban hosts he danced with a twice-divorced woman still in her twenties, `However, I preserved my virginity! I still had too many inhibitions.'[604]

Longden identified a greater urgency in sex-hunting once men were deployed in combat zones with the constant spectre of death.[605] 21st Army Group troops had been issued with contraceptives prior to D-Day, but many maintained their innocence; they might wonder what was on offer but not pursue the matter. Rifleman Patrick Devlin, a young Irish Roman Catholic in the 1/Ulster Rifles, recalled, after receiving a briefing for Operation Overlord, being asked to take three condoms.[606] He refused, `I thought we were going to France to fight, Sir.'[607] In order to prevent further embarrassment for the Major overseeing the parade, the Colour Sergeant told him `it was orders from high up […] "Take them Wee Joe and give them away."'[608] Devlin whimsically reflected, `I often wondered would we have been issued with the condoms if we had been invading any other country than France.'[609] For others, the morality of

[600] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils,* p.65
[601] Ibid
[602] Wyatt, *No Mercy from the Japanese,* p.15
[603] Christopher Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier* (Shrewsbury, Airlife Publishing, 2000), p.45
[604] Ibid, p.47
[605] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils,* p.65
[606] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 185, Papers of Patrick Devlin
[607] Ibid
[608] Ibid
[609] Ibid

pre-war Britain was abandoned, with no wives, girlfriends or family on hand. `The sexually profligate and the abstemious served side by side yet in an exclusively male environment few would judge the behaviour of their fellow man.'[610] This was not always the case for active Christians, however. John Broom hinted at a slight tone of censure over an encounter in a Brussels in 1944:

> I have spent one day in a famous city and was escorted by a girl of 26 whose father is a high court judge. The Sergeant Major stands very well with the same family, and indeed the girl has fallen in love with him. Rather a shame because he is married, and she knows it. However…[611]

Hugh Dormer went further in his disapproval of what he considered immoral sexual behaviour in the pursuit of war aims. Seconded into the Special Operations Executive from the Irish Guards for work in France, he heard of a local woman who had got herself injected with VD and then set out to sleep with as many German soldiers as possible. Rather than condone immoral combat where the ends would justify the means, Dormer reasoned that `Death now seemed inevitable and I preferred to meet it in uniform.'[612] He therefore declined to undertake any further undercover operations in France due to his Christian morals. Dormer felt inspired by T.E. Lawrence's words in the *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, `I pray God that no other English lad reading this story will from love of the glamour of strangeness go out to prostitute himself with another race.'[613]

For other Christians, the avoidance of sexual encounters arose from more prosaic reasons. Anglican Albert Parker recalled the existence of authorised brothels in France:

> I was always conscious of the fact that I ultimately wanted to have a family and there were people saying, "Oh it's all right. You take penicillin for a week and it will be all right" And I thought. "Is it all right? Is it going to have an effect?" There were girls offering services regularly. And in fact when I was in France for a time there was a brothel there that was legal […] For my part I

[610] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, p.65
[611] Broom, Letter, 18 September 1944
[612] Hugh Dormer, *Hugh Dormer's Diaries* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1947), p.135
[613] T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1935), p.31

was always thinking, "I want to have a family and I want to have a healthy family."[614]

Christians sometimes found their moral code was not welcomed by all their comrades, but a generalised acceptance of faith-based sexual abstinence was shown. Ken Tout recalled `the occasional rude comment that you were going to the citadel to see the pretty girls, some could be quite repulsive. However, if the other guys heard someone speak like that they would say, "Hold on a minute; you don't talk like that about someone going to church."'[615]

In addition to the frequent trope of their comrades' illicit relations with the opposite sex, the issue of homosexuality sometimes confronted active Christians in the armed services. This was a matter that never entered the publicly voiced concerns of Church leaders in the 1930s, although some discussions took place in private, with Archbishop Lang expressing opposition to decriminalisation of some homosexual acts.[616] Whilst such behaviour remained illegal within the British armed services until 1999, openly homosexual men were to a large degree tolerated within the forces during the war. The need for mass mobilisation meant that military chiefs unofficially waived their objection to homosexuals in uniform. Homosexual acts were overlooked, within reason, and there was a widespread acceptance of those whose sexuality did not fit the heterosexual mode. Two situations in which men were placed together in sustained and close contact were naval vessels and prisoner of war camps. According to John Costello, in the former homosexual practices were tolerated, so long as they did not interfere with the efficient running of the ship and did not cross the disciplinary divide between upper and lower decks.[617] Glyn Prysor concurred, stating that `the navy's approach appeared far less prescriptive than those of the American navy and the British Army.'[618] Emma Vickers' recent study suggested that gay British soldiers were considered to be `good fellows' as long as they did not flaunt their sexuality in a way which made their comrades feel uncomfortable.[619]

[614] Albert Parker, Private Papers
[615] Ken Tout, Private Papers
[616] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues,* p.99
[617] Costello, *Love, Sex and War,* p.157
[618] Prysor, *Citizen Sailors,* p.411
[619] Emma Vickers, *Queen and Country: Same-Sex Desire in the British Armed Forces, 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013)

Within prisoner of war camps, a spectrum of homosexual practices, from holding hands to mutual masturbation and full sex, was reported.[620] These occurred among men of regular heterosexual inclination and was termed `deprivation homosexuality.'[621] Whilst taking a fairly tolerant view of his fellow men's yearning for close female company, Rev Ellison Platt frequently bemoaned what he saw as the tendency towards homosexuality, or `perverse sexualism' as he termed it.[622] In April 1941 he saw no more significant manifestations of this tendency than `coarse humour' and `erotic discussion.'[623] However, seven months later a ballet performance put on by `sex-starved, virile young men whose minds – perforce – inclined towards abuse as an antidote' caused Platt to reflect `This fight against nature, against tortured bodies and imagination that has become fevered with longing, is a battle no young man should be required to fight.'[624] Platt considered that the presence of three padres in Colditz, two of them bachelors, helped to tone down homosexual tendencies.

However, the following month Platt noted that a `small mutual masturbation group' was holding sessions and that open discussions were taking place on the homosexualisation of Plato's disciples.[625] He decided to investigate the scope of such practices and preached a sermon based on Matthew 4:19, `Follow me and I will make you "Makers of men"', to emphasise that Jesus demanded `manly behaviour' from his followers. He claimed `to Christian teaching such abuse is abhorrent.'[626] Platt attributed homosexual practices to the lack of anything `wholesome' on which to focus men's minds, so when a successful escape occurred early in 1942, he noted a change of emphasis from one of inward-looking self-pleasure to the prospect of freedom. It should be noted that Platt's highlighting of significant homosexual practices was subsequently challenged by Major Pat Reid, who considered that whilst there was some degree of sexual repression and frustration in Colditz, it would have been impossible for the practices Platt imagined were happening to occur in such crowded conditions.[627]

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[620] London, Imperial War Museum, (IWM) Department of Documents,1279, J.H. Witte
[621] John Costello, *Virtue under Fire: How World War II Changed Our Social and Sexual Attitudes* (Boston, Little, Brown and Company, 1985), p.117
[622] Duggan (ed.), *Padre in Colditz,* p.103
[623] Ibid
[624] Ibid, p.152
[625] Ibid, p.152
[626] Ibid, p.165
[627] P.R. Reid, *Colditz: The Full Story* (London: Pan Books, 2009), pp.127-9

Within the army, homosexuality was, according to Sean Longden, tacitly accepted, with men frequently emerging from each other's bunks at roll call in some camps.[628] R.H. Lloyd-Jones, an anti-aircraft gunner, recalled that `Nobody commented on this or made any criticism.'[629] Whilst surreptitious homosexuality had a blind eye turned to it, there were examples of overt homosexuals being revered due to their bravery and leadership qualities. One such was `Dicky' Buckle, an officer in the Scots Guards, whose behaviour was, `outrageously camp' but, for his men, `he was brave, which was all that ultimately mattered.'[630]

Dudley Cave, who was later instrumental in persuading the Unitarian Church to accept ordination of gay and lesbian clergy in the 1970s, recalled, `There was none of the later homophobic uproar about gays undermining military discipline and effectiveness.'[631] Cave, who spent most of the war as a prisoner of war of the Japanese, was given a copy of Havelock Ellis's *Sexual Inversion in Men* by an army doctor in Changi camp, and claimed it made him feel better about being gay.[632] Cave's experience confirmed the general acceptance that gay soldiers encountered, even those who were active Christians:

> Homosexual soldiers were more or less accepted. The visible gays were mostly drag performers in concert teams. Regarded with considerable affections, their camp humour helped life the men's spirits. All the gays and straights worked together as a team. We had to because our lives might have depended on it.[633]

Captain E.W. Swanton of the Bedfordshire Regiment, then an Anglo-Catholic, was caught in bed with a `rather effeminate-looking Lance-Bombardier' in a base camp in England. [634] However rather than the matter being treated as a legal issue, a gunner in the battalion later remarked, `We didn't think any the less of him because of what had taken place. […] It was just one of those things. We accepted he was that way inclined.' [635] Despite the added complication of this being a relationship between an officer and a man of lower rank, no disciplinary action was taken, and the lance-

[628] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, p.300
[629] Gilles, *Barbed Wire University*, pp.50-53
[630] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.240
[631] Stephen Bourne, *Fighting Proud: The Untold Story of the Gay Men Who Served in Two World Wars* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2017), p.55
[632] Peter Tatchell, `Obituary: Dudley Cave', in *The Independent*, 30 May 1999
[633] Bourne, *Fighting Proud*, p.55
[634] Allen, *Jim: The Life of E.W. Swanton*, p.85
[635] Ibid

bombardier was promoted to sergeant shortly afterwards. No scandal was made public, and the good name of the regiment, and Swanton, remained intact. This incident reinforces the point that homosexuality was tacitly accepted, even when evident in Christians. John Costello claimed that servicemen living in close proximity with gay men in the Second World War were made aware that their comrades were not sexual perverts, or `limp-wristed effeminates.'[636] The evidence suggests little outright condemnation can be found in Christian testimonies, Platt apart, of such tendencies. Nevertheless, evidence which would build a firmer picture of Christian attitudes to homosexuality in the services is sparse and is perhaps an area that will never be fully addressed.

Sabbath Observance

Anxieties that total war disrupted traditional patterns of Sabbath Observance had been expressed during the First World War due to the need to engage in farming, munitions and military activity on Sundays.[637] Whilst the President of the Free Church Council, J.H. Shakespeare, had told the Prime Minister that Nonconformists would oppose Sabbath working, both the Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches supported the government's position, with the Archbishop of Canterbury pointing out that Christ's exhortation to use the Sabbath for `beneficent service' took precedence over the fourth commandment in a time of national crisis.[638] The decline in observance of the Victorian Sunday, which included church attendance and abstention from public leisure activities, had become a matter of growing concern for the British Churches during the 1930s.[639] In July 1932, the Sunday Entertainments Bill had allowed many cinemas to open on the Sabbath, and by 1934 25% had availed themselves of this opportunity in England, although in Wales and Scotland, where sabbatarianism remained strong, the figure was only 7%.[640]

Nevertheless, this meant that the majority of cinemas remained closed, with the playing of sports, and other public recreational activities such as day trips and dancing also frowned upon. J.B. Priestley contended that `the Sabbath […] is still

[636] Costello, *Love, Sex and War,* p.173
[637] Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?* p.106
[638] Ibid, 107
[639] G.I.T. Machin `British Churches and the Cinema in the 1930s' in D. Wood (ed) *The Church and the Arts* (Studies in Church History, 28; Oxford, 1992), pp.477-88
[640] Juliet Gardiner, *The Thirties: An Intimate History* (London: Harper Press, 2011), p.509

being imposed upon large numbers of people, especially younger people, who no longer want the good old-fashioned English Sunday' and that there existed an element of hypocrisy in that `the objectors, in their passion for a workless Sunday, never seem to refuse such things as newspapers and milk on Monday mornings.'[641] In contrast, the *Church Times* complained that `The day of rest has become a day of rush and bustle […] on the Lord's Day the family is distributed over golf courses and tennis courts, and is dashing about the country in Baby Austins.'[642] Nevertheless the piece concluded that banning games and shutting cinemas on the Sabbath would not lead to the churches being filled.

A further innovation which gave cause for concern for the Churches was the rise of religious broadcasting. There was apprehension that listening to a church service broadcast on the radio might become a substitute for church attendance.[643] However, a study commissioned by the BBC in 1939 found that there was little correlation between those who listened to Sunday broadcast services and those who attended church services, therefore the report stated that radio services brought `additional people into contact with religious ideas, [but] there is no need to regard them as rivals of religious organisations.'[644]

At the beginning of the war, the Sunday opening of cinemas was extended, mainly for the benefit of members of the armed services, for many of whom Sunday was their only day off-duty. Archbishop Lang wrote of his concern that the encroachments made into Sunday in order to provide relaxation and amusements in wartime would be difficult to rescind once the conflict was over.[645] Bishop Barnes of Birmingham bemoaned the Sunday opening of cinemas as a manifestation of the loss of the Churches' moral influence, `We shall get a truly pagan England.'[646] Cinema attendance figures soared from 19 million in 1939 to 30 million by 1945, despite the disruptions and restrictions of wartime.[647]

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[641] Priestley, *English Journey*, pp.182-3
[642] *Church Times*, 2 December 1938, p.607
[643] Elias *Radio Religion*, p.54
[644] Hilda Jennings and Winifred Gill, *Broadcasting in Everyday Life: A Survey of the Social Effects of the Coming of Broadcasting* (Bristol: BBC, 1939), p.33
[645] *The Times*, 4 April 1941, p.5
[646] Quoted in Parker, *Faith on the Home Front*, p.112
[647] James Chapman, `British Cinema and "The People's War", in Nick Hayes and Geoff Hill (eds.), *`Millions Like Us'?: British Culture in the Second World War* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999), p.40

In addition, the opening of theatres and music halls was extended, with the moral character of some of the entertainment proving a cause for concern. *The Times* reported an increase in `suggestive turns' on the stages of London theatres since the beginning of the war, it being particularly alarming that these occurred on a Sunday.[648] For some, the decline of the sanctity of the Sabbath was not only an issue of morality, but of national identity. Sir Charles Marston, a lay member of the Church of England Assembly took out a private advertisement in *The Times* in 1941 stating that the erosion of belief in the truth of the Old Testament, and subsequent decline in Sabbath Observance, had been the work of German fifth columnists. [649] The opening of cinemas, theatres and music halls on the Sabbath was a drift towards a continental Sunday `without regard to the fate which has befallen the Continent.'[650] Marston concluded that `In this great crisis in our history, we cannot afford to forfeit help from the unseen for the sake of Sunday amusements.'[651]

The fifth column notion was echoed by Thomas Magnay, National Liberal MP for Gateshead and Methodist Conference member. Moving a proposal in Parliament to annul the extension of conditions under which theatres and music halls could open on a Sunday, he claimed, `All the things that were sweet and reasonable and clean and Christian had been more and more jeered at and flouted' over the preceding decade.[652] The moral foundations of Britain had been undermined by fifth columnists and the result was to drive people away from the Churches. Although Magnay received support from others who cited the Sabbath as a great British tradition, the proposal was not accepted by the government, despite the Home Secretary, Herbert Morrison, recognising the importance of the Nonconformist voice in British public life. However, it passed on a free vote, displaying the continuing support for the idea of British Sabbath from many parliamentarians.

Whilst it is significant that much lip service was given to the idea of Sabbath Observance, the exigencies of wartime made it increasingly difficult for men and women in the armed forces to avoid situations which challenged this central tenet of the British Christian tradition. Rev Kenneth MacRae, a Free Church of Scotland

[648] *The Times*, 9 November 1940, p.6
[649] *The Times*, 4 March 1941, p.7
[650] Ibid
[651] Ibid
[652] *The Times*, 2 April 1941, p.2

minister in Stornoway and Officiating Chaplain to the local RAF Squadron, encountered mixed results when addressing the issue of navy and RAF personnel playing football in the town on the Sabbath. On 28th April 1941 he noted in his diary `For the first time in its history, Stornoway witnessed a game of football on the Lord's Day. The offenders were naval men.'[653] MacRae was gratified that the commanding officer of the base explained that the men had broken regulations, smuggling a football ashore, and sent out a signal to the commanders of all the vessels that there must be no repeat of the incident.

Three months later, following a similar incident involving RAF personnel, he wrote to the culprits' commanding officer requesting a prohibition. On this occasion he was met with a grudging acceptance that there would be no further `Sunday games', but also the point that Sunday was the only free recreation time the men had from their arduous duties.[654] MacRae's response was to assert that the demand for such games arose from an ignorance of Christian principles, and that if the men has such surplus energy, they should use it to walk to his church on the Sabbath. He noted ruefully `In Glasgow the Sabbath is gone in any case. Here it is in the balance.'[655]

Abstention from the playing of sport on the Sabbath did not always have to be externally enforced after complaints from clergy. John Broom's RAMC training depot in Leeds organised compulsory football matches for the men, and he was selected to play for the Far East draft team against that of the Cooks' Course. However, the pitch was only available on a Sunday afternoon. This led to an altercation with an NCO:

> [O]f course I told them I wouldn't play. A corporal said "Would you go on parade on a Sunday"? I answered "Of course". So he followed up with "Wouldn't you rather play football"? Whereupon I told him with finality that I drew a strict line between business & pleasure on a Sunday.[656]

Broom further bemoaned the drift away from the traditional Sabbath after a year-and-a-half of war, `Of course I dislike the opening of cinemas, theatres and the playing of sport on a Sunday. It doesn't seem to fit in with special days of prayers. Still

[653] Iain M. Murray (ed.), *Diary of Kenneth MacRae: A Record of Fifty Years in the Christian Ministry* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1980), p.336
[654] Ibid, p.338
[655] Ibid
[656] Broom, Letter, 21 October 1940

there doesn't seem to be much sense anywhere nowadays.'[657] Private James Driscoll of the 131st Field Ambulance noted with approval the strict Sabbath Observance of the Catholic population in Weert, Holland in 1944.[658] However for men on active overseas service, Sunday often ceased to exist as a distinct day. Ken Tout recalled of the Normandy campaign `There was no seven-day week. Every day was a day on its own. Sunday was no different, so you had no sense of missing out on going to church.'[659]

Conclusion

J.B. Priestley, during one of his wartime *Postscripts*, commented that:

> Through the fading mists there emerge the simple, kindly, humorous brave faces of the ordinary British folk- a good people, deeply religious at heart, not only when they're kneeling in our little grey country churches, but also when they're toiling at their machines or sweating under loads in the threatened dockyards.[660]

Religious faith was, for Priestley, something that permeated many facets of the British life. This was certainly the case for active Christians during the war, separated as they were from regular patterns of peacetime religious observance. Pre-war manifestations of faith, including Bible reading, hymnody and prayer were transferred into the military milieu, whilst the trajectory of closer co-operation between Christians of different Protestant denominations was maintained.

The use of prayer, hymnody and the reading and memory of the Bible meant that active Christians could develop their own modes of religious expression when the official chaplaincy services were not available or did not provide a sufficiently robust Christian message. As deep faith comes not merely from ritualistic and regular church attendance, but through a personal relationship with God and fellowship with those of a similar outlook, then some seeds of a 1950s religious revival can be found in the continuation of modes of personal devotion experienced by active Christians during the war.

[657] Broom, Letter, 16 March 1941
[658] Imperial War Museum, Department of Documents 16877, James Driscoll, Private Papers,
[659] Ken Tout, Private Papers
[660] J.B. Priestley, *Postscripts* (London: Heinemann, 1940), p.42

The war saw a furtherance of the ecumenical integration which had been a feature of 1930s British Christianity. Although before the war it had largely been driven by church leaders, the opportunities and exigencies of war meant that, particularly amongst those from the Protestant churches, a much greater degree of interdenominational co-operation was in evidence. However Roman Catholics in the army largely avoided displays of ecumenical behaviour, retaining their pre-war exceptionalism and exclusivity.

There is little evidence of significant disruption of Christianity in the tokens of religiosity discussed in this chapter. On the contrary, the resilience of their presence in the lives of active Christians in the face of great personal and collective challenges would indicate that, in this regard, British Christianity ended the war in no worse state than it had been in 1939.

The teachings of the British Churches had been uniformly condemnatory about sex outside of marriage. During the 1930s, this position had been increasingly challenged across many sections of society. The war provided a further impetus and opportunities for perceived moral laxity of a sexual nature, although this was accompanied by a censoriousness and campaigns to limit the spread of VD and illegitimate births. The British Army, in particular, exposed men to long period of separation from their wives and, in places such as western Europe, Singapore and Cairo, opportunities were provided for illicit liaisons.

The evidence suggests that active Christians largely lived by the sexual moral codes they had been brought up with in the British Churches. That is not to say that they were immune from intermittent sexual longings and temptations. Furthermore, they were pragmatically tolerant of the behaviour of their comrades who did indulge in sexual relationships, even when these were of a homosexual nature. This tolerance was reciprocal, with Christians rarely being ridiculed or challenged over their personal morals.

The war caused a disruption to patterns of Sabbath Observance, both in terms of church attendance and the increased availability of alternative forms of leisure. However, as discussed in chapter two, active Christians went to great lengths to avail themselves of both officially sanctioned and unofficially arranged opportunities for collective worship. They did acknowledge that Sunday had largely ceased to exist as

a distinct holy day. Nevertheless, in their desire to remain faithful to the teachings of the British Churches on sex, and in their realisation that Sabbath Observance had suffered due to the war, active Christians demonstrated a persistent loyalty to their pre-war religious norms despite the challenges, and therefore completed their wartime service without a perceptible weakening of their faith, or of their acceptance of church teaching on these issues.

Chapter Four - Christianity and Military Life

Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated the resilience of key Christian tropes amongst active Christians in the armed services during the war; prayer, reliance on the Bible and hymnody, an increasingly ecumenical atmosphere between Protestant Christians and the continuation of Sabbath Observance where possible. Chapter two suggested that the religious provision across all three services provided some degree of support to Christians in helping them to experience more collective expressions of faith, both on home service and in active combat zones. This chapter will address whether, outside of officially sanctioned religious observance and collective expressions of faith, the military environment was one which was conducive to the maintenance of religious faith. The culture across the armed services was one from which many active Christians initially felt alienated but, over the course of the war, most assimilated into. They formed alternative bonds of loyalty from their family and home congregations, which had formed the bedrock of their pre-war faith.

The hierarchies of the army and navy were host to frequent expressions of religiosity. Despite this thread of piety, which was articulated across the armed services, it must be recognised that active Christians found initial difficulties in adapting to the demands of military life. However, from 1942 onwards the conflict between individual outlooks and military culture was increasingly resolved. This resolution frequently caused some degree of disconnect from previous identities and loyalties. Despite expressions of Christian faith remaining resilient, and the robust organised expression of that faith via the chaplaincy services, the overall experience of military life weakened the bonds between many active Christians and the organised Churches.

Christian Culture in the Armed Services

There has been some degree of consensus across historians of military culture that during the Second World War pockets of Christianity featured within each branch of service. However, its significance has often been downplayed. Alan Allport's work on British Army culture, although mentioning the cynical light in which church parades were seen by the majority of men in the army, still concluded that `the majority of British people in the 1940s, in and out of the Army, remained thoroughly, if

inarticulately, Christian in their moral outlook.'[661] However how this Christian outlook was mediated by the experience of half a decade or more in the armed services remained unaddressed by Allport. In contrast, Sean Longden's study of the 21st Army Group's campaign in northern Europe dismissed the significance of Christianity to the average soldier. For Longden, `religion was surprisingly unimportant for many of the soldiers.'[662] Whilst conceding that the army contained several nominal Christians from a range of denominational backgrounds, he saw religion as an irrelevance in their everyday lives, with men only turning to prayer at times of intense stress. He termed this expression of faith as `any old port in a storm', quoting one man that he considered his position of being that of a `religious atheist.'[663]

Brian Lavery's works on the Second World War navy included only passing references to Christianity, whilst Glyn Prysor stated that many sailors had an ambivalent attitude to organised religion, although some found communal prayer comforting.[664] [665] However those who displayed an overt faith were, according to Prysor, `derided as "bible thumpers" or "Holy Joes."'[666] In contrast, Christopher McKee's study of naval culture during the first half of the twentieth century suggested that `Religious faith is one source of comfort to which battleship-era ratings might have turned to cope with the multiple hardships and anxieties of their lives. But to link sailors and religion is to run up against a firmly established stereotype: sailors by nature are not religious people.'[667] Nevertheless, he did concede that, whilst religious sailors were a minority, they were `probably a larger minority than some would acknowledge.'[668] Martin Francis' history of wartime RAF culture recognised that `there may have been tokens of a religious revival during the war, albeit ones which ultimately failed to slow the relentless march of secularisation in Britain in the twentieth century.'[669] Nevertheless, `there was little to suggest that flyers were

[661] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.257
[662] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, p.36
[663] Ibid
[664] Brian Lavery, *Hostilities Only: Training the Wartime Royal Navy* (London: National Maritime Museum, 2004); *In Which They Served: The Royal Navy Officer Experience in the Second World War* (London: Conway, 2008)
[665] Glyn Prysor, *Citizen Sailors: The Royal Navy in the Second World War* (London: Penguin, 2011)
[666] Ibid, p.393
[666] Ibid
[667] Christopher McKee, *Sober Men and True: Sailors' Lives in the Royal Navy, 1900-1945* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2002), p.132
[668] Ibid, p.132
[669] Francis, *The Flyer*, p.123

possessed of a particularly religious sensibility.'[670] He did identify a superstitious strain within many airmen carrying a range of good luck tokens and performing regular pre-flight rituals.[671]

Therefore, the brief allusions to Christianity in works of historians concerned with military culture largely downplay its significance. This is a surprising lacuna for a generation of whom around 35% were still regular churchgoers at the beginning of the war and, as established by Clive Field, 96% of whom still professed a religion by 1939.[672] Christianity was a strong element in the pronouncements of senior commanders. Michael Snape argued that the senior British Army generals of the Second World War were much more communicative about their religious beliefs than their counterparts in the First World War.[673] There was a `remarkable currency of a practical, patriotic and theologically unsophisticated Protestant piety among the senior generals.'[674] Sir Francis Fremantle spoke in Parliament 1943 of `generals whose names and their encouragement of religion are household words to us.'[675] This was not only the case in the army, as prominent naval figures such as Admiral John Tovey held devout Christian beliefs, albeit not as overtly signalled as by some of those in the army.[676]

Notable examples of self-defining Christians in the senior ranks of the army included Montgomery, Wingate, Dobbie, Alexander, Gort, and Alanbrooke. Montgomery wrote `I do not believe that today a commander can inspire great armies, or single units, or even individual men, and lead them to achieve great victories, unless he has a proper sense of religious truth.'[677] In his caravan there were Christian texts pinned to the wall, including the so-called `Drake's Prayer':

[670] Ibid, p.124
[671] Ibid, p.124
[672] Field, `Gradualist or Revolutionary Secularization?', p.91
[673] Snape, *God and the British Soldier* p.72
[674] Ibid, p.59
[675] HC Deb 22 April 1943, vol 388, col 1892
[676] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, pp.439-41
[677] Bernard Montgomery, *The Memoirs of Field-Marshal The Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, K.G.*, (London: Collins, 1958), p.9

> O Lord God, when Thou givest to Thy servants to endeavour any great matter, grant us also to know that it is not the beginning, but the continuing of the same, until it be thoroughly finished, which yieldeth the true glory.[678]

Montgomery's religiosity was generally well received by Christians under his command. Norman Kirby, who served in his TAC HQ, recalled the excitement he felt journeying to Normandy in June 1944, with `that pillar of confidence, General Montgomery with his Christian God of battles as our guide.'[679] Sergeant Alec Waldron, a lapsed Plymouth Brethren member, received a `prized letter of thanks' from Montgomery for his actions as a glider pilot.[680] John Broom admired Montgomery's leadership of the Eighth Army. Writing during the summer of 1944, having already served under him in North Africa with the 7th Armoured Division since the autumn of 1942, Broom commented `Altogether, the results so far achieved reveal a glimpse of the masterly strategy of Montgomery. It's almost uncanny the way he manages to fox Jerry.'[681] Montgomery did not always receive warm praise from army Christians, however. Hugh Dormer felt that he looked `tired and old' during an inspection in February 1942 and had `the bloodshot staring eyes of a fanatic.'[682] Perhaps Montgomery's overt Puritan Protestantism did not sit well with the deeply devout Roman Catholic Dormer, who saw his fate as being in the traditions of the English Catholic martyrs.

Lieutenant-General Sir William Dobbie saw distinct advantages for the individual Christian in undergoing a period of military service. For Dobbie, army life:

> [F]orces the Christian to strike out a line of his own, and gets him out of a groove. It develops hardihood, and independence of character, which are of great value in life, and which the world acknowledges as such. Just as in the physical realm the inhabitants of countries with a severe climate develop a rugged hardihood, so, also, in the moral realm a similar phenomenon is in evidence.[683]

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[678] Quoted in Kirby, *1100 Miles with Monty*, p.17
[679] Ibid, p.x
[680] Alec Waldron, *From Pacifist to Glider Pilot* (Bognor Regis: Woodfield Publishing, 2001), p.145
[681] Broom, Letter, 26 June 1944
[682] Dormer, *Diaries*, p.138
[683] Dobbie, *A Very Present Help*, p.19

Dobbie claimed that for Christians life in the army `strengthened their faith, and developed their Christian character. They have been able in their Army life so to present Christ to their comrades that a great number of these have been won for Him.'[684] It was not just the individual Christian who benefitted from an amalgamation of military and Christian culture. The possession of a Christian character meant that a man should prove a good asset to the army, `A Christian should not be (and I think very seldom is) a slovenly or inefficient solider.'[685]

Colonel Orde Wingate, commander of the Indian 77th Brigade, the Chindits, was another senior officer from a Plymouth Brethren background driven by a deep knowledge of the Bible and a sense of Old Testament destiny. Issuing an order of the day for the first Chindit expedition into Burma in February 1943, he wrote `Finally, knowing the vanity of man's efforts and the confusion of his purpose, let us pray God may accept our services and direct our endeavours so that when we shall have done all, we shall see the fruit of our labours and be satisfied.'[686] For Operation Thursday the following year, a memorandum quoted from Zachariah 9:12, `Turn you to the strong hold, ye prisoners of hope.'[687]

However, this strain of Christian piety amongst senior commanders was not universal. The GOC of the 43rd (Wessex) Division, Major-General G.I. Thomas, conveyed a bellicose address to his chaplains in 1942, instructing them to deliver a series of centrally-written messages and sermons. Rev Eric Gethyn-Jones recalled:

> [W]ith very few preliminaries, [Thomas] stated that he wished his chaplains to preach a Jihad. […] Furthermore, he laid down during the `pep' period that the addresses given throughout the Division on each Sunday should be identical; that every chaplain would receive a copy of an approved address and preach or read it verbatim. The storm broke. It was pointed out that chaplains were individuals who varied considerably in thought and outlook, and that such a method imposed from above by a layman, was totally unacceptable.[688]

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[684] Ibid, p.18
[685] Ibid
[686] Trevor Royle, *Orde Wingate: A Man of Genius, 1903-1944* (Barnsley: Frontline Books, 2014), p.249
[687] Francis Pike, *Hirohito's War: The Pacific War, 1941-1945* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016), p.690
[688] Eric Gethyn-Jones, *A Territorial Army Chaplain in Peace and War: A Country Cleric in Khaki* (East Wittering: Gooday, 1988), pp.68-69

One senior naval officer who was less overt about his deep faith than some senior army figures was Admiral John Tovey, who served as Commander-in-Chief of the Home Fleet from 1940 onwards. Tovey was nevertheless described by chaplain Rev J.C. Waters as `a great Christian, a man of faith and prayer.'[689] However, unlike Montgomery, Wingate or Dobbie, Tovey did not routinely parade his religiosity, stating that `One is very diffident about speaking about these things in public.'[690] A significant Christian faith which guided wartime actions was also an ingredient often present in officers of middle rank. Lieutenant-Colonel Terence Otway, who commanded the 9th Battalion of the Royal Ulster Rifles in an airborne assault on the Merville Battery on the morning of D-Day, had under him a denominational mix of Church of Ireland, Roman Catholic and Presbyterian men, over half of whom were from the Republic of Ireland. For Otway, Christian faith was a necessity in war, `Whenever a man told me that he did not believe in God, was agnostic, atheist etc, I did not believe him. All men need someone or something to hang on to especially in danger.'[691] However this did not mean his command was defined by religiosity. Otway tried to encourage Christian values in personal and collective behaviour rather than overt religious activities. Some officers went further, in taking turns to act as elders for 5th Black Watch communion services.[692]

Incarcerated in Changi prisoner of war camp in Singapore, Major-General Merton Beckwith-Smith was keen to support the work of one of his Anglican padres, Rev Eric Cordingly. Cordingly wrote of Beckwith-Smith, `one knows how his religion is a big essential in his life. […] No man can have done more in this part of the camp for the spiritual, mental and physical welfare of those under his command.'[693] Further down the command structure, Acting Major E.W. Swanton helped to organise an open-air church at Kinsayuk camp, and conducted a harvest festival service in the absence of an available chaplain.[694] However, he had previously taken his ecclesiastical enthusiasm too far, incurring the wrath of two fellow officers for placing them on a charge for failing to bow to the altar, later dismissed out of court by the Colonel-in-

[689] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.439
[690] Ibid
[691] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive) Alan Robinson research files, Terence Otway
[692] Snape, *God and the British Soldier,* p.173
[693] Eric Cordingly, *Down to Bedrock: The Diary and Secret Notes of a Far East Prisoner of War Chaplain, 1942-45* (Norwich: Art Angels, 2013), p.44
[694] Allen, *Jim: The Life of E.W. Swanton,* p.107

Charge.[695] On a more solemn note, Swanton also frequently officiated at funerals, `such regular occasions as to attract little notice.'[696]

Captain Hugh Dormer's relationship with his tank's wireless operator, H.W.P. O'Connor, showed how the bonds of the Catholic faith united them across the rank and class divide within the 2nd Battalion of the Irish Guards:

> [O'Connor] is my operator and as good-natured and religious a young man as you would ever meet anywhere. Every night I used to see him at Mass in the village church and he was always only too eager to help me without ever asking. He made my bed up at night and cleaned my belt and shoes and looked after me always. He was at a Jesuit school when the war broke out and, like many Guardsmen, had a very real idea of what fighting honourably means.[697]

There were limits to the extent to which many officers felt it appropriate to convey their religious sensibilities. Captain Andrew Sewell saw the promotion of Christian values in his men as a necessary part of his role as an officer, `but not at the risk of emphasising the heathen nature of others, e.g. enemy, local inhabitants and allies.'[698] Squadron Leader F.R. Henn of the 43rd Reconnaissance Brigade, who had been brought up as an Anglican, did not see the promotion of Christian values as `particularly necessary' amongst his men.[699] Lieutenant Clifford Lawson of the 4th County London Yeomanry treated his troop `like brothers', rather than trying to actively promote Christian values, this despite his previous theological studies at Oxford and future career in the Anglican church.[700]

Within the Royal Navy, due to the logistical impossibility of providing a chaplain for every vessel, the commanding or other senior officers often had to fulfil the religious duties which would have otherwise been undertaken by a padre. Lieutenant-Commander H.B. Turner commented, `I have to be my own chaplain on a submarine', whilst Commander Richard Dyer referred to himself as `a small ship captain, and, thus, the ex-officio C of E leader.'[701] In order to support officers in these duties, Rev Douglas Wanstall produced *A Naval Prayer Book* in 1936, `to furnish some

[695] Ibid, p.108
[696] Ibid, p.126
[697] Dormer, *Diaries,* p.154
[698] MAC Archive, Robinson, Andrew Sewell
[699] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, F.R. Henn
[700] MAC Archive, Robinson, Clifford Lawson
[701] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains,* pp.442-3

guidance and assistance to the Commanding Officers of those ships which do not carry chaplains in the conducting of Sunday services and daily prayers and Divisions.'[702] According to Gordon Taylor, Wanstall's book was a `boon' for officers such as Turner and Dyer.[703]

Where a chaplain could be provided for a vessel, commanding officers frequently showed great regard for the service they provided. Captain Jack Leach, commander of HMS *Prince of Wales*, valued the role his chaplain, Rev Wilfred Parker, undertook before the vessel engaged with the enemy at the Battle of Denmark Strait in 1941. `Padre, we are going into action, and we shall need help. I want you to read a prayer to the ship's company.'[704] Leach requested that Parker read Sir Jacob Astley's prayer from before the Battle of Edgehill, `O Lord! thou knowest how busy I must be this day: if I forget thee, do not thou forget me.'[705]

Therefore, it was not just the senior echelons of the British Army and the Royal Navy in which a marked thread of religiosity was to be found. The testimony of officers throughout the command structure shows the presence of a Christian culture which permeated many aspects of military life. However, self-imposed limits were placed on the overt promotion of faith, with an understanding being shown that officers' primary role was to act as military leaders, rather than *de facto* church elders. Despite these parameters, active Christians demonstrated an appreciation that many of those in senior command shared their Christian outlook on life, and thus were able to feel some degree of affinity with the military milieu in which they found themselves. Nevertheless, they frequently felt a disarticulation between their pre-war lives and the necessity to be turned from civilians into soldiers, sailors and flyers for the duration.

Resistance to Military Culture

Under the terms of the National Service (Armed Forces) Act of 1939, men could not be forced to join the navy or air force against their will but could express a preference for these services, which therefore retained a large voluntary element. These two services were seen by most male conscripts as preferable to the army, and

[702] D.J.N. Wanstall, *A Naval Prayer Book* (London: Mowbray & Co., 1936), p.1
[703] Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.441
[704] Ibid, p.401
[705] Hastings, Max,*The Oxford Book of Military Anecdotes*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1986), p.118

they competed to attract the best recruits. According to Norman Davies, `the Royal Navy was still regarded as the "Senior Service" […] and the rise of the Royal Air Force [provided] a prestigious service free of former prejudices.'[706] The events of 1940, the capitulation of the BEF in the face of the German blitzkrieg, and the contrasting `finest hour' of the Battle of Britain, served to reduce the prestige of the army but significantly increase that of the RAF. The navy, not having suffered any significant reversals, enjoyed a persistently positive image in the wartime imagination. Therefore, due to the generally high regard in which the RAF and RN were held, it was within the British Army that the main conflicts between men of an actively Christian background and their new environment occurred, and where new loyalties and identities were forged which sometimes challenged, if not totally replaced, those held before the war.

Within the army there existed different cultural assumptions, ethics and practices from the civilian milieu from which most of the citizen army was drawn. This cultural disconnect had grown since the demobilisation of the First World War army, and little attention had been paid within the army's command structure as to how to maintain the morale of a new generation of civilians thrust into army life. The inter-war assumption at senior command level had been that a modern war would not involve mass armies but feature more specialised technical roles and aerial bombardment of the enemy. Therefore, any consideration of transforming a mass of civilians into a fighting force had been neglected.[707] However, after 1939 the army expanded by tenfold.[708] By December 1940 there were six new recruits for every one pre-war soldier.[709]

This presented an immediate problem as, according to Jeremy Crang, `From the outset there was little enthusiasm for the war amongst the conscript soldiers who made up the bulk of the army.'[710] The new recruits were `more class-conscious and better educated than their predecessors [and] quicker than before to resent […] the "old school tie."'[711] Gary Sheffield concurred, `The men of 1939-45 had a much less

[706] Norman Davies, *Europe at War, 1939-1945: No Simple Victory* (London: Pan MacMillan, 2006), p.225
[707] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.xxii
[708] Ibid
[709] Ibid, p.67
[710] Jeremy Crang, `The British Soldier on the Home Front: Army Morale Reports, 1940-45' in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p.61
[711] Ibid, p.65

trusting, more cynical attitude towards authority than their predecessors of 1914-18.'[712] This feeling of wariness was often mutual. Major-General Peter Martin, in a lecture given to the Royal Army Chaplains' Department in 1971, described the soldier of 1939 as `ill-educated' and `discouraged from thinking for himself.'[713] T.E. Jessop noted that the new recruits conscripted into the army during the early part of the war, although having generally better educational levels than existing soldiers, possessed `neither a knowledge of the affairs of the world, or a philosophy of life.'[714] Sean Longden claimed that this meant the army had to transform itself to accommodate its new members, `With the influx of conscripts the army underwent a rebirth.'[715] This rebirth would mean a much higher representation of those better-educated men who had been encouraged to think for themselves, but whose wider experience of life was limited. In addition, the army would need to change the way it moulded these men into a fighting force as officers were, unlike during the First World War, unable to resort to the ultimate punishment of the firing squad for those who disobeyed orders. Therefore, they were often required to lead by persuasion, thus making the maintenance of morale of supreme importance.

The navy gave less scope for disengagement between the organisation and the new recruits. This was despite the fact that, according to Glyn Prysor, `Ordinary men and women and their social superiors negotiated a clash of classes, and had to balance demands for a new vision of the future with the immediate necessities of fighting a world war.'[716] In contrast to the culture prevailing amongst many of the army's new recruits, `The psychology of the individual sailor often appeared subservient to rigid discipline.'[717] A naval vessel operated like a machine, with the men seemingly content to operate as working parts within the overall structure.

Any cultural clash in the navy was also minimised since, whilst the navy could absorb around 6,000 men per month at the beginning of the war, up to 16,000 were

[712] Gary Sheffield, `The Shadow of the Somme: The Influence of the First World War on British Soldiers' Perceptions and Behaviour in the Second World War', in Paul Addison and Angus Calder (eds.), *Time to Kill: The Soldier's Experience of War in the West, 1939-1945* (London: Pimlico, 1997), p.32
[713] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Peter Martin
[714] Jessop, `The Padre's Hour', p.380
[715] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, p.5
[716] Prysor, *Citizen Sailors*, p.7
[717] Ibid, p.387

expressing this preference.[718] Therefore it could afford to choose the best quality men and this partly enabled the organisation to engender mutual respect, as the individual and organisation had chosen each other. The navy proved itself able to utilise men's skills in ways that the army was often unwilling to countenance. Brian Lavery argued that there were few attempts to break men in with excessive drill, and when on board ship, individual initiative was valued and encouraged across a range of roles. [719] Naval training and doctrines were more adaptable than those of the army. Most naval personnel were constantly engaged during the war, unlike many army recruits who experienced long periods of home service, helping to negate the boredom of inaction which could, if unchecked, lead to friction within the service. In addition, due to regular transfers between ships, men did not fall prey to a pattern of developing then breaking regimental loyalties, as occurred in the army, thus avoiding the resentment that being moved from one unit or regiment to another could cause.

Lavery conceded that, whilst morale was generally high in the navy, occasional acts of revolt occurred, including a mutiny of men preparing D-Day landing craft at Ipswich, where a chaplain had to be sent to mediate.[720] However these acts were due to poor leadership, rather than any underlying militancy among the men. Lavery summarised that `The navy of the Second World War […] managed to blend the discipline and determination of the regular force with the enthusiasm, intelligence and ingenuity of the RNVR and Hostilities Only men.'[721] The navy attracted the right kind of recruit, found them the right job at the right level, and maintained their morale. The better quality of recruit and tight naval discipline meant that the religious culture within it had to be straightforward and free from sanctimony. Rev Douglas Robb, a Baptist chaplain, observed:

> From a religious point of view […] the sailor detests humbug and inhibitions, abhors institutionalism, loathes straitlaced conventions and pious platitudes. Here surely is a challenge to the Church of Christ to-day. […] He is […] ready to consider realities and shun mocking phantoms. To consider their problems

[718] Lavery, *Hostilities Only*, p.30
[719] Ibid, p.274
[720] Ibid, p.272
[721] Ibid, p.279

> with no airy voices, but in the clear light of Christian saneness and truth is not only a privilege but an immediate requirement.[722]

In contrast the RAF was, according to Neil Allison, a more secular organisation that the navy and army.[723] Its multi-racial and multi-national composition, and the generally higher educational attainment and class background of its recruits, made it less reflective of British society in general, and therefore less reflective of contemporary British Christian culture. Its new recruits were seen in a positive light by the existing flyers, and there is little evidence of the widespread discontent with the transition to military life which is found within official records and first-hand accounts of the British Army. This was partly due to the fact that the RAF was the most publicly visible service, with air battles taking place in British skies, and successive waves of bombers making their way towards Germany. Many RAF personnel were home-based, thus in frequent contact with civilians. In addition, flying still carried an air of mystery, as air travel had not been widely accessible to the British public prior to the war. Martin Francis claimed that, as the most junior of the three services, it took pride in its `lack of formality, and emphasised a technocratic and meritocratic vision of military life.'[724] This was in marked contrast to the army, into which the majority of active Christian conscripts had been absorbed.

People held differing perceptions of the cultures of the main women's services. Members of the WRNS were paid less than male sailors, but this was accepted by most, with their director, Vera Laughton Mathews, the product of a Convent school, averring that men had signed up for danger, hardships and sacrifice of life.[725] The ATS suffered from a poor moral reputation, with some recruits being associated with drunkenness and immorality. Henderson Stewart, MP for East Fife, declared in the House of Commons that `The ATS is not the sort of service that a nice girl goes into.'[726] Lucy Noakes concluded that `The ATS overall had a reputation for promiscuity.'[727] However the WAAF was held in higher regard, with the war seeing an ongoing expansion of the roles that women could undertake, and members being

[722] Douglas Robb, `Seeing through the Port-hole', *Scottish Baptist Magazine*, 4th January 1943, p.4
[723] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.103
[724] Francis, *The Flyer*, p.5
[725] Vera Laughton Mathews, *Blue Tapestry* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1949), p.81
[726] Quoted in *The Times*, 15 January 1942
[727] Lucy Noakes, *Women in the British Army: War and the Gentle Sex, 1907-1948* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006), p.121

issued with the same uniform and badges of rank as the RAF right from the beginning of the war.[728]

It was the army that became the focus of much of the angst between existing organisational structures and the new recruits, including active Christians. Some senior figures in the regular army saw British society as suffering from a crisis of masculinity, with too much emphasis on intelligence rather than character, a nation grown soft, with welfare benefits and `general pansydom.'[729] Thus new recruits needed knocking into shape by drilling and parade. The military reversals Britain experienced between 1940 and 1942 were blamed on a `flaccid generation whose spirit had been sapped by the burgeoning leisure culture and the fashionable pacifism of the 1930s.'[730] However, conscripts refused to shoulder the blame for the army's early failures, with Gary Sheffield asserting that `in the Second World War soldiers were more questioning and less tolerant of bullshit and incompetent gung-ho officers.'[731] This led to a situation where, according to Alan Allport, `the basic mistake the army was making in 1942 was its belief that it could train worldlier and better-educated wartime conscripts in the same way that it had always trained its peace-time regulars.'[732] 34% of officers commissioned during the war had attended public schools and this class element gave rise to a further disconnect between the officer class and the conscripted private or NCO.[733]

A War Office Committee, set up in March 1942 at the instigation of Adjutant-General Sir Ronald Adam, and led by Major John Sparrow, reported that the morale of soldiers stationed in Britain was negatively affected by poor quality rations, lack of entertainment, low-brow ENSA provision, timewasting spit and polish activities, separation anxiety and poor relationships between officers and men.[734] Officers had to be fine leaders as well as possessors of commissions. However, the average British soldier was becoming `browned off' due to news of defeats overseas, resentment of church and other parades, fatigues and the general grind of military life. There is a considerable body of evidence from the testimony of active Christians in the army that

[728] Albert J. Mills, *Sex Strategy and the Stratosphere: Airlines and the Gendering of Organisational Culture* (London: Palgrave McMillan, 2006), p.99
[729] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.101
[730] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.18
[731] Sheffield, `The Shadow of the Somme', p.33
[732] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.95
[733] Holmes, *Soldiers*, p.214
[734] J.H.A. Sparrow, *Second World War 1939-1945: Army, Morale* (London: The War Office, 1949)

the spit and polish activities and relationships between officers and men were bones of contention. Whilst most were willing to `render unto Caesar' what they considered a fair amount of time and commitment, that time had to be constructively used. Christians could straddle both sides of the construct offered by David Fraser, being both `general run of men quietly if reluctantly accepting the demands of the hour', but at times showing symptoms of being `resentful or maladjusted misfit[s].'[735] Their faith would prove a supporting factor, but was not always entirely sufficient to inure them from the `bleak official notification, sudden immersion into an unnerving atmosphere, subjection to a huge, impersonal machine' of the call-up papers.[736]

Edgar Mash struggled hugely with both familial separation anxiety and military life on being posted to an RAMC Casualty Clearing Station in Devon in 1939:

> The complete break up of everything was almost unbearable to me; night after night I completely broke down and seemed to lose all strength of spirit. It was, of course, the break-up of home that affected me most. I found it an intense mental and spiritual struggle to adapt myself to a new life, military life.[737]

Mash found some solace and guidance in verses of scripture gleaned from his reading of the *Daily Light*, a book of devotional Bible and other texts.

On enlisting in the Royal Corps of Signals, Alec Waldron's first impression of army discipline was of `sundry lance-corporals, corporals and sergeants, whose sole purpose in life was [...] to make our lives as miserable as possible.'[738] However, this impression soon altered when the NCOs had a whip-round so he could attend his father's funeral at short notice. Waldron found that the `forced detachment' of army life left him unable to undertake a natural grieving process as he only had a forty-eight hour pass.[739] During the early stages of the war, during initial training, he found military life `irksome and unrewarding.'[740] Similarly, Ken Tout recalled `The system was to shout at you. Although there was some humanity, that was the system. You were OK if you had a good sergeant or corporal.'[741] However Tout, recognised that

[735] David Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them: The British Army in the Second World War* (London: Cassell & Co., 1983), p.97
[736] Ibid, p.98
[737] Mash, *Up from the Gates*, p.13
[738] Waldron, *From Pacifist to Glider Pilot*, p.82
[739] Ibid, p.85
[740] Ibid, p.93
[741] Ken Tout, Private Papers

this was necessary for some new recruits. At a training camp in Aberdeen he came across some young men from the Gorbals area of Glasgow, `quite likeable lads but many had reprehensible habits which could not be tolerated.'[742]

Tout was subjected to mocking from his colleagues that he was only attending the Salvation Army Citadel in Aberdeen as there were females present, unlike at church parades in camp. However, later in his army career, having been transferred to the 1st Northamptonshire Yeomanry, his commanding officer, a Major Bevan, overruled the company sergeant-major who had forbidden Tout from attending a special service in Salisbury for aspiring Salvation Army ministers. This was after representations from Tout's comrades who appreciated the sincerity of his faith. Tout considered that Christians were tolerated by their comrades as long as they did not cause embarrassment by overt displays of hymn singing or communal worship in the barrack room.[743] Tout also recalled the perception of a religious, as well as class bias in advancement through the army ranks, reckoning that he could have attained officer rank had he been an Anglican rather than a Salvationist.[744] Therefore Tout's experience was of an organisation in which faith was at different times ridiculed, tolerated and admired, but one in which promotion was based on social class, rather than innate ability. Conversely Neil Cochrane, another Salvationist, found that army life was conducive to the development and maintenance of a Christian lifestyle, `Having been brought up in an area where persecution was rife against the Salvation Army, I found that living amongst members of the forces was much easier to contend with, we were all in the same boat.'[745] Cochrane continued, `My father gave me a word of sound advice, "Don't try to preach at 'em. Actions speak louder than words."'[746] Like Tout, he found personal example rather than proselytism the best form of testimony.

John Broom initially found difficulty in forming bonds with most of the men at his RAMC training camp, `The blasphemy sometimes is distressing […] The chaps are on the average fairly good-hearted but awful infidels. You can take it from me that

[742] Ibid
[743] Tout, *Tanks Advance!*, p.29
[744] Ibid*!*
[745] MAC Archive, Robinson, Neil Cochrane
[746] Ibid

Christians are very few and far between.'[747] James Driscoll, another RAMC recruit, soon found that by praying in public at his bedside, he was able to find two other evangelical Christians who became his companions during basic training.[748] However, when he was posted to 131st Field Ambulance in Sussex, he was advised to `keep quiet about my religion, which […] would make me an object of derision.'[749] Therefore even in a regiment which contained a proportion of religiously-inspired conscientious objectors in addition to other active Christians, there was little evidence of the broad Christian ethos found across British society.

Although class distinctions featured in the army, there was little rancour demonstrated towards individuals who served as officers. More typical targets for resentment were the NCOs charged with moulding the new recruits into a fighting force. John Broom wrote:

> The Riot Act was read to us on two successive days for the fellows are getting very restive about being treated as they are in such a ridiculous manner […] they are being bossed around by a conceited incompetent set of sergeant-dispensers with just a few months service & no experience.[750]

This resentment of those in immediate command was widespread amongst active Christians, particularly those from a Nonconformist background who had been brought up to question authority. After not being consulted about glider flight path calculations, Alec Waldron wrote .`As a mere Staff Sergeant my opinions were neither sought nor permitted – like Victorian children – S/Sgts should be seen but not heard – as it was clearly an Army dictum that intelligence was directly correlated with rank!'[751] However there was often less disdain shown for those of higher rank. John Broom wrote of the RAMC training depot in Leeds `[The Colonel] is a very decent chap, rather unlike the other sisters & orderlies. The higher the rank, the better the chap, seems to be the fact obtaining in the Army.'[752] He was impressed by example set by

[747] Broom, Letter, 27 June 1940
[748] Driscoll, *Memoirs of an Old Man*, p.56
[749] Ibid, p.59
[750] Broom, Letter, 3 November 1940
[751] Waldron, *From Pacifist to Glider Pilot*, p.141
[752] Broom, Letter, 9 June 1940

officers accompanying men on a fifteen-mile route march, `All the officers who went, about a dozen in all, marched every inch of the way & were a very decent lot.'[753]

Broom continued to focus his resentment of army life on NCOs, `I'm glad to say that one of our two Staff Sergeants was posted yesterday to another unit. He will always rank in my memory as one of the worst intolerant bumptious blinking ignoramuses ever it has been my misfortune to meet.'[754] A respect for commissioned officers continued, even to the extent of being ready to forego his right of refusal to act as a captain's batman, a role which highlighted the subservience of rank with all the connotations of inferiority of educational background and social class. The role was undertaken without any personal animosity towards the captain, although the underlying resentment of hierarchy was evident, `batting is, after all, a menial task, demanding subservience & a mind that admits personal inferiority. Why shouldn't any officer clean my buttons & boots? There are several reasons why he should.'[755]

Class resentment was a recurring theme. Waldron's War Office Selection Board assessment saw him attend a camp to be vetted as a potential officer, `a test of both social acceptability and leadership qualities. I was never entirely convinced which one took precedence.'[756] Later in the war, he expressed resentment at the `loot' officers had gathered in North Africa taking priority over the loading of men onto a ship in pouring rain and in four inches of water.[757] Others found that the quality of their comrades was of greater importance than social class. Hugh Montefiore, an Anglican Oxford graduate, found it straightforward to fit in to the military structure at the lowly rank of gunner, whilst undertaking basic training for the Royal Artillery even though `there was only one other Oxford man in our squad.'[758] James Driscoll found that when he arrived penniless to begin his RAMC training, a lance-corporal, who was `clearly from the gentry [but] no snob and very kindly' broke King's Regulations to lend him half a crown to buy shoe brushes and polish.[759]

Resentment was frequently expressed at what new recruits saw as ridiculous army fatigues and punishments. John Broom was punished for failing to wear full gas

[753] Broom, Letter, 15 September 1940
[754] Broom, Letter, 11 August 1941
[755] Broom, Letter, 11 November 1941
[756] Waldron, *From Pacifist to Glider Pilot*, p.173
[757] Ibid, p.150
[758] Hugh Montefiore, *Oh God, What Next?* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1985), p.38
[759] Driscoll, *Memoirs of an Old Man*, p.57

protection equipment on a parade and was confined to barracks for what he called a `paltry offence.'[760] Lack of respect of army discipline was evident in Broom's wilful disregard of this punishment:

> Apart from reporting about six or seven times a day, I wasn't at all inconvenienced. And I wouldn't say that I stayed in barracks all the time. Each morning I took a stroll around town & went out a few other times beside. As you may rightly guess, I've no patience with these ridiculous army restrictions.[761]

On being directed to spend an evening cleaning equipment in preparation for an inspection by the unit's commanding officer, Broom noted `If people spent as much time preparing for eternity as we have to spend on this, they would all walk in to Heaven.'[762] Men would deliberately avoid extra duties. For example, on being informed of an impending two-day manoeuvre as he approached camp on return from leave, Broom decided,`Not wishing to get involved in this, I turned back & entered a canteen where I procured some tea, staying there until a quarter past six.'[763] On another occasion he admitted to preferring to have his ankle bound up in elastoplast, meaning that it was impossible to wear his army boots, thus missing parades, `Although I'm classified as fit for light duties, I manage to steer clear of unpleasant people with their unpleasant habit of dispensing unpleasant duties. I fain would let this state of affairs continue for a few more days at least.'[764]

Broom resented spit and polish fatigues which interfered with his religious observance. An order to undertake Sunday afternoon fatigues from a commanding officer whose experience of command in Sierra Leone meant `he had only to clap his hands & a score of lickspittles would come rushing to him. He treats us like that.'[765] This work caused Broom to miss Sunday evening chapel. However, he did advise his mother `You mustn't think that all the Army is as restrictive as this unit.' Resentment was more than a short-term reaction to mundane demands, but a lingering antipathy of the perceived futility of having endured two years of meaningless tasks, ` I found out

[760] Broom, Letter, 13 February 1941
[761] Ibid
[762] Broom, Letter, 28 March 1941
[763] Broom, Letter, 22 April 1941
[764] Broom, Letter, 25 November 1941
[765] Broom, Letter, 8 July 1941

that I had been detailed for C.O.'s parade, held this morning. Taking the customary poor view, I went on it with dirty respirator but was saved from wrath by the careful selection of a dark spot in which to stand for inspection.'[766]

Some men found the commonplace nature of their role unfulfilling to the extent that they sought transfers within the army. Methodist Sunday School teacher Geoffrey Picot's initial service was in the Pay Corps, but he quickly realised that for him, this would not be enough of a contribution to the war effort, `it would be nice if I could find a more physically active, mentally challenging role, where I could make a contribution the memory of which I could happily live with for the rest of my life.'[767] Picot's wish was granted with a transfer to the 1st Battalion of the Hampshire Regiment, and he saw active service throughout the Normandy Campaign.

Major John Sparrow's morale report stated, `The ordinary soldier does not fully identify himself with the Army; he looks with detachment upon it and those who control it.'[768] A further factor affecting morale, one evident later in the war as more men were moved into active service, was a resentment at the lack of leave for those serving overseas. There was a widespread perception amongst those in the First, Eighth and Fourteenth Armies that they were doing far more work than other men. Even between these different armies resentments grew. The Fourteenth Army complained of being the `Forgotten Army' whilst men in the Eighth Army accused the First Army of unfairly basking in glory of the liberation of Tunis in 1943, when they felt they had done the `hard slog' up to then. John Broom wrote:

> [T]he Eighth Army had a greater part in the final victory than is generally realised. It's pretty obvious to me that the whole of the other armies would have been unable to smash the enemy. The Eighth Army could have done it in little time but for orders to do otherwise, undoubtedly to allow the other armies to collect prestige.[769]

Poor morale occasioned by the bitterness of failure could make the committed Christian take a more jaundiced view of his comrades. R.H. Stanley, part of the defeated British forces in Greece in 1941, found no comradely loyalty displayed, as it

[766] Broom, Letter, 5 February 1942
[767] Geoffrey Picot, *Accidental Warrior: In the Front Line from Normandy to Victory* (London: Penguin, 1994), , p.7
[768] TNA WO 163/161 *Essay on morale*
[769] Broom, Letter, 28 May 1943

became `every man for himself' in the desperate scramble to evacuate the mainland.[770] For those less fortunate than Stanley, whose own escape attempt was successful, active service was replaced by a long incarceration. Rifleman John Eldridge, captured in Greece in April 1941, bemoaned the lack of stimulation available after ten months in prison, `I wish I were in the desert where there is a little action and a chance to forget there is a place such as England. Absence is not so bad when there is plenty to do to take one's mind off dear ones.'[771] Even as late as May 1945 Eldridge felt led to complain about the return of spit, polish and queuing following liberation.[772] This army officialdom continued after the war, however, with Norman Kirby, recovering from a jeep crash in the 23rd Scottish General Hospital at Wittekindshof, being subject to daily inspections, and being ordered to stand to attention in the ward in rank order as a colonel inspected the line. Kirby had to sit to attention but was reprimanded for having the tapes of his pillowcases showing, upsetting the colonel. His reaction was a sarcastic `My heart bleeds for him', earning a further reprimand.[773]

Assimilation into Military Life

Although the early phase of the war saw a disconnect between the individual's perception of how they should be treated, and the reality of the army's need to shape them into a fighting force, from 1941 onwards there emerged an increased sense of belonging. Some in positions of authority, including Sir Ronald Adam, saw the need for the army to bend to accommodate the varying backgrounds and aspirations of its conscripted men. Therefore, the rest of the war was a `process of arbitration' between what the army wanted and what the new recruits were willing to do.[774] This meant a process of transforming policy and practice to meet the needs of the soldiers, but also the men reconciling themselves with the military machine. Soldiers' morale needed to be first understood, and then improved.

Improvements in morale were aided by the posting of large numbers of men overseas, meaning they were engaged in worthwhile activity. In addition, the establishment of War Office Selection Boards meant that men's talents were utilised in roles better suited to their individual aptitudes. Allocating men to appropriate roles

[770] SWWEC Archive, R.H. Stanley
[771] IWM, 12703, John Eldridge, *War Diary*, 10 February 1942
[772] Ibid, 30 May 1945
[773] Kirby, *1100 Miles With Monty*, p.201
[774] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.xxiii

was not only necessary for the technical aspects of fighting a war, but for morale. T.E. Jessop noted that, following the huge successes in North Africa and Italy through 1942 and 1943, the collection of conscripts `are as fine a body of soldiers as the British Army ever had.'[775] The underlying factors for this improved image were a sense of pride in military successes and active efforts on behalf of the leadership, not only in the army, but also in the RAF and RN, to establish and promote morale.

Eric Ambler's film *The Way Ahead* (1944) demonstrated how the army had bent itself to the new men, but also how the men themselves had matured. The raw recruits of 1939 and 1940 had come to realise the point of the training, the spit and polish, the army `bullshit.' For Allport, the film `articulates a post-heroic philosophy of morale.'[776] Men are recognised as civilians temporarily in khaki who are getting the job done as best they can, with the realisation that the better they do it, the sooner the war will end. As they will eventually return to civilian life, individual personalities need to be maintained, and not totally subsumed into the military machine. The army had come to realise that their wartime recruits `were suspicious of slogan, detested bluster, resented injustice, but where their trust was earned they performed great things. Their loyalty had to be earned. Once earned it was generously and affectionately given.'[777] Relationships were at their best when common hardships were encountered. Over the course of the war, individualists formed collectives.

The army's conviction had been that men fought for regiments rather than God.[778] The regimental system demanded a total investment in that identity, but this was uncomfortable for men whose primary associations were with their family, community, and workplace. However, by 1943 regimental geographical associations had largely disappeared, and by January 1944, only 34% of casualties had a local connection to their regiment.[779] For some officers, regimental pride remained. Martin Gordon, second in command of the 2/Gordon Highlanders from Normandy to the Baltic noted that, `By far the greatest single factor in a soldier's morale is regimental pride.'[780]

[775] Jessop, `The Padre's Hour', p.380
[776] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.126
[777] Fraser, *And We Shall Shock Them*, p.99
[778] Holmes, *Soldiers*, p.392
[779] Ibid
[780] Quoted in Holmes, *Soldiers*, p.398

Alan Allport saw regimental identity as a potential weakness, as it could prove difficult for men to fit in to a new grouping when transferred, due to previous absorption into the culture of a particular unit, division or regiment.[781] Anglican Peter White expressed disappointment at being moved from the 4th Battalion, King's Own Scottish Borderers in late 1945, having been through the whole of the North-West Europe campaign.[782] Captain Raleigh Trevelyan, an Anglican, had joined the army straight from school, and the point that he belonged to a `crack regiment', the Rifle Brigade, had been reinforced many times. When Trevelyan was transferred to the Green Howards, this regimental bond was broken, leaving a sense of betrayal:

> As soon as I went abroad, what happened? Without the smallest apology I and a lot of my contemporaries were doled out as cannon-fodder to any mob that happened to be short of platoon commanders. No wonder at first we were very unhappy, and no wonder now we are bitter with the people who taught us that iniquitous rubbish.[783]

But whatever regimental loyalty had been engendered, for Richard Holmes `real loyalty was to people.'[784] A 1943 War Office report noted that in each platoon there were six men who would go anywhere and do anything, twelve `sheep' who would follow those men at a short distance and then six ineffective men who did not have what it took to be a soldier.[785] These disparate groups had been moulded into cohesive bands of men. Christians in the armed services were not immune from this drawing together of men into bonds of community. Norman Kirby experienced `great sadness' on seeing his comrades gradually demobilised towards the end of 1945.[786]

Hugh Dormer expressed `amaze[ment] at the patience and comradeship and consideration of guardsmen' displayed in the early stages of the Normandy campaign and felt a quasi-religious sense that `those sublime moments of sacrifice on a battlefield must bind men together into eternity.'[787] John Broom, who previously had found much to complain about in army life, observed after a month in North Africa in 1942, that `in all fairness to most of the fellows out here, the manner in which they

[781] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.164
[782] White, *With the Jocks*, p.536
[783] Raleigh Trevelyan, *The Fortress: A Diary of Anzio and After* (London: Leo Cooper, 1972), p.48
[784] Holmes, *Soldiers*, p.407
[785] Quoted in Ibid, p.391
[786] Kirby, *1100 Miles With Monty*, p.199
[787] Dormer, *Diaries*, p.138

fulfil their duties & suffer unresentfully many inconveniences evokes my utmost admiration.'[788] By June of 1944, having been part of the successful campaign in North Africa and the invasion of Normandy, his identification with the military milieu had undergone a transformation:

> The boys out here are every bit as brave as you would think. Some of their exploits read like fiction. They were wonderful. Nearly all of them have plenty of battle experience, & it's amazing that they aren't too cheesed off with going into action time after time, in many different countries, to have the heart to hazard their lives, repeatedly, in this campaign.[789]

The advantages of the formation of new bonds could outweigh the temporary disappointments of transfer. Alec Waldron concluded that glider pilots were `the finest bunch of men' and he found a `firm but flexible discipline all too absent in the army of that time.'[790] At glider battle school he came across a `wonderful collection of individualists the like of which I never again met in any walk of life.'[791] Lieutenant Bruce Hayllar of the Indian Army Corps, who was inspired by his experience at the Battle of Kohima to pursue a career in the Anglican church, wrote to his parents `I have never seen, and never shall see again, such bravery and unselfishness as I saw up there.'[792] Hayllar developed a deeper spirituality through understanding the meaning of unselfishness and sacrifice manifested in his comrades. This sentiment amongst the men of the Fourteenth Army was observed by United Board chaplain Rev Samuel Shaw, who had been deployed to Burma in 1944. He found the camaraderie amongst the men `much closer and personal' than he had previously experienced. When Shaw held prayer services the men were happy to attend, and just before an attack they were `eager for me to stay with them.'[793]

Geoffrey Picot was struck by a sense of awe on transferring from the relatively mundane environment of the Pay Corps to the renowned Hampshire Regiment, `I could scarcely have joined a battalion […] that was more battle-hardened or whose

[788] Broom, Letter, 9 September 1942
[789] Broom, Letter, 26 June 1944
[790] Waldron, *From Pacifist to Glider Pilot,* p.151 & 115
[791] Ibid, p.124
[792] Fergal Keane, *Road of Bones: The Epic Siege of Kohima, 1944* (London: Harper Press, 2011), p.358
[793] Quoted in Allison, *United Board Chaplains,* p.90

record showed greater success. How on earth would I fit in with these Goliaths?'[794] Picot later recorded that infantry battalions formed the `greatest team known to man […] The infantryman is the king of warriors.'[795] Having served with the Hampshires during the 1944-5 campaign in north-west Europe, Picot marvelled at the transformation of ordinary men like himself into a fighting force that had defeated the Wehrmacht:

> Who won the battle? Hundreds of thousands of ordinary chaps like me, a segment of the conscripted youth of the nation, butchers, bakers, candlestick makers, civilians at heart who had never imagined we had military qualities. We had been drilled and trained, some of us trying to do the best we could, others not trying too hard, and then we were ordered into battle. So well had we been transformed into warriors that, with the outstanding aid of a handful of regular soldiers who had survived earlier battles, we trounced the most disciplined and ferocious nation in the world.[796]

Edward Porter claimed, `I think, generally, soldiers depended on the camaraderie of the mates they lived with in dugouts or tents. The bond of friendship and dependence on leadership were the most comforting things.'[797] Therefore it was not just the comrades of similar rank, but the respect that had been developed for his officers, from which Porter drew comfort. Similarly, Raleigh Trevelyan, over time, came to reject the `nebulous loyalty' of his original regiment, the Rifle Brigade, citing instead he `ties with the blokes' of the Green Howards platoon with whom he had served during the Anzio campaign.[798]

Therefore, during active overseas service men formed collegiate identities with those with whom they had experienced hardships and danger. For active Christians, this experience expanded their horizons beyond previous milieux of family and church congregation. The notion that one could form close bonds with others not of a Christian faith, whilst undertaking a venture receiving Christian approval but not fundamentally Christian in nature, meant that the congregational hierarchy of their home churches would struggle to exert the same authority when they returned to civilian life. A

[794] Picot, *Accidental* Warrior, p.31
[795] Ibid, p.301
[796] Ibid, p.9
[797] MAC Archive, Robinson, Edward Porter
[798] Trevelyan, *The Fortress,* p.48

distance from the `other' developed, not only between those who had served in the forces and those who had not, but even between men who had experienced the war in widely differing circumstances. By the end of the war many servicemen were united in a common disdain for anyone outside of the military. The wartime conscripts who had originally not regarded themselves as regular soldiers and had rejected military values had developed, after years in uniform, a contempt for `civvies' and their easy lifestyle. This feeling was further fuelled by a resentment at the higher pay men working in civilian industries, were receiving.

Alan Allport suggested that extended periods of service overseas had meant that `conventions of home and work had been disrupted, often profoundly. New relationships, attitudes and forms of behaviour had evolved.'[799] This disconnect between an individual's previous life, and the one to which he had become inured during years of military service, extended to the relationship between the Churches and the armed services. A Mass-Observation survey in 1942 found that only 2% of material in the *Church Times* related to military service matters, whereas the figure was 47% in the Salvation Army's *War Cry*.[800] Therefore the dangers, fears and anxieties of the millions of Anglicans in the armed services were not being reflected in their mainstream publication, whilst that of a smaller denomination was able to give much greater coverage to the issues facing its adherents.

John Broom drew the distinction between military and civilian outlooks on life in 1944, `I think that Mr Brown would benefit by a little foreign service, don't you? The war, obviously, has been a long holiday for some people. They need a shaking. In some ways it might have done many people good to have been invaded by the Germans.'[801] Lieutenant Bruce Hayllar, having been wounded during the Battle of Kohima, had decided to devote his life to God, but this Christian spirit did not extend to some who had not experienced the horrors of battle. In a letter to his parents he stated:

> A man with an M.C. or D.S.O. is so far, far superior to a successful businessman or politician. Again, some people are a bit lazy about the war […]

[799] Alan Allport, *Demobbed: Coming Home after the Second World War* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London, 2009), p.3
[800] MOA, FR 1870A, `The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, p.15
[801] Broom, Letter, 16 November 1943

> content to let it run on without worrying much about it except how it affects themselves. They should just see what a battle involves. It is a terrific and most disgusting thing. Far worse than any slum or brothel and far bigger.[802]

This distinction even extended towards men who had not shared the same intensity of war experience. Rather than seeing themselves as one great collective military machine, men often sought reassurance within more exclusive identities. John Broom, having been transferred from 2nd Light Field Ambulance to a military hospital in 1945, was unimpressed by the forced removal of his Desert Rats insignia and its replacement with a 21st Army Group sign:

> We've taken down the Rats, but not put up the 21 A G efforts. However, we remain true Rats at heart whatever our sleeves bear, & the new chaps in the Div who wear the Rat may know that they haven't got the soul of a Rat whose outstanding qualification is the few pounds of sand lying in the stomach.[803]

By the end of 1945 Broom even gave serious consideration to signing up for another two years, seeing the previously restrictive military milieu as one that now offered an arena for freedom and independence, `I love freedom of action and independent thought, and I really find a lot of irksomeness in listening to the opinions so often illogically and prejudicially presented by people with civilian experience only.'[804]

Randle Mainwaring, an evangelical Anglican whose faith had flourished as an adolescent despite the disapproval of his atheist parents, struck a slightly different note of relief, claiming of his war service with the RAF Regiment in the Far East, `I would not willingly have exempted myself from those war experiences but I was glad to be going home.'[805] Having risen to the rank of Wing Commander, Mainwaring returned to his old clerical job to find his pay had been reduced from £150 to £100 per annum. He was rebuked for writing to the managing director asking if those at home had any appreciation of the `terrible times for the young men who were fighting for them and their way of life.'[806] His immediate superior reinforced this chasm between what had been expected of him during war and his new enfeebled peacetime role, `Mainwaring,

[802] Quoted in Keane, *Road of Bones*, p.358
[803] Broom, Letter, 23 December 1945
[804] Broom, Letter, 14 November 1945
[805] Mainwaring, *Fight the Good Fight*, p,36
[806] Ibid, p.37

the war turned you from a clerk into a Wing Commander. My job is to turn the Wing Commander back into a clerk. See!'[807] Despite this cold welcome from his employer, Mainwaring found his ties to his faith circle strengthened, devoting his post-war years to the growth of the evangelical Sutton Crusaders group, leading many young men to Anglican confirmation and ordination.

Ernest Gordon reckoned his time as a Japanese prisoner of war to have been one of `comradeship of the highest order […] By the deaths of so many of our friends we were tied to those places with invisible cords that could never be broken.'[808] However, on returning to the UK, Gordon immediately felt shunned by the country he had not seen for many years. Firstly, he and his comrades were forbidden to help with the unloading of supplies from their ship in Liverpool docks for fear of antagonising the dockers' trade union:

> While we were prisoners we had been free to contribute to the general good. […] Here, in a society which paid lip service to freedom, we were prohibited, apparently, from applying the lessons we had learned. Impersonal laws, red tape, regulations in triplicate, were hemming us in like the jungle with invisible walls.[809]

Reabsorption into civilian life was hindered by the feeling that `we had been sent out as boys to do men's work on the battlefield. Now that we returned as men we were offered boys' work.'[810] Gordon inferred from advice provided by a counsellor to `toe the line' and `join the team […] now we were out of prison camp we could put God away until Sunday.'[811] He longed for the close companionship he had shared in captivity. Gordon would pace the floor or go for long walks. He found he was restless with religious life too, telling `our friends in the clergy how to bring the churches up to date.'[812] Thus for Gordon, the intensity of the comradeship and closeness to God he had felt in camp was in sharp contrast to the aloofness and apathy he experienced both in general and religious life.

[807] Ibid, p.38
[808] Gordon, *Miracle on the Kwai*, p.217
[809] Ibid, p.218
[810] Ibid, p.221
[811] Ibid, p.221
[812] Ibid, p.222

In contrast, Captain Bill Frankland of the RAMC, an Anglican who had also been a Far East prisoner of war, found that the best way he could readjust to home life was by an immediate return to pre-war normalities. On being asked on his homecoming if he would like to see a counsellor, he retorted, `No I would like to see my wife and go back to work.'[813] Eric Lomax, who had received especially brutal treatment at the hands of Japanese camp guards, recalled `My experiences had put a huge distance between myself and my previous life.'[814] Lomax found himself `passive' in being drawn back into his Strict Baptist Chapel. In contrast to his recent intense experiences, he found the chapel to be a place where `fierce feuds, outbreaks of ostentatious remoteness and snorting resentment would break out over the seating priorities.'[815] Lomax and his wife were taken to task for inadvertently taking a pew which had been the exclusive reserve of the same lady for thirty years. In addition, Lomax looked with disdain on others in the congregation who had not shared the personal horror of his war, `their complaints about how awful firewatching duties had been did not, under the circumstances, engage my full sympathy.'[816] Lomax found his marriage failing by 1946, partly due to him and his wife being shunned by her family. For Lomax, `people in her family would never let a slight die a natural death. I think this side of her character may have been developed in the Chapel.'[817] Therefore, it was the culture of organised religion, and the attitude of its adherents, that Lomax found petty and irksome, and fuelled his subsequent drift away from religious observance and affiliation.

Many Christians had their worldview reshaped by their wartime service, becoming `others' from their younger and previous selves. Individualists had combined into effective collectives. Those who initially resented military authority came to respect the firm leadership of respected officers. Men from different classes and backgrounds came to appreciate each other better. The decades following the end of the war gave many of these men an opportunity to reflect on the effect that the war had had on their outlook on life. Most considered they had taken part in something worthwhile. Alan Wilkinson contended, `The second world war began without high

[813] Bill Frankland, Private Papers
[814] Eric Lomax, *The Railway Man* (London: Vintage Books, 1995), p.207
[815] Lomax, p.216
[816] Ibid, p.216
[817] Ibid, p.248

emotion but with a deep conviction of the justice of the cause which deepened as the war proceeded.'[818] A.J.P. Taylor reflected that `No English soldier who rode with the tanks into liberated Belgium or saw the German murder camps at Dachau or Buchenwald could doubt that the war had been a noble crusade.'[819] For those in the army and navy, that crusade could not frequently be shared with their families and church congregations on the home front due to minimal amounts of home leave.

Rev. Rupert Godfrey, an Anglican army chaplain who had been held prisoner in the Far East firstly on Java, and then on the Japanese mainland, recognised the riches of the soul that could be salvaged from even the most brutal war adversities, exhorting men at a Thanksgiving Service in August 1945 to `give thanks for all the experience we have gained as prisoners of war, for breadth of vision, for tolerance and understanding of other men's views […] and for all the friendships which over three and a half years we have been able to form.'[820] Norman Kirby, writing in the early twenty-first century, found much of worth in what at the time had seemed pointless activities:

> As civilians most of us must have tried, however obscurely, to make life meaningful for ourselves and I, as a teacher, had struggled, often despairingly, to do the same for children. The war changed all that. In the army, digging antiquated trenches with pick and shovel in the Royal Engineers, and Tac HQ chasing pigeons and getting people locked up, did not come across to me as meaningful activities. Yet in the soldier's life there were hidden gains unsuspected by me at the time. These came from the disciplines, the excitements, the irksomeness, the endurances and the hazards shared with others from many different walks of life. Looking back, these are experiences I would not now want to be without.[821]

Alec Waldron served a further three-month period after his demobilisation date in 1945, but despite being offered promotion to Flight-Lieutenant to remain in the Glider Pilot Regiment after the war, he concluded that he was temperamentally unsuited to peace time service, and that his developing left-wing political views would

[818] Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform?*, p.249
[819] A.J.P. Taylor, *English History, 1914-1945* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p.600
[820] Rupert Godfrey, *The Years that the Locusts have Eaten: War Diary and Sermons of Rupert Godfrey, 1941-45* (Privately Published, 2003), p.70
[821] Kirby, *1100 Miles With Monty*, p.116

not fit well within that milieu.[822] However he later considered his wartime years as more productive than a university education would have been, developing skills of leadership, management of men and organisation of resources. In addition, Waldron had gained an awareness that the dogmatism of his Exclusive Plymouth Brethren upbringing had been supplanted by an understanding and tolerance of people of all faiths and no faith and of people with diverse political views.[823]

Albert Taylor saw his incarceration by the Japanese as the period during which he matured into a man. Writing to his father upon his release, he expressed optimism:

> I have known hard work, long hours, hunger, thirst and disease and have watched my comrades die (Psalm 91 v 7) […] Through all this I was preserved and hardship has taught me what I could never have learned at home in England. I do not regret the experience. I left home in your eyes and Mother's a boy. But I shall return a man. I hope you will like the change: it is for the better.[824]

Hugh Montefiore was grateful for his time in the army, having gone in as an `immature, overgrown schoolboy' but emerging as a man.[825] He had found out what `made people tick.'[826] For Geoffrey Picot, `To have played a part in that task [defeating Hitler] is the greatest service that anybody of my age can have rendered to our fellow man.'[827] He recalled that the soldiering life suited him due to its clear-cut hierarchical order, discipline, outdoor lifestyle and sense of comradeship.[828] Neil Cochrane, who served with the 51st Highland Division in North Africa and Europe, `always felt glad that I was called upon to pass through that experience in my life' as it reaffirmed his religious faith.'[829] Norman Kirby recognised the worthiness of this and others' wartime efforts**,** `those who suffered did believe that their cause was just, and a great evil was destroyed by brave men and women.'[830]

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[822] Waldron, *From Pacifist to Glider Pilot*, p.189
[823] Ibid, p.193
[824] IWM, 19912, Papers of Albert Taylor
[825] Montefiore, *Oh God! What Next?,* p.56
[826] Ibid, p.39
[827] Picot, *Accidental Warrior*, p.7
[828] Ibid, p.301
[829] MAC Archive, Robinson, Neil Cochrane
[830] Kirby, *1100 Miles with Monty*, p.223

For John Broom, writing in the immediate aftermath of the conflict, there was `nothing essentially Godly about fighting a war […] man will never be satisfied with Peace because man is greedy at heart. Another and more deadly war is as certain as man's ambitions are boundless.'[831] This cynical view of the post-war world was echoed by Ernest Gordon, `Communist hated capitalist; capitalist hated communist; Arab hated Jew; Jew hated Arab; labour hated management; management hated labour; politician hated politician.'[832] This denunciation was not confined to the international situation, but extended to the United Kingdom:

> A moral cynicism was sapping the strength of our society. […] There were many who had remained untouched by the welter of the holocaust. What had happened on the battlefields, in mass bombings, in concentration camps – the blood, pain, suffering, heart-break and death – remained totally beyond their comprehension […] We encountered some who were actually sorry to see the war end because they had such a good time and had done so well financially.[833]

Some found that despite the weakening of previous bonds of faith and community, there were some gains on the spiritual plane. On meeting a grieving German woman in 1945, Peter White noted in his diary `the utter waste of stupidity of the war […] there were no real winners.' However, he reflected, there was, `an unseen credit balance […] a gain for things of the spirit.'[834] Edward Porter was another who found the war deepened his spirituality as well as evolving his personality, `Through varied experiences and meeting a wide range of people in periods of stress and alienation from settled backgrounds and old friends, I found I had to search for a satisfactory pattern of beliefs. […] I needed a more secure creed and meaning to my life.'[835]

Owen Eva reflected that those who had died alongside him in Far East prison camps `had used their limited years of life well and that the world was a better place because of what they had been able to be and to do in their all too short lifetime.'[836] Eva also considered that his own survival was due to God having a purpose for him in

[831] Broom, Letter, 20 May 1945
[832] Gordon, *Miracle on the Kwai,* p.222
[833] Gordon, *Miracle on the Kwai,* p.223
[834] White, *With the Jocks,* p.532
[835] MAC Archive, Robinson, Edward Porter
[836] IWM, 2381, Owen Eva

the world. However, this sense of direction, which saw him present himself as a candidate for the Anglican priesthood upon his return to England in November 1945, was not sufficient to assuage a sense of `guilt at having survived when so many fine men had died; guilt that there were times when I was too concerned with my own survival and not sufficiently concerned to see if there were ways in which I could help other men in their needs.'[837] Another whose experience of active service stiffened her resolve to live a worthwhile life was Lavinia Holland-Hibbert. Writing in the 1990s, she recalled, 'I decided my aim was to be a good Christian, a good Socialist and a good European. I suppose the first has survived longest, and I have gone from Right to Left and finished up as a Liberal member of the Church of England.'[838]

Conclusion

The military experience was a transformative one for many active Christians. Despite entering services in which there was often a strong Christian ethos amongst senior and middle-ranking officers, many felt challenged by the dramatic change in milieu into which they were expected to assimilate. Morale was frequently low, especially during the first half of the war and Christians often found themselves in conflict with military discipline. However, over time, bonds were formed between Christians and those with different outlooks. In many cases this was contemporaneous with an increasing dissonance from previous lives, sometimes to the extent that Christians found it difficult to return to pre-war work and religious norms following demobilisation.

Alternative loyalties were formed which would be forever disconnected from people's previous and future lives. There was initial friction between men who were active Christians and their new comrades, although this was frequently at a minor level and quickly overcome once mutual respect was established. Poor relationships with those in immediate command were often caused by the rigid discipline and structure needed to train civilians to win a war, the lingering class resentment held by a better-educated and more articulate grade of recruit than the army had been privileged with during the 1930s, and the initial torpor from the higher echelons of the army in assimilating this new breed of soldier into their ranks in a wholehearted manner**.**

[837] Ibid
[838] IWM, 6468, Lavinia Orde

The removal of active Christians from a background in which they could choose their social and religious milieu, and conscription into one in which they were forced into prolonged proximity with people who did not share their love of God, only served to give further resolve to their pre-war beliefs and practices. Rather than acting as a secularising agent, exposure to military settings provided Christians with an additional identity which reinforced their religious one, and acted as a stimulus for a deeper and more robust post-war faith.

Chapter Five – Christianity, National Identity and the Enemy

Introduction

The extent to which men and women were willing to subsume some part of their former selves into the culture of the armed services was examined in the previous chapter. An additional factor which was crucial in forming a common sense of purpose for active Christians and their less religious comrades was the development of a shared national identity, behind which most of the United Kingdom could combine. This identity affirmed that Britain was engaged in a just, and for some, a holy war. Alongside this sense of moral purpose ran the notion that Britain's two principal enemies, Germany and Japan, were engaged in a demonic enterprise, with their actions frequently being framed in Satanic terminology. This chapter will examine the nature of British national identity during the war, and how Christianity had come to form part of its expression. This is a central consideration in determining the extent of any religious decline or revival among active Christians in the armed services. Had they seen Christianity being diluted to serve the purposes of the state, this might have led to a weakening of patriotic sentiment. If, however, they approved of the utilisation of religion in support of the national cause, then this would provide a further dimension for their faith and a renewed sense of purpose to preserve a society based on Christian ideals.

National Identity

Peter Mandler defined national character as `the idea of a cultural, psychological, or biological essence that all individuals in a given nation share in common, and that directs, somewhat abstractly, all manifestations of national life.'[839] For Benedict Anderson, a nation was a `community […] imagined as a deep, horizontal comradeship.'[840] This view has been deeply contested, with Richard Weight arguing that British national identity went beyond an imagined community and that, alongside abstract notions of values and beliefs, there went the more solid entities of laws, customs, language, institutions and history.[841] This was also the view put forward by

[839] Peter Mandler, `The Consciousness of Modernity? Liberalism and the English National Character, 1870-1940', in Martin Daunton and Bernhard Reiger (eds), *Meanings of Modernity: Britain from the Late-Victorian Era to World War Two* (Oxford: Berg, 2001), p.120.
[840] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p.7
[841] Richard Weight, *Patriots* (London: Macmillan, 2002), p.10

Anthony Smith, who saw cultural identity as a `sense of continuity on the part of successive generations […] shared memories of earlier events in history [and a] collective destiny.[842]

Whether an imagined concept, or one which found expression in solid institutions and codes, British national identity, for many commentators, contained strong religious characteristics. Political scientist Ernest Barker argued that it was not the racial, environmental, or demographic substructure of a nation that determined national character, but rather its `spiritual superstructure' which was the product of language, law, education and religion.[843] John Wolffe wrote that `a fruitful avenue to the investigation of national consciousness in Britain and Ireland is likely to be by way of religion.'[844] Linda Colley gave detailed consideration to the relationship between religion, specifically the British Protestant version, and the development of a British national identity between 1707 and 1837.[845] Her contention was that Britishness had been defined by the existence of an external `other', Catholic France during that period. A common Protestantism and loyalty to crown and parliament were the key unifying features of British identity. However, this Britishness co-existed with continuing senses of Englishness, Scottishness and Welshness, and even strong regional identities.

Lucy Noakes held that people living through the Second World War were aware that they were living through momentous times, and therefore their sense of national identity was heightened.[846] She concurred with Anderson's argument of imagined communities being enhanced in wartime. The nation was given characteristics, such as `plucky', a deliberate government policy to appeal to the British fondness for the underdog, a sympathy directed towards Belgium during the First World War and now made to characterise the British war effort. The extent to which Christianity was utilised in the shaping of a mid-century national identity has been examined by Matthew Grimley. He averred that `historians have ignored the role

[842] Anthony D. Smith, *National Identity* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1991), p.25
[843] Ernest Barker, *National Character and the Factors in Its Formation* (London: Methuen, 1927), p.39
[844] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, p.17
[845] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707 – 1837* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)
[846] Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender and National Identity, 1939-91* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997)

played by religion in twentieth-century national identity.'[847] He partly blamed preoccupation with history from below and microhistories in missing such broad themes as Christianity.

The national character promoted during the war was a heavily English-dominated one. The connection between Englishness and the Protestant religion had been repeatedly `asserted in the voluminous popular literature' on national character produced between the wars.[848] As the Welsh and Scottish churches began to assert their own distinctive cultural traditions, so it became less complicated for Anglicans to emphasise the Englishness of the Church of England.[849] Grimley therefore identified a stronger sense of Englishness emanating from the English Churches during the 1930s, aided by a decline in doctrinal and political conflict between the Anglican and Free Churches.[850] He noted the centrality of Christianity in the forging of a twentieth century national identity, thus challenging the notion of an ongoing marginalisation of religion in British society.

Martin Pugh argued that, despite the development of a national identity during the 1930s, pre-war Britain was a nation with strong competing metropolitan identities.[851] Heavy industries still dominated many areas of northern England, central Scotland, South Wales and the Midlands. These industries were in decline with those regions falling in relative prosperity to London and the Home Counties. J.B. Priestley, in his classic *English Journey*, identified three different Englands; firstly, `Old England, the country of the cathedrals and minsters and manor houses and inns, of Parson and Squire, guide book and quaint highways and byways England.'[852] The second England was the place of Priestley's upbringing, `the nineteenth century England, the industrial England of coal, iron, steel, cotton, wool, railways [...] slums, […] sooty dismal little towns, and still sootier grim fortress-like cities.' Finally, there was modern England, with its `arterial and by-pass roads, of filling stations [...] giant cinemas and dance halls and cafes.'[853] Therefore, whatever Britain, or England, that

[847] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.886
[848] Ibid, p.885
[849] Ibid, p.892
[850] Ibid
[851] Martin Pugh, *We Danced All Night: A Social History of Britain Between the Wars* (London: Vintage Books, 2008) p.414
[852] J.B. Priestley, *English Journey* (London: Heinemann and Victor Gollancz, 1934), p.319
[853] Ibid

was having an identity conceptualised for it, it was a nation of very diverse economic, social and physical contrasts.

National identity was one of many multi-faceted and often overlapping sets of personal identities. Whilst Linda Colley suggested that Britons could have more than one self-identity at a time, Sonya Rose extended this idea to argue that `national identity meshes with other identities, especially during a war.'[854] Christianity was a central identity for the people examined in this study. For John Wolffe, this `merging of religion and nationalism reached its climax in the early twentieth century as the United Kingdom engaged in a major war.'[855] This merging was reshaped during the Second World War as religious language and general references to a `Christian civilisation' were used to promote a national consciousness fit to unite Britain's past and present to confront the enemy. For Philip Williamson, this was a civil religion `which sacralised the particular purposes of the nation.'[856] Religion was revived and harnessed to address the urgent needs of 1939 to 1945. Responses of actively-Christian service personnel will therefore be studied in the light of a national consciousness which had partly grown out of, but then integrated British Protestantism into a broader narrative. The evidence suggests that although active Christians proved to be strong believers in Britain's national purpose in the war, their faith was not subsumed within that nationalism.

William Temple wrote that for active Christians their self-identity was `not [...] as Britons who happened to be Christians, [but as] Christians who happened to be British.[857] This view was supported by contemporary commentators, who saw the British as a people chosen by God to undertake his work on earth. According to Arthur Mee, the British were fighting the war `to drive back from our Island the paganism overthrown twelve hundred years ago by King Oswy in the last English battle for Christianity.'[858] Some prominent politicians reinforced the idea of a British national mission to effect the salvation of Christian civilisation. Lord Halifax referred to a `crusade for Christianity', whilst Anthony Eden claimed only a British victory would

[854] Colley, *Britons*, p.6; Rose, *Which People's War?*, p.9
[855] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, p.19
[856] Williamson, `National Days of Prayer', p.357
[857] *The Times*, 27 May 1940, p.3
[858] Mee, *Nineteen Forty*, p.100

`restore […] Christian Civilisation.'[859] For Labour, Clement Attlee spoke of the war as a `spiritual contest between good and evil.'[860] So prevalent was overtly religious rhetoric in the pronouncement of prominent politicians, that the Minister of the Methodist Central Hall, Rev W.E. Sangster, coagulated their expressions of national Christian sentiment in a book entitled *Ten Statesmen and Jesus Christ*.[861]

Hugh McLeod argued that whilst the religious nationalism of Britain was decidedly Protestant between its high point in the 1860s and 1914, from then up to 1940 it was replaced by a generalised Christianity.[862] This generalisation of religion was needed to bring a wider section of the population, particularly Roman Catholics and Jews, under the umbrella of Britishness. Following 1945, that national Christianity `dwindled away.'[863] However, many commentators had already noted a declining importance of faith in the lives of individuals and the nation. George Orwell asserted that `We have got to be the children of God, even though the God of the Prayer Book no longer exists.'[864] For Field Marshal Smuts of South Africa, who served in Churchill's Imperial War Cabinet, the problem of religious decline went beyond Britain with consequences for the world's economic health. Across Europe `the bedrock of Christian morality has become undermined and can no longer support all the superstructure of economic and industrial prosperity which the last century has built upon it.'[865]

The declining significance of Christianity in British society was bemoaned in the pages of *Practical Christianity*. One anonymous officer claimed that `Religion stands in the background of most people's lives and is seldom thought of because it entails self-sacrifice, self-control, self-denial, which appears to be the hard way to live.'[866] Rear Admiral G.B. Allen asserted that Britain was suffering from `The gradual destruction of faith in the Bible as the inspired Word of God, the humanising God of

[859] Ministry of Information, *Spiritual Issues of the War*, No.39, 27 July 1940; *Spiritual Issues of the War*, No. 83, 5 June 1941
[860] Newman Watts (ed.), *Spiritual Issues of the War* (London, 1942), p.10
[861] W.E. Sangster, *Ten Statesmen and Jesus Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1941)
[862] Hugh McLeod, `Protestantism and British National Identity, 1815-1945, in P. van der Veer and H. Lehmann, (eds.), *Nation and Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), p.4
[863] Ibid
[864] S. Orwell and I. Angus (eds.), *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol 2 (London: Penguin, 1968), p17-18
[865] Quoted in *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, January 1943), p.3
[866] `R.A.C.', `Totalitarian Christianity', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, September 1943), p.13

the Son, the subjection of faith to some opinions of science, the indifference and lack of any sense of need for Christianity, so-called modernism.'[867] For others, Britain had been brought to a state of war through turning away from God. Commander R.G.Studd, a First World War veteran who commanded Whale Island training base in Portsmouth from 1939 onwards, came from a prominent evangelical family. He referred to a `Spiritual Blackout' which had led to England losing its soul.[868] Too much heed had been paid to the theories of Higher Criticism and Modernism which had begun in Germany in the previous century. Whilst Germany had turned to the new, but false hope of the Nazi Gospel, in Britain the Bible had become disregarded, `Men, navigated by the will-o'-the wisp of their own whims and fancies, rushed madly after money and pleasure, with a thin veneer of social services, philanthropy and pacifism to give it an air of respectability!'[869] The nation needed faith in Jesus Christ so the `British Empire can fulfil its obligations to the world.'[870] Captain L.D. Gammans M.P. termed the struggle a `War for the Soul of the British People.'[871] Something had `gone out of us' as a nation, with individualism in the ascendant. Britain had lost its core beliefs in religion, democracy and Empire with nothing substantial as a replacement. However, God had given Britain a second chance to face it responsibilities. The `miracle of Dunkirk' and subsequent salvation from invasion meant that Britain could now save its soul, as well as defeating the enemy, `the greatest task which God has ever entrusted to any nation.'[872] For another contributor, it would have been a curse had Britain won a swift victory in 1939 and 1940, as God had `sobered and chastened' a previously backsliding Britain to make the nation more worthy of the fruits of victory.[873] This idea of Britain's divine purpose was echoed by `a K.C.' who wrote, `I believe that Great Britain is a trustee for God and for the everlasting Gospel of His grace, and that the trust estate can only be properly maintained by the ultimate success of British arms.'[874]

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[867] Rear Admiral G.B. Allen, R.N., `Nazi or Christian Witness', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, March 1943), p.25
[868] R.G. Studd, `Spiritual Blackout', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, November 1944), p.19
[869] Ibid, p.22
[870] `Dusk over Germany', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, January 1944), p.7
[871] Captain L.D. Gammans M.P., `War for the Soul of the British People', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, July 1942), p.18
[872] Ibid, p.21
[873] `Is War Necessarily Wrong?', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, March 1942), p.24
[874] `Ibid, p.23

Therefore, for many active Christians, Britain was not the Christian nation it once was, but had been given an opportunity by God to redeem itself as the saviour of the world from the Godless Nazi menace. Anglican Arthur Mee had loftily assigned to the people of 1940s Britain the `fight to save from destruction all that is noblest in our way of life [and] the abounding glory that it has fallen to us to save it.'[875] However, this was not the case for all Christians. Captain J.H. Frankau of the Royal Engineers, from a low church Anglican upbringing, questioned how Montgomery could have been so sure of the support of God in battle, whilst the Germans held to the precept of *Gott Mitt Uns*.[876]

Britain's Christian identity could be symbolised through music, particularly the National Anthem, with its direct appeal to God to uphold the monarch. Rev Toby Boulton, an Anglican chaplain, heard a rendition in a cinema in Durban, `everyone stood up and there were not a few wiping their eyes, and after the anthem great applause.'[877] Joe Blythe wrote, following a short service in his Japanese prisoner of war camp on Christmas Day 1942, that `we went to bed satisfied in our souls […] An Englishman ought to thank God he was born in England, the land of the free. We always finished our Service with the National Anthem, showing our captors, that although we were down, we were not out.'[878] John Broom drew inspiration from the words of the patriotic hymn *I Vow to Thee, My Country*, finding an expression of the special role Christians should play in setting an example to the rest of the nation in wartime:

> We are Britishers, not rats that we should scamper into holes. And as Christians we have a noble example to show to everybody, sustained by inner strength and dauntless courage. Now is the time to respond to the exhortation `Quit you like men.' Above me as I write, [...] are the two verses of "I vow to thee my country." They are strong & noble words, beautifully expressed & I read them through every day & feel greatly encouraged.[879]

Broom was sustained, not only by his very devout and direct faith in God, but also by his self-conception as a Briton. Indeed, the survival of the nation had to take

[875] Mee, *Nineteen Forty*, p.218
[876] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, J.H. Frankau
[877] Toby Boulton, *See to it, Padre!* (Dundee: Adelphi Press, 1994), p.59
[878] Blythe *Survival Through Faith in Adversity*, p.35
[879] Broom, Letter, 21 June 1940

precedence over any other consideration. With a growing awareness of the crisis facing Britain by late 1940, Broom viewed the war as `a very serious affair. It's obvious to anybody, with heavy shipping losses, heavy food rationing in store etc that we haven't yet begun to realise what this war is going to mean.'[880] For Broom, success in the war meant the total mobilisation of the nation's physical and mental resources. No half measures would be adequate to meet the Axis threat, `I think that all our thinking, all our energy & talent should be devoted to the country's need, & all & everything should be thrust aside.'[881] Over two years later, whilst in the North African desert having undergone the Second Battle of El Alamein, Broom's sense of national pride remained strong as he looked back to `the atmosphere of a superior society in which we once lived.'[882] Eventual victory would mean `the enslavement of Europe overthrown, freed nations emerging into the sunlight & the final demilitarisation of Germany.'[883]

However not every Christian positioned Britain's war aims in quite such grandiose terms. When the Japanese medical gunso in his prisoner of war camp asked Dr. Harold Churchill `Why are you fighting this war?', Churchill admitted to himself that he had `almost forgotten its origins', giving the generalised answer `To defend our country.' [884] For Rev John Humphries, the war was less about existing or past superior values, but whether a better society could be brought into being, `It [Normandy] looks like any other landscape and yet over the horizon men are fighting, some of them dying, for a creed. For 5 minutes or so I speculate on the worthiness of the British Empire to survive – we have no right to pray for victory unless we pledge to build a better world than this.'[885]

Nobler aims were also expressed by an anonymous K.C. in *Practical Christianity*, `We are fighting not against freedom but for freedom and against corruption.'[886] In retrospect Hugh Montefiore was, at a distance of four decades, `glad that the war had been fought, both in Europe and in Asia, and that the evils of Nazi imperialism had been conquered.'[887] John Wyatt felt that his regiment, the East

[880] Broom, Letter, 4 December 1940
[881] Ibid
[882] Broom, Letter, 16 September, 1942
[883] Broom, Letter, 27 March 1943
[884] Palmer (ed.), *Prisoners on the Kwai*, p.52
[885] IWM, 11797, Rev. John H. Humphries, *War Diary*, 17 June 1944
[886] `Is War Necessarily Wrong?', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, March 1942), p.24
[887] Montefiore, *Oh God, What Next?*, p.56

Surreys, had `let the country down' at the Fall of Singapore.'[888] In contrast, on his release, `we held our heads high with the pride of a nation which had won a war.'[889] The reception his troop ship received at the port of Esquimalt in Canada on his journey home to `good old England' made him feel `so proud to be British.'[890] For Wyatt, patriotic feeling was linked to the ebb and flow of wartime fortunes. The translation of a Protestant national religiosity into a general Christian one meant that many British Catholics like Wyatt could identify themselves fully with the great national endeavour.

Ken Tout identified that motivation for Allied soldiers was based both on an abhorrence of the Nazi regime and the desire `to achieve demobilization in a victorious country looking to a better world.'[891] He acknowledged that most soldiers had `a sub-stratum of patriotism which they found difficult in expressing' but in singing the National Anthem, they were making the explicit link between God and kingship.[892] Geoffrey Picot saw that Britain had done Germany and other nations a great service from the Normandy campaign onwards. The period between June 1944 and May 1945 had `put Britain on a unique pedestal of honour, liberated seven nations, released the German people from their own tyranny and settled the quality of life in half of Europe for fifty years, if not indefinitely.'[893] Victor Cooper, who served as a navigator and pilot with 106 Squadron of the RAF, and who before the war had offered himself for the Methodist ministry, `felt that England had had no option but to fight Hitler and that her cause was right. Nazism I saw as evil. I never felt afterwards that I had made the wrong decision - indeed some of my later experiences but strengthened my convictions.'[894]

It was not just abstract notions of patriotism or national mission which could inspire active Christians in the fight against the Axis Powers, but the English landscape, both natural and built. Tom Lawson contended that the church building `loomed large in the conceptual landscape under attack from Nazi bombers, in "deep England."'[895] This connection between church buildings and national identity was

[888] Wyatt, *No Mercy From the Japanese,* p.70
[889] Ibid, p.131
[890] Ibid, p.134
[891] Ken Tout, *The Bloody Battle for Tilly: Normandy 1944* (Stroud: Sutton, 2000), p.33
[892] Ibid, p.34
[893] Picot, *Accidental Warrior,* p.7
[894] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 12516, Private Papers of V.V. Cooper
[895] Tom Lawson, *The Church of England and the Holocaust: Christianity, Memory and Nazism* (Martlesham: Boydell & Brewer, 2006), p.12

explored by Matthew Grimley, who suggested that `One of the most pervasive images in the English art and literature of the Second World War was the country church.'[896] Churches were used as central motifs in many wartime films, including *A Canterbury Tale* (1944) and *Mrs Miniver* (1942). Lord Halifax set the church building within a wider landscape. Following the fall of France in June 1940, he took a short holiday in his native Yorkshire and noted, whilst gazing across the Vale of York:

> All the landscape of the nearer foreground was familiar – its sights, its sounds, it smells; hardly a field that did not call up some half-forgotten bit of association; the red-roofed village and nearby hamlets, gathered as it were for company round the old greystone church, where men and women like ourselves, now long dead and gone, had once knelt in worship and prayer. Here in Yorkshire was a true fragment of the undying England, like the White Cliffs of Dover, or any other part of our land that Englishmen have loved. Then the question came, is it possible that the Prussian jackboot will force its way into this countryside to tread and trample over it at will?[897]

Rev Toby Boulton was another who conflated a sense of identity with the natural landscape and a church. On board the S.S. *Sobieski* docked outside of Sierra Leone en route to an unknown destination, Boulton `discovered I was not alone in a painful nostalgic longing for an English village church filled with daffodils and primroses.'[898] Joe Blythe spent Good Friday 1943 in a prisoner of war camp having `visions of [the] English spring and the devout wending their way to Good Friday service.'[899] The ringing of the bells of St-Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square on Easter Day 1943 following victory in North Africa was heard on the wireless by troops stationed in the desert. For many this was the first sound heard from home for many months. John Broom wrote with a slight wariness of technical wizardry, `This day will be memorable on account of the ringing of church bells after nearly three years almost complete silence. I heard the bells of St. Martin-in-the-Field on the air this morning – at least they purported to come from there.'[900] However it was not just the parish church which could act as a symbol for national consciousness. Herbert Mason's

[896] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.884
[897] The Earl of Halifax, *Fulness of Days* (London: Collins, 1957), p.215
[898] Boulton, *See to it, Padre!*, p.57
[899] Blythe, *Survival Through Faith in Adversity*, p.50
[900] Broom, Letter, 25 April 1943

famous photograph of St. Paul's Cathedral, still erect amongst the smoke of the London blitz was a potent symbol of British resistance to attack. As Lord Halifax put it:

> Today St. Paul's stands as it should stand [...] clear and majestic, its great cross of gold above the City sharp-cut against the sky. Surely there is something symbolic in that. The confused mass of buildings has gone, the rubbish has gone; but what really matters remains. That is how the war is striking millions of us in Britain today.[901]

Hugh Dormer expressed a nostalgia which was noteworthy in linking essentially English (rather than British) characteristics with Roman Catholicism and the physical manifestation of religion of his former school, one with a Benedictine monastery at its heart. On a walk through the North Riding of Yorkshire before his embarkation for Normandy he recalled, `We talked of pine forests and America, of Europe and the English Character, of broadmindedness and patriotism, of Catholicism and Ampleforth.'[902] John Broom, speeding through the Scottish countryside by train on his way to board a troopship on the River Clyde, also found inspiration in the British landscape, `The fields appeared of a deeper green than those so well loved in the days of my youth in Essex, & some of the scenes fringed with a background of distant forests' empurpled mists were of exquisite loveliness.'[903] Thus the natural scenery provided a backdrop for thoughts of personal nostalgia. For John Wyatt, taken prisoner by the Japanese in February 1941 and contemplating the prospect of never seeing England again, it was his `beloved Sydenham' and his parents which left him yearning for home.[904]

Words of poetry could induce a longing for England. Rev Toby Boulton used the privilege of his position as an Anglican padre to broadcast an evening postscript after the news on board his troopship. On 30th April 1942 he had decided on Robert Browning's *Home Thoughts from Abroad*, containing the evocative words, `Oh to be in England, now that April's there [...] and after April when May follows.' He was

[901] Quoted in *Practical Christianity*, (Officers' Christian Union, November 1942), p.4
[902] Hastings, *A History of English Christianity*, p.386
[903] Broom, Letter, 21 May 1942
[904] Wyatt, *No Mercy From the Japanese*, p.70

inspired to add some lines from the sister poem, *Home Thoughts from the Sea* with mention of previous great British naval victories and ending with:

> Here and here did England help me: how can I help England?'—say,
> Whoso turns as I, this evening, turn to God to praise and pray,
> While Jove's planet rises yonder, silent over Africa.

On reading these words, he was told that the ship fell silent. Not only had he touched a nerve of longing for England in others, but he felt he had to retire to his room `with a desperate longing to be alone for a time.'[905] Therefore the feeling of nostalgia for home could be provoked by a communal act, such as the singing of *God Save the King* or the public reading of a poem.

Rev George Bassett, a Methodist chaplain, expressed this aching when in India. He felt the positive effects of nostalgia for his homeland, as even a deeply hurtful longing could reinforce one's essential humanity, `Sunday means home and home-sickness of the most acute kind. It hurt terribly, but in spite of its hurt, one must thank God for such human feelings, for after all, it is these things which give a value to life.'[906] John Broom still had the English landscape in mind after spending most of the previous three years on overseas service. As he surveyed his north German surroundings in late 1945:

> Even the landscape between Rendsberg & Kiel is superlative with its rolling grasslands studded with the fiery-tinted forests of autumn. The country roads wind very much like the fashion of English roads, & at times it's hard for one not to think one is in England, though largely speaking things are on a slightly grander scale.[907]

A further factor which enabled active Christians to identify with the national cause was the Christian rhetoric used by many political leaders. Scepticism of the political class had been strengthened by the failure of the policy of appeasement during the 1930s. John Broom admitted to his mother to having misjudged the pre-war international situation:

[905] Boulton, *See to it, Padre!*, p.62
[906] George Bassett, *This Also Happened* (London: Epworth Press, 1947), p.26
[907] Broom, Letter, 20 October 1945

> I'm sure, you especially, & millions of others in general, were pretty well contented with the Disarmament politicians. I'm sure you didn't think very highly of Churchill until this war began. I'm afraid a good many of us were thinking along those same wrong lines. I don't exempt myself from this condemnation.[908]

Leo Amery's speech in the Norway debate of 7th May 1940 which led to Chamberlain's resignation quoted the words of Cromwell, `You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing. Depart, I say, and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!'[909] Therefore, even in the act of Chamberlain's downfall and the subsequent succession of Churchill, God, via the words of the devoutly Protestant Cromwell, was invoked. Churchill stated that the `survival of Christian civilisation' was at stake in the Battle of Britain.[910] The Prime Minister was using the idea of Britain as a Christian nation to provide a sense of unity of purpose during those crucial months. It is not surprising that Churchill, despite his non-devout form of religiosity, was highly thought of by active Christian service personnel. John Broom wrote, after reading his `Give us the Tools' speech of February 1941, that `He certainly knows divine truth.'[911] This was a reference to Churchill's claim to have drawn General Wavell's attention to Matthew 7:7; `Ask, and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened unto you', in relation to the inroads made against the Italian forces in North Africa. Broom also wrote, after unfavourable references to previous military leaders who had been removed from positions of responsibility such as Gort and Ironside, `After which one fervently thanks God for Churchill, Wavell, Alexander, Montgomery & Brooke.'[912]

Churchill's belief in Britain's special destiny in the world echoed the idea of the Christian missionary nation. During the late 1930s he had developed an awareness of the importance of religious faith in shaping public attitudes. In contrast to Christians in the armed forces, Churchill saw Christianity as a tool to serve the nation, rather than the nation as an instrument for fulfilling God's will. For Keith Robbins, `He stood in

[908] Broom, Letter, 23 March 1941
[909] Michael Burleigh, *Moral Combat: A History of World War II* (London: Harper Press, 2010), p.159
[910] Robert Rhodes James, (ed.), *W.S. Churchill: Complete Speeches, 1897-1963* (New York: Chelsea House, 1974), p.6238
[911] Broom, Letter, 13 February 1941
[912] Broom, Letter, 15 June 1943

relation to the Church of England as a flying buttress – supporting but external.'[913] Michael Burleigh positioned Churchill's religiosity as a rejection of belief in Christ's divinity, `accompanied by fervent belief in some of the secular pieties of the times, such as Darwinism, progress and the civilising mission of the British Empire.'[914] However, during the war the interests of both government and British Christianity were served by this interdependence. Churchill displayed great enthusiasm for repeated National Days of Prayer, with Philip Williamson arguing that this special worship sought to place Britain on a moral high ground in the eyes of its dominions and allies.[915] Burleigh noted Churchill's penchant for religious references in his speeches, concluding that `A peculiarly English form of Christianity resonates through many of Churchill's best speeches, in which the more belligerent hymns combined with the gentleness of the Sermon on the Mount.'[916] However for Churchill religious doctrine was unimportant. There existed instead the secular idea that `if you tried your best to live an honourable life and did your duty and were faithful to friends and not unkind to the weak and poor, it did not matter much what you believed or disbelieved, all would come out right.[917]

Hugh Montefiore wrote of the effect of Churchill's speeches in spreading courage through the country, and of `the esteem and goodwill in which he was held by the population as a whole.'[918] Montefiore contrasted this with the culture of contempt which he felt was reserved for the political elite of the 1990s, reflecting on the unity of purpose which enthused the country during the war. Similarly, Toby Boulton reflected `in this Nation there is little trace of the wonderful sense of "togetherness" which upheld and inspired us through those terrible but heroic years.'[919] There is a tendency to look back on the leaders of one's formative years with a sense of respect which is unlikely to be found for those of subsequent generations. Their faults and errors tend to be overlooked and their successes magnified. However, in some cases this yearning for the values of national purpose of the 1940s was not always accompanied by a desire to display the trappings of war service. Dr Harold Churchill,

[913] Keith Robbins, *History, Religion and Identity in Modern Britain* (London: Hambledon Press, 1993), p.195
[914] Burleigh, *Moral Combat*, p.163
[915] Williamson, `National Days of Prayer', p.347
[916] Burleigh, *Moral Combat*, p.163
[917] Ibid
[918] Montefiore, *Oh God, What Next?*, p.37
[919] Boulton, *See to it, Padre!*, p.100

never wore his war medals at Remembrance Sunday services after the war, and John Broom's five medals and ribbons remained in their wax wrapping until his death.[920]

However, not all leading politicians were held in high esteem by Christians. Rev Ellison Platt displayed a surprisingly approving attitude to a broadcast by Lord Haw-Haw which provoked `mirth [as he] ripped the pants off "his sartorial elegance, the Right Honourable Anthony Eden"', thus indicating that in this instance patriotism was still coloured by strong political and class feelings.[921] In contrast, John Broom continued to show approval of the actions of Churchill and Eden right through to V.E. Day, despite subsequently voting Labour at the landslide election of 1945:

> Possibly you tootled along to a service this morning & afterwards listened in to the radio, especially to Churchill's broadcast […] The dispute with Russia over Poland must cause him a great deal of worry & take away some of the joy of military victory. Molotov is a pretty deep merchant, & I'm glad that Eden refused to accept his ideas.[922]

Therefore, a distinction was drawn between the need for national leadership in wartime, and the qualities needed to nurse Britain back to post-war social health. Broom praised the fair-minded way in which he thought the Attlee government handled the demobilisation of troops, `by its cool adherence to the very fair conditions of Bevin's Release Scheme. How many governments would have been frightened into giving way to popular opinion?'[923] He also wrote in defence of the Labour administration that it was `no good blaming the government' for continued food shortages in Britain.[924] Broom had experienced what he thought as weak leadership in 1930s, thus approved of the Churchill and Attlee administrations, both of which are still considered high points in British governmental history. For him, wartime leadership was not a party-political matter, it was the appropriateness of that leadership in addressing the wartime and post-war needs of the country that counted.

Rev Toby Boulton felt an increased sense of national unity caused by millions being called up for military service, `A common uniform in time of war creates a bond at a deep level and one longs for something similar to bind the whole nation together

[920] Palmer (ed.), *Prisoners on the Kwai*, p.6
[921] Duggan (ed.), *Padre in Colditz*, p.40
[922] Broom, Letter, 8 May 1945
[923] Broom, Letter, 15 September 1945
[924] Broom, Letter, 9 October 1945

in peace time.'[925] However it would be wrong to state that every Christian felt part of a unified people. John Broom indicated some class resentment in stating `I think that everything will have to be sacrificed in order to win this war. It will hit some people like a blow in the solar plexus, but it won't affect people of our station in life.[926] By September 1945 his view was that the British were `a short-sighted, unthinking people.'[927] Rev. John Humphries echoed this nuanced view, considering that ` No doubt we are the people but the nation which has produced the world's best fighting men has also produced hooliganism in Sheffield and Liverpool and race-gangs in Glasgow – depressing!'[928]

John Wolffe concluded that `British patriotism had lost much of that fervent association with religion that had caused many to link it with ultimate moral and spiritual claims.'[929] However, among Christian service personnel, whilst their religion had not lost its fervour, patriotism had been largely reinforced as the moral superiority of the allied cause had become increasingly unchallengeable as Nazi methods of warfare and genocide unfolded. However, the war exposed qualities within fellow citizens which they found less than admirable. By the end of the war, Christian service personnel had a clear sense of multiple identities, as Christians, as Britons and as members of a military formation.

Love Thine Enemies?

In the minds of many active Christian service men and women there appeared to be a dichotomy between the exhortation in Matthew 5:44 to `love thine enemies', and the evil, sometimes satanic light in which Hitler's regime was portrayed. Furthermore, for those who had contact with the Japanese as prisoners of war, this edict became even more challenging due to the brutal treatment many received at the hands of their captors. By the twentieth century Germany had replaced France as the nation against which Britain defined its own sense of self. However, distinction must be drawn between views British Christians expressed about Hitler, which were universally negative, and perspectives on the German people in general, which showed marked differences depending on the Christian's experience of war. Gallup polls

[925] Boulton, *See to it, Padre!*, p.17
[926] Broom, Letter, 4 December 1940
[927] Broom, Letter, 15 September 1945
[928] IWM, 11797, Rev. John H. Humphries, *War Diary*, 12 July 1944
[929] Wolffe, *God and Greater Britain*, p.253

indicated altered perceptions between 1939 and 1945 as the identified enemy shifted from Hitler and his regime at the start of the war, to the whole of the German people by the end of the war.[930] However these polls were conducted on the Home Front, amongst those who had little or no direct experience of Germans. Christian service men and women, many of whom encountered Germans as combatants, captors, captives and eventually subjugated peoples, expressed a more complex and shifting view of the German people.

Some Christian commentators sought to demonise the Nazi regime. The novelist A.A. Milne, who had declared as a pacifist in 1934 but then retracted this position to serve as an officer in the Home Guard, characterized Hitler's Germany as `the Devil, Anti-Christ, the negation of every spiritual value which separates mankind from the rest of creation.'[931] The *Church Times* wrote of `demonic forces of evil which have captured the soul of a people.'[932] Leslie Weatherhead referred to Germany as a sick nation led by a sick man, and that it was the Christian's duty to understand the cause of this sickness `so we shall be able to preserve our own minds from the poison of bitterness.'[933] However this was not a view universally expressed in Christian circles. Ernest James, Moderator of the Congregational Union of England and Wales, stated in 1939 that `the people of this country and empire carry no hatred in their hearts for the people of Germany and Italy.'[934] Archbishop Lang spoke in the House of Lords on 1st September 1939, `we have no thoughts of enmity towards the German people. We believe that many, perhaps most of them, are as opposed to war as we are, but they cannot speak their minds.'[935] Renowned historian Herbert Butterfield, a lifelong Methodist, linked flaws in the German polity to the absence of a questioning expression of faith, `perhaps the greatest of misfortunes of Germany lies in the fact that no phenomenon quite like English Nonconformity existed in the German states in modern times.'[936]

[930] Weight, *Patriots,* p.104
[931] A.A. Milne, *War Aims Unlimited* (London: Methuen, 1941), p.12
[932] *Church Times*, 24 Jan 1941 p. 48
[933] Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud*, p.87
[934] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues,* p.100
[935] HL Deb 01 September 1939, vol 114 cols 913-23
[936] Herbert Butterfield, `Christianity and Western Ideas' in Festival of Britain, *The Church and the Festival Souvenir Programme,* (London, 1951), p.10

For many, it was important to draw this distinction between abhorrence of the Nazi philosophy and a hatred of the people fighting in its cause. Hugh Lyon, headmaster of Rugby School addressed this difference in a book designed to respond to questions raised during padre's hours.[937] For Lyon, hate caused more violence to one's own nature than ever it could do harm to an enemy. Vengeance was a wasteful emotion, and people needed to differentiate between the hatred of Nazism as a philosophy, and hatred of its exponents, even Hitler, `Hitler has done devilish things, but he is not the devil.'[938] This message was echoed by Anglican Captain Simon Frazer, a troop leader with the 15/19 Hussars, whose conception of the enemy was as an abstraction that needed removing from the earth, rather than individuals or a collective to hate, `In a war soldiers were trained to destroy the enemy, not to hate them. There is a difference.'[939]

Colonel R.G. Pearse felt that the German people of past generations `were being prepared for that which came and therefore Nazism had a comparatively, easy conquest upon the minds and affairs of the nation.'[940] Therefore Pearse saw Nazi philosophy as deeply woven into the German psyche. Rear Admiral G.B. Allen, whilst agreeing that the seeds of Nazism were sown over a period of years, went further in ascribing the philosophy as being a creation of the devil. The world had been presented with `not merely with a long prepared and determined effort at world-wide territorial conquest, but with a satanically-inspired attack on the Lord Jesus Christ and His Kingdom.'[941]

Active Christians in the armed services frequently mirrored this conflation of the Nazis with the devil. After Dunkirk, on seeing some of the survivors who had been transferred to his RAMC training camp in Leeds, John Broom wrote of the `sheer incomparable devilishness of the Germans.'[942] He returned to this theme in 1943 whilst on service in Italy:

[937] P. Hugh B. Lyon, `Christ said `Love your Enemies: How can a Christian Love Hitler?' in Ronald Selby Wright (ed.) *Soldiers Also Asked* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp.37-44
[938] Ibid, p.42
[939] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Simon Frazer
[940] R.G. Pearse, *The Bible and War* (London, Williams and Norgate, 1941), p.56
[941] Rear Admiral G.B. Allen, R.N., `Nazi or Christian Witness', *Practical Christianity* (Officers' Christian Union, March 1943), p.25
[942] Broom, Letter, 5 June 1940

> In Naples somebody shot a German & as a reprisal 300 women & children have had their hands cut off & other equally devilish acts have been committed on a fair scale. Small wonder that almost every Italian one meets execrates all Germans & Mussolini. From the lips of several Ities I have learned of the violent ends of their fathers & brothers at the hands of the Germans, & I have seen some of the evidence of his insensate cruelty directed against the women folk.[943]

This view then turned to semi-pity on viewing a collection of Germans who had been captured. Significantly Broom saw only `a few' as seeming to be fanatics:

> Some were hopelessly depressed, almost all were unkempt & a few had the brutal merciless eye of the Nazi fanatic [...] it would have been a pathetic spectacle but for the memory of what unspeakable cruelties have been committed by them & in their name.[944]

Norman Kirby wrote of German prisoners `who expressed relief at being captured [and] grim humour and self-mockery, but remorse was totally lacking in their conversation and demeanour.'[945] Thus for Broom and Kirby, their initial impression of German prisoners of war was those of the `other', people a different mental and cultural outlook to them. However, by 1945 it was possible to discern a distinct shift in Broom's view of the ordinary German. In a semi-lamentation for a great fallen nation he wrote `There's no doubt that Germany was streets ahead of England in engineering, architecture & in the quality of everything they did & made.'[946] Broom found it difficult to continue his earlier view of Germans as devilish. Moreover, he berated his mother for her unchristian attitude towards them:

> I find it frightfully difficult to understand your views on the Germans. Apart from your unchristian attitude (Love your enemies: I find it quite impossible to worry overmuch about the dear Germans) you seem to be singularly dense in appreciating the food situation out here. [947]

Germans were not to be judged as a nation, but as individuals:

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[943] Broom, Letter, 10 October 1943
[944] Broom, Letter, 28 May 1943
[945] Kirby, *1100 Miles with Monty*, p.128
[946] Broom, Letter, 20 October 1945
[947] Broom, Letter, 1 January 1946

> Try, if you will, to think of the Germans as individuals or as member of family "cells", not as a nation whose economic frustrations in the closed markets of the world led them to find the outlet for their inferiority complex by a policy of self-justification leading to all the horrors of the Nazi prison camps & brutal war.[948]

Initially Norman Kirby found average Germans `war-weary, apathetic civilians' but felt himself unable to trust any of them.[949] Subsequently, when working alongside German generals in the reconstruction of the country, he was unable to sustain his attitude of hostility and admitted to similar feelings of pity as Broom towards human suffering. Rather than the German housewife, Kirby's sympathy was with the younger generation completely disorientated by Hitler's defeat and demise, having been brought up amidst an onslaught of Nazi propaganda. However, whilst Kirby was able to feel Christian forgiveness, he was unable to forget the horrors so recently committed in the name of Germany:

> [T]here was [...] an unseemliness, a loss of dignity in this all-too hasty transition from foe to friend. We had so recently seen the victims of Nazi holocaust and had forged deep and lasting relationships with those who had suffered and fought against tyranny. What would they think of us? Yet this was "peace".'[950]

Yet Kirby appeared tormented by the contrast between the kindness of the ordinary German, especially as he convalesced in hospital, and the `savage necessity' of fighting a war for the previous six years.[951] In an echo of the War Guilt clause in the Treaty of Versailles, Kirby's view accorded with Montgomery's proclamation, *To The Population of the British Area in Germany* of 10th June 1945. Montgomery asserted that the miseries heaped upon nations which had experienced total war `were found by the German nation: every nation is responsible for its rulers, and while they were successful you cheered and laughed.'[952] However there would be forgiveness as

[948] Ibid
[949] Kirby, *1100 Miles with Monty*, p.142
[950] Ibid, p.197
[951] Ibid, p.203
[952] Montgomery, *Memoirs*, p.371

the British are `Christian forgiving people', alongside teaching the defeated people the awareness of responsibility for their former actions.

According to Michael Snape, `British Roman Catholics were keenly aware of the existence of their many co-religionists in Germany and of their difficult relationship with the Nazi regime.'[953] This enabled sympathy to be shown towards the suffering of the German people. Captain Alan Harris of the Royal Engineers, a Roman Catholic, expressed compassion for German Catholics near Münster who had seen `more than a little of the traditional soldierly brutality and licentiousness' yet who had made decorative preparations for the procession of the Blessed Sacrament.[954]

Protestants too could express sympathy with their German foes. Christopher Bulteel, who had been temporarily taken prisoner by a Herman Goering Division, found his captors displayed `cheerfulness and fortitude' as shells fell around them, `The Germans seemed almost to be enjoying themselves.' [955] In a subsequent discussion with one of the German corporals holding Bulteel and his group, he found him a `charming and intelligent young man' who held similar views about the relative superiority of German troops over Italians as British troops did towards the Americans.[956] In this instance mutual Anglo-Saxon admiration overcame any sense of discord between the two protagonists. When the situation was reversed, and Bulteel found himself looking after German prisoners on a Tunisian beach, he was impressed by the way they organised themselves within their cage. As they were no longer a threat and had nowhere to escape, `We spent many friendly evenings with [the officers], drinking the local wine together.'[957] Similarly Clifford Lawson `met very few [men] who hated Axis soldiers.'[958] However this was not the case for Geoffrey Picot. He saw two dead Germans in Normandy not as human souls taken from the world, but as representatives of something horrible:

> Over one hedge I peeped and saw my first dead Germans. Two lads of about nineteen had been killed by a grenade. I looked at them and shuddered. A limb was twisted the wrong way round, a stomach was ripped open, a face looked

[953] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.191
[954] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), Department of Documents, 1359, Sir Alan Harris CBE,
[955], *Something About a Soldier*, p.123
[956] Ibid, p.125
[957] Ibid, p.147
[958] MAC Archive, Robinson, Clifford Lawson

> ghastly in death. Not long before they would have been goose-stepping their jack-booted way around Nuremburg and other cities to the frenzied applause of the crowds. Hitler would have been boasting of their valour and people in the democracies would have been trembling.[959]

Thus, British Christian conception of the German nation, and the Germans as people was complex, shifting over time even within the same individual. Many held the view that Germany was the necessary demonic counterpoint to Britain's Christian mission. Anglican Harold McLean, a Warrant Officer in Bomber Command, recalled `I did not relish the suffering we put upon the German population, but I did not have any feelings of guilt.'[960] Significant differences are also in evidence between personal experiences of individuals or groups of Germans and the generalised perception of the nation. There was a broad initial agreement amongst active Christians that the Germans, or at least their leadership and its philosophy, were of the devil. This transmitted itself into a hatred of atrocities committed by Germans, moving on to a sympathy for civilians encountered after VE Day, but never amounting to a total trust of German values. Rarely was there any hint of Christian warmth to this enemy from service personnel. Hatred, grudging respect and pity formed the Christian's view of their German enemy. This perspective of an `otherness' provided justification for conduct of the war including the carpet bombing of German towns and cities. This theme will be explored in the chapter six.

Given the extremes of inhumanity experienced by troops kept captive by the Japanese between 1942 and 1945, it proved straightforward to view this particular enemy as an `other.' The Japanese government did not abide by the Geneva Convention and therefore many acts of barbarity were visited upon allied troops unfortunate enough to have been captured in late 1941 and early 1942. Similarly, those who encountered the Japanese in a combatant capacity felt little sympathy or affinity for those in the opposing forces. However, in the face of the inhuman treatment experienced by prisoners of war, many Christians made a great effort to find common bonds of humanity by their captors.

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[959] Picot, *Accidental Warrior*, p.61

[960] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Harold George McLean

Private Fred Cox, a Roman Catholic in the East Surrey Regiment, recorded soon after his release, `The vast majority of the Japanese I came into contact with during those three and a half years showed complete indifference to our welfare […] some were callous and downright cruel.'[961] Nevertheless Cox did recognise that there were a handful of guards with a `spark of humanity.'[962] This view was echoed by Captain John Leech, who recalled three different camp guards who brought extra food, one of them a Korean Christian who asked Leech for a copy of the Psalms and gave him rice in return.[963] Douglas Firth recounted a conversation with a Christian guard whilst working on the Death Railway after the latter had noticed a small cross around Firth's neck. This `gave me a special boost of spirit that I needed.'[964]

John Wyatt noted occasional acts of Christian brotherhood, such as when a Japanese officer on the Death Railway gave him some water after an exceptionally hot day and said, `Me Christian. Am velly solly. You go back to campo.'[965] However, his view of the Japanese military as a whole was formed after witnessing the Alexandra Hospital Massacre. For Wyatt that episode meant that the `Imperial Japanese Army forfeited its right to claim to be representing a civilised country.'[966] On seeing a German submarine as he left Singapore Harbour on a Hell Ship, he felt less hatred for the Germans than the Japanese.[967] Ultimately, Wyatt found himself unable to forgive, even six decades later.

In contrast, Captain William Frankland, an Anglican in the RAMC, thought it his simple duty as a Christian to forgive those who had wronged him.[968] Despite many beatings witnessed and received at the hands of Japanese and Korean guards during his three and a half years of captivity, Frankland, a vicar's son, continued to hold no ill-will towards his captors, although this was tempered by a sense of detachment. In an echo of the thoughts of Hugh Lyon, Frankland concluded, `You must not go on hating people; it does you harm but it does not do them any harm. Also, I am a Christian who was taught to love, not hate. That's how I live my life. […] You feared

[961] Ellie Taylor, *Faith, Hope and Rice: Private Cox's Account of Captivity and the Death Railway* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2016), p.130
[962] Ibid
[963] Captain John Leech, `In Japanese Hands', *Practical Christianity*, January 1946, p.6
[964] Firth, *Spirit of the River Kwai*, p.18
[965] Wyatt, *No Mercy from the Japanese,* p.85
[966] Ibid, p.66
[967] Ibid, p.98
[968] William Frankland, Private Papers, Family Archive

the Japanese […] I feared them. I would not use the word hate.'[969] However Frankland thought it contradictory that a Japanese guard at Blakang Mati prison camp could be a Christian, whilst at the same time being a member of the Imperial Japanese Army, for whose members Emperor Hirohito was the Son of Heaven.[970]

Joe Blythe reflected on leaving Japan in September 1945 that the `Japanese were a cruel race of people' having previously predicted `a catastrophe is in store for the world if ever this `Cruel Race' manages to overrun it.'[971] However an act of kindness did show that `not all Japs were bad.'[972] Even Ernest Gordon, whose faith deepened whilst in captivity, witnessed a particularly savage beating, feeling `It was hard to love such a man as the commandant.'[973] However Gordon did form part of a group which offered water and comfort to a trainload of wounded Japanese soldiers who had been left to rot by their own men. There were some Christians who could find elements of humanity in their captors. William Allchin, a Quaker officer who later campaigned for peace and reconciliation, found many camp guards were Christians, Buddhists or Shintoists, `at all events they certainly weren't sadists.'[974] For Allchin, much of the subsequent negative portrayal of the Japanese stemmed from the fact that there had been a reversal of imperial roles, with whites no longer `lording it' over Asians.[975] Albert Taylor concurred that there were Christians to be found among the camp guards, one indicating his faith by saying "Cross. Me" to Taylor.[976]

Rev. Rupert Godfrey amplified the view during a camp sermon that Christianity needed to apply to everyone, British and Japanese alike:

> We cannot segregate one section of humanity from another and say that we will behave Christianly towards one lot and un-Christianly towards the other. […] One therefore hopes that when an officer is heard declaring that he has lost `all Christian feeling' towards such and such – one hopes that consciously or unconsciously he is talking through his hat.[977]

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[969] Ibid
[970] Ibid
[971] Blythe, *Survival Through Faith in Adversity,* p.74 and p.37
[972] Ibid, p.71
[973] Gordon, *Miracle on the Kwai,* p.194
[974] William Allchin et.al., *The Light of Experience* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1977), p.138
[975] Ibid, p.139
[976] IWM 19912, Papers of Albert Taylor
[977] Godfrey, *The Years that the Locusts have Eaten,* p.107

Christian responses to the horrors of Japanese captivity were varied from Allchin's Quaker imperative to find some good in everyone and Frankland's position of general forgiveness, to those like Blythe and Wyatt who could acknowledge individual acts of humanity within the context of an overall cruel and inhumane national ethos. Both Blythe, a former coalminer, and Wyatt, a future postman, were less forgiving of acts of cruelty by those of fellow ordinary rank than those of officer class. The inner tension between a general forgiveness of the Japanese and a specific act of Christian forgiveness is encapsulated in the debate between Bombardier Stanley Warren, creator of the Changi Murals in the Roberts Barracks hospital, and his Anglican chaplain, Rev Chambers, over the wording of the nativity scene. Whilst Warren wanted the words from the King James Bible to adorn the mural, `*Glory to God in the highest. On earth peace, goodwill to all men'*, Chambers insisted on the nuance of the Vulgate version of `*Peace on Earth to Men of Goodwill*.'[978] Thus whilst Warren sought to impart a general Christian goodwill to all, for Chambers this was too much, and the glad tidings of the Christmas story were limited to those who would reciprocate that goodwill, clearly excluding their Japanese captors.

For those Christians who encountered the Japanese as combatants, a similar revulsion against their barbarism was evident, alongside episodes of shared humanity. Frank Infanit, a medic with the West Kent Regiment, observed an `ascetic and peace-loving' chaplain, Rev Roy Randolph, helping another officer to make a booby-trap.[979] Infanit remarked, `I don't understand, you're a man of God', to which Randolph replied, `Well, eh, after Kohima I had to go and look at one of our men and he had been tied up and tortured with wire. Then I decided that God had forsaken the Japanese.'[980] As Lieutenant Bruce Hayllar convalesced in a military hospital at Dimapur, a wounded Japanese soldier, captured in battle, was placed next to him. Hayllar was told to keep watch on him and recalled `I remember that man. He was just like us. He was just my age, about nineteen or something, and he wasn't responsible. He could not talk. He lay under my blanket with me. We knew we were trying to help each other but that was it.'[981] The soldier died later that night. Despite this experience, throughout much of his later life, Hayllar refused to buy Japanese cars and found it

[978] Gilles, *The Barbed Wire University*, p.239
[979] Keane, *Road of Bones*, p.419
[980] Ibid
[981] Ibid, p.358

difficult to give communion to Japanese Christians in his ministry as an Anglican clergyman. Eventually, Hayllar was changed by a single experience, `I had to baptise a baby and it was half Japanese. That cured me, because I said, "Don't be so stupid. This child isn't to blame for all of this."'[982]

The evidence from active Christians indicates an overall less condemnatory tone of the Japanese than that reserved for the Germans. It was noted by Major P. de B.V.W. William-Powlett of the 3rd Royal Hussars that, in Japanese camps:

> Those do best, who are kindly, widely tolerant, and interested in their fellow man, who have a steady faith in the fundamental goodness of Providence, and who realise that despite appearances mankind is gradually learning a better way of life. They are those who hold high the royal destiny of man.[983]

A higher proportion of those who survived would have drawn on this quasi-religious positivity and would be less likely to carry decades of hatred and bitterness inside them. Active Christians attempted a greater understanding of the actions of the Japanese than those of the Germans. There was a degree of self-protection and self-interest in this forgiveness. For example, Eric Lomax carried decades of internal bitterness, and eventually found peace through reconciliation with his former tormentors, whereas for William Frankland the forgiveness was straightforward and immediate.[984]

Conclusion

The development of notions of a British, but usually more specifically English, national character between the wars had appropriated Anglicanism as part of that identity and had further incorporated other Protestant Churches into this conception. Despite competing regional and class identities, the British nation fought the war with a marked unity of identity and purpose. Roman Catholics were also able to ascribe to this national identity, due to the efforts of their church hierarchy to align more closely with the British state, and, for some, the clear credentials of the history of English Catholicism.

[982] Ibid, p.448
[983] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 4495, Papers of P. de B.V.W. William-Powlett,
[984] Lomax, *The Railway Man*; William Frankland, Private Papers

Whilst active Christians continued to maintain a primary identification with their faith, the merging of a national identity based on notions of fair play and sticking up for the underdog, alongside a clarity of purpose in confronting a devilish enemy, made it straightforward for most Christians to support the British war effort. A better world on earth would result from the war, thus resulting in a salvation for the peoples suffering under the regimes of the Axis Powers. For some Christians, the war acted as punishment for the nation having turned its back on God, and therefore provided redemptive opportunities. However, this notion became less marked as the grim reality of the fighting and destruction became apparent.

Britons who considered themselves active Christians entered the war with a defined sense of those dual identities. The evidence suggests that they rarely, if ever, had to choose between their faith and their country. Britain's war aims were presented in a way that allowed Christians to conceptualise themselves as doing God's work. Therefore, being required to surrender their freedom, time, and possibly lives, in the service of their nation did not necessitate a lessening of allegiance to their faith.

Christians' love of Britain came to be expressed in a less assertive manner as the war progressed and was given frequent expression through music and memories of landscape. Despite the presentation of the German and Japanese regimes as manifestations of evil, it was clear that for many active Christians, a broad distaste for actions being perpetrated in the name of the peoples of those countries could be put to one side, and individual episodes of empathy, tolerance and understanding could occur. A common Christian faith was often at the heart of these incidents. Often, the worse the treatment at the hands of the enemy, particularly in Far East prisoner of war camps, the greater the capacity of Christians to delve into their faith to provide the psychological resilience to survive.

Therefore, despite an additional identity of Britishness, active Christians did not experience conflict with their distinctiveness as believers. Indeed, the rhetoric issued to support war aims, particularly against the Nazis, often provided an extra dimension to that faith. Christians' acceptance of this alignment of national and religious identities, and the accompanying sense of sacred purpose demonstrates that, following the war, the British Churches would experience a return from active service of men and women with a resolute and resilient faith.

Chapter Six – Ethical and Moral Issues of the Second World War

Introduction

Although, as established in the previous chapter, the British war effort was framed within a Christian context and required little effort on the part of most active Christians to identify with its aims, the often-unpleasant execution of the war meant that believers were presented with a series of ethical challenges. From the complexities of the justification for taking another soldier's life in armed combat, through to the targeting of civilians using obliteration bombing tactics, the conduct of war could, at times, seem to challenge the biblical precepts of, `Thou Shalt Not Kill' and `Love Thine Enemy.' This chapter will argue that Christians were able, with the support of a clear theological lead from the British Churches, to find accommodation with, and accountability for, the results of their actions. An increased range of specialist and technical roles available in the armed forces compared to the First World War meant that Christians could often avoid direct personal agency in the act of killing. For those charged with this responsibility, the taking of life took place along a spectrum of intimacy, from anonymised long-range artillery bombardment through to desperate hand-to-hand combat.

In the judgement of Alan Allport, the `twin prospects of killing and being killed frightened and fascinated soldiers above all things in the Second World War.'[985] Joanna Bourke agreed on the primacy of the requirement to kill, `The characteristic act of men in war is not dying, it is killing.'[986] Research undertaken by Alan Robinson on advice sought from chaplains led him to conclude that the former weighed more heavily in the thoughts of those on active service, as men were `more concerned about being killed than killing.'[987] The starkest moral issue which a largely civilian and conscripted military force had to confront was the possibility of having to take the life of another human. Men came to terms with this in a range of ways. Some struggled whilst others thrived, finding an authenticity and primitive energy in combat. Sean Longden suggested, `For most, killing was an unpleasant necessity, required to ensure survival. However, others relished the violence.'[988] Michael Snape argued that army

[985] Allport, *Browned Off* , p.204
[986] Joanna Bourke *An Intimate History of Killing* (London: Granta Books, 1999), p.1
[987] Robinson, *Chaplains at War*, p.156
[988] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, p.1

chaplains helped men to mediate the moral complexities of taking lives more successfully than in the First World War and that, at least for chaplains in the Second World War, `the rhetoric of hate was avoided and that the principles of the just war were applied.'[989] Therefore, as Joanna Bourke argued, `An insistence upon personal moral integrity was typical of those engaged in fighting.'[990] Whilst civilians were keen to exonerate servicemen for their actions, combatants were anxious to accept and reconcile themselves to their own agency.

The question of whether killing was done with relish, reluctance or revulsion is a contested one. Reactions to the taking of human life could be contradictory and complex within the same person. For active Christians, who had been brought up to follow the Ten Commandments, the moral challenge of taking human life was the starkest issue which many would encounter. Having been repeatedly exhorted in church and Sunday School to follow the sixth commandment, `Thou Shalt Not Kill', many Christians were placed in roles whose central purpose was the extinguishing of life. However, in the army at least, the killing was done by a minority of people, with there being a ratio of around twelve rear area troops to one combatant during this war, therefore for many it was rare to see men being killed, although not unusual to see them dying. Despite this, Joanna Bourke argued that the extent to which combatants insisted on collective responsibility for death was striking.[991]

Fighting and Killing

The British Churches had expounded a generally pacificistic, and sometimes pacifist message during the 1930s. Anti-war sentiment had cut across many lines; political allegiance, social class and gender, as well as Christian denomination. Purist pacifism, the belief that war was wrong in any circumstance, had a strong Christian tradition and socialist pedigree. According to Richard Overy, `in the 1920s and 1930s to be a Christian socialist pacifist was an unremarkable amalgam.'[992] The 1935 Peace Ballot organised by the League of Nations Union had attracted nearly 12 million voters and demonstrated high levels of support for multilateral disarmament. In addition,

[989] Snape, *God and the British Soldier* , p.187
[990] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing* p.7
[991] Ibid
[992] Overy, *The Morbid Age*, p.223

nearly 2.5 million people had stated their disagreement with any military intervention to stop one nation attacking another.[993]

The generation that went to war in 1939 had been well-schooled on the international situation and attempts to preserve peace. The LNU had been successful in persuading most local education authorities to endorse its work, with around 200 LEAs supplying its material to their schools and 145 issuing advice to headteachers covering the inclusion of the League's instruction within the existing curriculum.[994] As Helen McCarthy stated, `If there was one place in interwar Britain where the fact of the League's existence was hard to miss, it was the classroom.'[995] By 1933, its membership stood at over one million. However, for some of the absolutist pacifist tendency, including organisations within most Christian denominations, the League, with its emphasis on international coercion to bring errant nations into line, did not go far enough. For Overy, the impact of Christianity on the campaign against war was huge, with religious analogies implicit in the language and values of the absolutist pacifist cause.[996] In the 1930s the Council of Christian Pacifist Groups came to represent those from Nonconformist denominations who totally renounced war. In addition, some Anglicans, such as Canon Dick Sheppard, founder of the Peace Pledge Union, were prominent advocates of the pacifist cause. In 1934 Bishop Barnes of Birmingham, addressing the National Peace Congress in his cathedral, called on Britain to disarm unilaterally.[997] However, this was not a universal view amongst the Anglican hierarchy, with both Lang and Temple reserving the right to support the use of force in extreme circumstances. Indeed, Arthur Ponsonby, a sponsor of Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union, felt that most Christians did not accept the absolutist pacifist message.[998] Despite these differences of opinion, the Christian churches espoused an overwhelmingly anti-war message.

Despite the publicity generated by anti-war groups in the 1930s, when conscription was introduced in 1939, just 2.2% of the first batch of those eligible for service registered as conscientious objectors, and by July 1940, following the fall of

[993] Martin Ceadel. `The First British Referendum: The Peace Ballot, 1934-5', *English Historical Review*, 377 (1980), 810-839
[994] Helen McCarthy, *The British People and the League of Nations: Democracy, Citizenship and Internationalism, c.1918-1948* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011), p.104
[995] Ibid, p.104
[996] Overy *The Morbid Age*, pp.223-7
[997] *The Times*, 26 June 1934, p.16
[998] R.A. Jones, *Arthur Ponsonby: The Politics of Life* (London: Christopher Helm, 1989), p.202

France, this proportion had fallen to just 0.5%.[999] Thus the 20% of Peace Ballot voters of 1935 who had expressed disagreement with the concept of military intervention *under any circumstance* had translated to fewer than 1% of eligible men refusing to serve in armed combat by the middle of 1940. Nevertheless, the fact remained that the generation that entered the armed services had grown up with a broad pacificistic message at school, in their churches and from many leading politicians. To then be thrust into a situation in which killing was part of the role, either directly or complicitly, would have required some moral realignments and heavy consciences for many men and women. As Ian Machin stated, `In spite of the challenge and stimulation of war, Christians were often reluctant to be engaged in it and regarded its outbreak as the failure of a careful and persistent peace policy.'[1000] This reluctance was overcome and Machin acknowledged that when war did break out, little Church opposition was voiced and `The overwhelming majority of Christians engaged either actively or passively in the fight.'[1001] Nevertheless, Graham Dawson's idea of British heroic masculinity, embodied in a military role, was one that did not sit easy with British Christians reared on the peace-loving sensibilities of the 1930s.[1002] Men tried to mediate what Lucy Noakes saw as a `dominant idea of masculinity within British national identity: that of the male solider' with a fundamental belief that relishing the prospect of killing was wrong. [1003]

This chapter will examine the message given by mainstream church leaders at the beginning of the war, and the ways in which those messages, allied to the pacifistic tone of public rhetoric of the 1930s, were mediated into a spectrum of responses by men of an active Christian faith who were called upon to take life in battle. The religious arguments for Britain's engagement in the Second World War were broadly that the war would promote civilisation and nurture high idealism; that virtues such as courage, strength, patience and self-sacrifice could only flourish during times of crisis, and that materialism would be swept aside as entire nations underwent a spiritual reawakening.[1004] Killing in war could be justified if it prevented a greater evil, and

[999] Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914-1945* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), p.294
[1000] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues*, p.110
[1001] Ibid, p.111
[1002] Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994)
[1003] Noakes, *War and the British*, p.17
[1004] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p.271

individual soldiers could not be regarded as murderers if they were acting under legitimate authority in the interests of their community. Forgiveness of enemies, as advocated by St. Paul in Romans 12, only applied once those enemies had shown repentance.

For some at the very highest levels of the Anglican church, reconciling the Christian message with warfare was not easy. Bishop Henson of Durham wrote of his confusion in trying to come to a clear message to preach to troops in 1939, `The Sermon on the Mount haunts the mind, though it does not, and cannot, control the life.'[1005] William Temple attempted to resolve this confusion by articulating the view that, since the sacrifice of one's life was not the greatest injury to suffer, as it represented the fulfilment of an individual's personality, it could not be the greatest injury to inflict.[1006] W.R. Matthews, Dean of St. Paul's Cathedral, wrote of the `unavoidable tension between the values of the Kingdom of God and the values of civilisation' but that, in accepting the benefits of secular civilisation, the Christian becomes responsible for its defence and is `not authorised to repudiate those civil obligations to which he has made himself morally liable.'[1007] Further down the ecclesiastical ladder, Rev. Rupert Godfrey, Curate at St. George's, Edgbaston, preached Christian Pacifism until September 1940 when the `clutching claws of the German werewolf' compelled him to accept that the pacifist cause had become untenable, to repudiate his previous statements and to urge prayers for Britain's cause.[1008] Therefore the Church of England gave its approval to the war, providing Anglicans in the armed services with the reassurance that killing could be undertaken as a regrettable necessity as part of a Christian's duty to society as a whole.

The Nonconformist Churches, despite containing voluble pre-war pacifist parties, also gave a clear line to their members. In the spring of 1940, a statement on *Baptist Action in the Present Crisis* was circulated stating that failing to come to the defence of Poland would have been a `moral surrender.'[1009] Nonconformist theologian Leslie Weatherhead had experienced, like many, a vacillation of views during the

[1005] Herbert Hensley Henson, *Retrospect of an Unimportant Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950) vol. 3, p.233
[1006] William Temple, *A Conditional Justification of War* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1940), pp.32-4
[1007] W.R. Matthews, `War: The Christian Dilemma', in *The Spectator*, 10 February 1939, p.10
[1008] Godfrey, *The Years that the Locusts have Eaten*, p.6
[1009] Ernest A. Payne, *The Baptist Union: A Short History* (London: The Carey Knightsgate Press, 1958), p.216

1930s on the justness of war. Therefore, having come down squarely on the side of the Christian case for fighting the war, he was able to contend, `I do not think the Conscientious Objector is the only person with a sensitive conscience.'[1010] Furthermore, the issue of military service could not be reduced to a simple binary polarity of right or wrong choices, `The Christian Englishman […] whether he decides for pacifism or national service, must do *some* wrong in order to do that which he believes to be right.'[1011]

Other churchmen referred to biblical and historical precedent on warfare. Rev J.W. Coutts, a Church of Scotland minister, cited the story of the Roman centurion in Matthew 8:5-13 not being chastised for his military status, and stated there were no examples in the early Christian Church of members being disciplined for pursuing a military career.[1012] Indeed it was only since the era of the Reformation that a Christian repugnance had emerged against wars fought for national aggrandisement or imperial ambition. For Coutts, it was enough to state that individual soldiers were in no way morally culpable for acts of warfare carried out under order. The 37th of the 39 Articles of the Church of England stated `It is lawful for Christian men, at the commandment of the Magistrate, to wear weapons, and serve in the wars.' Similarly, the Church of Scotland's Westminster Confession of Faith removed the responsibility for the decision to bear arms from the individual to the government.

Christians were presented with the case that whilst the execution of war presented moral dilemmas, those who fought it did so with the blessing of their Churches. The tension these dilemmas caused would never fully resolve themselves for many, with the central question of reconciling the sixth commandment with the act of killing, and the many sub-questions which flowed from it, being frequently in men's thoughts. Army chaplain Rev R.J. Blofeld recorded that he was asked the question `How can I be a Christian and kill people?' thirty-five times during his padre's hours between 1943 and 1944.[1013] The pressure on the Churches to both be fully supportive of the war, whilst maintaining the centrality of the Christian message of peace and reconciliation was highlighted by Angus Calder, `Even those of their critics who

[1010] Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in Wartime*, p.32
[1011] Ibid, p.53
[1012] Rev. J.W. Coutts, `Thou Shalt Not Kill: How then can a man be a Soldier and a Christian?' in Ronald Selby Wright (ed.), *Soldiers Also Asked* (London: Oxford University Press, 1943), pp.77-85
[1013] Blofeld, `Soldiers' Questions', p.8

believed most passionately that the war must be fought were liable to retort in disgust when Christians said openly, `Thou Shalt Kill.''[1014]

Therefore, for many, war was not a choice between right and wrong, but between two wrongs; that of meek capitulation to an evil regime, or of killing both combatants and civilians. When the latter course had been chosen, the possibility of taking life forced the Christian into a position along a continuum of choices. At one extreme was the conscientious objector who refused any involvement with the military machine, often refusing to undertake any war-related civilian work. Next were the objectors who accepted some form of military service, in the Non-Combatant Corps, the Royal Army Medical Corps, the Royal Army Pay Corps, the Royal Army Veterinary Corps or the Army Dental Corps. There was a slight nuance between them and the next group, those who had managed to gain a military posting which would not necessitate the taking of life. Further along were those who were called upon to take life in an anonymised, mechanised manner, including operating long-range artillery or aircraft. Next were those fighting directly in tank warfare, or in the infantry who could be required take the life of a specific individual or group directly. Finally, there were those who were forced to perform acts of killing in cold blood, either of the enemy or their own men in mercy killings.

According to Michael Snape, `the Christian culture of contemporary British society [...] helped to ensure that there was room in the British army for conscientious objectors who were prepared to undertake non-combatant military service.'[1015] However the extent to which they were tolerated is debatable. On a parade of Northern Command through Leeds in 1940, the RAMC section was booed because of its association with having to absorb a high number of conscientious objectors.[1016] This was an unfair judgment to make, as many had actively chosen that service to experience a similar level of danger as their peers. James Driscoll, a young evangelical Christian from East London, stated in his tribunal hearing in March 1940, `I refuse to have any part in the killing or maiming of my fellow beings because it is incompatible with my Christian faith.'[1017] Driscoll had no first aid experience and was therefore

[1014] Angus Calder, *The People's War: Britain*, 1939-45 (London: Pimlico, 1992) , p.487
[1015] Snape *God and the British Soldier*, p.192
[1016] The National Archives, *Conscientious Objectors: Right to Non-Combatant Service*, 2 February 1941, WO 32/15272
[1017] James Driscoll, Private Family Papers

ordered into agricultural or forestry work. So determined was he that his Christian conscience should not set him apart from the demands being placed on his contemporaries, he took his case to an Appeal Tribunal, writing, `I believe my Christian duty in the present emergency is to help alleviate the sufferings caused by the hostilities.'[1018] Driscoll's wish was granted and in August 1940 he was assigned to the RAMC. Anglican David Briggs, who was initially assigned to the Pay Corps but later requested and was granted a transfer to the RAMC, recalled `I wanted to be a part of everything […] not to chicken out of anything […] to experience the dangers that other people had. But I was not prepared to carry arms.[1019]

John Broom encountered a conscientious objector at Beckett Park RAMC in Leeds, reckoning, `This Walter by the way is a C.O. & in every possible way a splendid Christian with a very fine knowledge of the Bible.'[1020] The man referred to, Walter Stotesbury, was a member of the Plymouth Brethren, and had offered himself for any type of service that would not mean he would be required to bear arms.[1021] However, by 1944, having served in North Africa and the early stages of the Normandy campaign, Broom's view had become more nuanced. Whilst still declaring, `I have never let any chap run C.O.s down for cowardice, that is, genuine cases, not the sort who run the *Daily Worker* […] or the *Peace News*, chiefly political subversionists', he was insistent that family members should not laud the bravery of the objector over that of the soldier.[1022] This was a particularly sensitive point within the family, as his close cousin Derek Bryant and registered as an objector in 1940. Broom was `Glad to know that Auntie May is appreciative of the bravery of the boys here. C.O.s aren't the only brave folk, you know, though I'm sure they must have a sort of moral bravery to flaunt public opinion & invite ridicule.'[1023]

Many Christians found an acceptable compromise in joining up in non-combatant roles, such as medical and technical services, without having to register as a conscientious objector. Leslie Weatherhead reckoned, `This is worthy, of course, but it should be recognised that it is a compromise.'[1024] Edward Sinclair, an Anglican, who

[1018] Ibid
[1019] David Briggs Papers, Private Family Collection
[1020] Broom, Letter, 31 March 1940
[1021] *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 2 February 1940, p.3
[1022] Broom, Letter, 30 June 1944
[1023] Ibid
[1024] Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in Wartime*, p.59

made the choice to serve with the RAMC, was strongly influenced by the advice of his local curate. Sinclair felt that there was `No question of the morality of our work in a Field Ambulance', indicating that for some, serving in a non-combatant role within the armed services removed the need to face the moral challenge of killing another human.[1025] George Woodman, a teacher, was another who opted for a specific technical role to avoid the possibility of being directly responsible for killing. In Woodman's case, this was as a telegraphist in the Royal Navy.[1026]

Despite his war service consisting of medical and clerical roles, John Broom grew to relish the lexicography of warfare, revelling in the successes of the 51st Division in the Normandy campaign, `Jerry had a simply terrific bashing from the Div […] to such an extent that some tanks could claim having knocked out six of the enemy.'[1027] However, as argued by Joanna Bourke, many men found the reconciliation of love for God and man with deliberate slaughter problematic.[1028] Leslie Weatherhead, though averring that God would honour whichever path a Christian's conscience led them to follow in wartime, wrote that `It is impossible to reconcile war with Christianity.'[1029] John Broom agreed, writing shortly after VE-Day, `I'm inclined to think there's nothing essentially Godly about fighting a war. […] More than ever I am convinced that man will never be satisfied with Peace because man is greedy at heart. Another and more deadly war is as certain as man's ambitions are boundless.'[1030]

As many men conscripted into combatant roles held little relish for the act of killing, the British Army briefly introduced `hate training' at two of its centres, Chelwood Gate and Barnard Castle, in 1941. Men were encouraged to shout phrases such as `Hate Hate Hate. Kill the Filthy Hun!', with sheep's' blood being splashed around to create a sense of realism.[1031] However, this training was soon terminated by General Sir Bernard Paget, Commander of Home Forces, as being `foreign to the British temperament.'[1032] Nevertheless, doubts had been raised about the capacity of

[1025] MAC Archive, Robinson, Edward Sinclair
[1026] Email from Donald Woodman to the author, 20th June 2016
[1027] Broom, Letter, 9 July 1944
[1028] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing,* p.269
[1029] Weatherhead, *Thinking Aloud in Wartime,* p.5
[1030] Broom, Letter, 20 May 1945
[1031] Joanna Bourke, `Psychiatry, Hate Training, and the Second World War', *Journal of Social History,* 52 (2017) https://doi.org/10.1093/jsh/shx034
[1032] Clive Emsley, *Soldier, Sailor, Beggarman, Thief: Crime and the British Armed Services since 1914* (Oxford: OUP, 2013), p.168

men to kill in combat. As Michael Burleigh pointed out, most soldiers in western armies remained civilians in spirit and came from societies that had not encouraged them to hate.[1033] To wage effective warfare, this mindset had to be addressed both through the encouragement of some degree of hate, and convincing men to kill in the absence of hate.

It was pride in their work, rather than hatred of their target, that motivated those tasked with killing an anonymous enemy at a distance. Richard Holmes contended that `The act of killing is often so blurred by the distance separating killer and victim that it seems like a game, or is swamped by a feeling of the technical satisfaction in marksmanship.'[1034] Joanna Bourke referred to this phenomenon as `numbed killing' via `agentic modes', with technology bringing a pride in the skill of performance and, as argued by Robert Jay Lifton in an examination of American troops fighting in Vietnam, the technological imperative to make full use of the equipment.[1035]

Pride in the skill of killing was evident for some Christians in the war. Raleigh Trevelyan's first experience of killing in cold blood gave him the same thrill he had felt as a boy shooting at wild birds in the woods, `I was triumphant […] before long I was pouring out the story to an audience, flatteringly impressed.'[1036] An anonymous captain in the Royal Artillery also described the `thrill' of battle but how, rather than triumphalism, his reaction was that `faith in Jesus gives strength to meet every need' and gave inspiration to carry on.[1037] The youthful ambitions of Nicholas Stacey, a seventeen-year-old naval officer who subsequently became an ordained Church of England minister, demonstrated the anticipation of leadership proficiency, blending the idea of destroying enemy hardware as well as ending human lives. Before his first commission, he envisaged his future career being one of `giving orders, inspiring sailors, killing Germans, sinking ships, shooting down aircraft and picking up survivors.'[1038]

Some men showed immediate regret when the anonymous foe became real. This personalisation of the foe was, for Bourke, `crucial to the moral and emotional

[1033] Burleigh, *Moral Combat*, p.362
[1034] Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behaviour of Men in Battle* (London: Cassell, 2003), p.376
[1035] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p.5; Robert Jay Lifton, *Home from the War* (London: Wildwood House, 1974)
[1036] Trevelyan, *The Fortress*, p.93
[1037] Officers' Christian Union, *Experience Will Decide* (OCU, 1959), p.8
[1038] Nicholas Stacey, *Who Cares* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1974), p.10

well-being of combatants and formed a buffer against numbing brutality.'[1039] In 1942 RAF pilot Michael Benn had written to his brother Tony, claiming he was `really ready to deal with any Hun I can get hold of!'[1040] However after his first action on 20th January 1943, when he successfully shot down a Junkers Ju 88 over North Africa, he displayed both satisfaction with his work, but moral culpability for the result of his action. Shooting down the plane was `a piece of cake. […] The poor fellow went down in flames and hit the sea. We could see him burning in the water. I felt rather miserable really, it seems such an awfully bloody thing to do, but it's just part of the war. It was him or me.'[1041] However Benn echoed Weatherhead's and Broom's thoughts on the incongruity of performing ungodly acts in a godly cause, `Of one thing I am sure, you cannot reconcile Christianity to the war. Christ said – "turn the other cheek", not "go and bomb them four times as heavily as they bombed you." Christianity is permeated with the idea of returning good for evil.'[1042] Another Anglican fighter pilot, Roger Hall, displayed a similar combination of emotions during his second sortie in the Battle of Britain, `I was seized with a sadistic sort of curiosity to see what the result of our fire was going to be.'[1043] When a Junker Ju 88 was shot down by a colleague, he felt an `ungovernable anger' against the enemy.[1044] However, when Hall was responsible for his first individual `kill' in October 1940, this frenzied reaction had given way to one of `utter horror and loneliness.'[1045]

Hugh Montefiore conformed to Richard Holmes' assessment that `the antisepsis of distance is no guarantee that a sense of clinical detachment will prevail.'[1046] He initially relished the thrill of the power to take another man's life, in his role as a gunner in the Royal Artillery, `I remember to my shame enjoying some of my shoots when I caught Japanese in the open and brought down salvos upon them. I enjoyed it when I hit my targets, especially if there were Japanese there.'[1047] Michael Burleigh identified that men experienced a thrill of firing weapons both in training and in battle, achieving a pleasing technical proficiency in their lethal application.[1048] Four

[1039] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p.12
[1040] Michael Benn Papers, Letter from Michael Benn to Tony Benn, 20 June 1942
[1041] Ibid, Letter from Michael Benn to William Wedgwood Benn, 30 August 1943
[1042] Quoted in Tony Benn, *Dare to Be a Daniel* (London: Arrow Books, 2005), p.65
[1043] Hall, *Spitfire Pilot*, p.38
[1044] Ibid
[1045] Ibid, p.143
[1046] Holmes, *Acts of War*, p.377
[1047] Montefiore, *Oh God, What Next?*, p.55
[1048] Burleigh, *Moral Combat*, p.363

decades later, Montefiore felt remorse over the youthful enthusiasm he brought to his role. Whilst acknowledging that it was proper to be satisfied with the efficiency of his work, `It seems to me that it is immoral to enjoy killing other human beings. I fear that war inevitably desensitises those who fight in it, especially in close combat. [...] one should never enjoy killing other human beings. I have repented at my leisure.'[1049]

Christopher Bulteel took less time to come to a position of regret than Montefiore. Reflecting in the aftermath of a battle during the North African campaign in which he saw dozens of Germans killed by artillery fire, he expressed anguish over the wider destructive effects of the killing, `And what about the wounded, and dying, and the dead? What about the mothers, the widows, the orphaned children?' [1050] Bulteel `tried to keep at the back of my mind the agony, the loss, the destruction that men seem so often to inflict upon each other.'[1051] Thus the act of firing at planes, tanks and an anonymous enemy, produced a gamut of reactions, with most combatants expressing horror or regret either soon afterwards, or at the distance of decades. An abhorrence of killing was keenly felt by active Christians who had come to maturity during the 1930s. It was true that, overall, when called upon to kill an anonymous enemy, Christians practised righteousness in battle by killing without hatred. They slipped into Bourke's `agentic mode', acting in ways they would otherwise find unacceptable, as agents of a larger war machine.[1052]

In a few cases, the nature of combat meant that close-quarters fighting, and killing, took place. Bruce Hayllar experienced savage, hand-to-hand fighting at the Battle Kohima in April 1944. Whilst on patrol he was enthusiastic about the prospect of `find[ing] the Jap and beat[ing] him up.'[1053] When under fire he recalled that `some savage instinct comes to one's aid when logically a man should be scared stiff.'[1054] More typical of the fighting experience of the Second World War was the requirement to kill from the more insulated space of a tank. The future Archbishop of Canterbury, Robert Runcie, who served as a tank commander during the North-West Europe campaign, recalled, `it was killing other people rather than my friends being killed' that shook him, `a German standing up bravely with a bazooka and you training your

[1049] Ibid
[1050] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier* , p.84
[1051] Ibid
[1052] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p.7
[1053] Keane, *Road of Bones*, p.228
[1054] Ibid

gun on him, and just blowing him to smithereens as you went through.'[1055] Runcie's reaction to this act was one of physical revulsion, `When I'd been very successful in knocking out a German tank, I went up to it and saw four young men dead. I felt a bit sick.'[1056]

Ken Tout, whilst commanding a tank in Normandy, could not bring himself to kill one German once he had seen him in the flesh. Spying a young soldier, separated from the protection of his tank, Tout knew he had the opportunity to shoot to kill him, but at that moment it seemed pointless as there was no mutual ill-will between the two combatants, `It was only Stan and Harvey and I passing by. Just ordinary, inoffensive youths like himself.'[1057] The fact that Tout could consider individuals on both sides of a bloody battle as `inoffensive' demonstrates the disconnect men could identify between the exigencies of warfare, and the basic human decency within men of all nations called upon to kill. Hate was not part of Tout's mindset that day.

Sometimes those who might have anticipated killing anonymous enemies were faced with the human dimension of their work. Roger Hall, a former fighter pilot who had transferred to the reconnaissance 91 Squadron, flew on a mission over northern France in 1942 and came across a German cyclist battalion. After another pilot had fired on the group, Hall `came down on them and fired, not aiming consciously at any one of them in particular but at the centre of the carnage.'[1058] However, he was able to see `their faces covered with blood and a look of incredulity in their eyes.'[1059] Hall then fired shots which killed some of the Germans directly, `There was blood and horror on the road as I finished firing. […] I began to feel a horrible revulsion for what I was doing. However much I tried to hate the Germans, I ended by despising myself.' [1060] He saw the faces of the wounded, seeming to cry out for mercy, finding himself `in the grip of conflicting forces, one of which told me to exercise mercy and the other to finish the bastards off.'[1061] Knowing he was being observed by a fellow pilot in another plane, Hall fired, but pointed the bullets towards the horizon, allowing the shots to pass over the stricken Germans. This left a lingering feeling of dissatisfaction,

[1055] Humphrey Carpenter, *Robert Runcie: The Reluctant Archbishop* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1996), p.77
[1056] Ibid, p.78
[1057] Ken Tout, *Tank: 40 Hours of Battle, August 1944* (London: Sphere Books, 1985), p.45
[1058] Roger Hall, *Clouds of Fear* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1975), p.141
[1059] Ibid
[1060] Ibid
[1061] Ibid

`I should never have gone to war that day.'[1062] Hall had found himself able to make the initial attack but did not have sufficient venom to kill an enemy rendered defenceless and at his mercy.

Lance-Corporal Frank Bramhall, a Roman Catholic grocer from Rochdale serving with the Fourteenth Army, lamented the fact he took many Japanese lives, even though it won him the Military Medal. His daughter recalled `I can imagine why it upset him so much, because he was Roman Catholic and he used to say to me, "how can I go to heaven when I've killed these people?"'[1063] Bramhall felt unable to speak about his experiences or doubts until just before his death in the 1980s, his family only finding the extent of his actions through research for a television documentary. Although not resulting in a cold-blooded killing, Harold Churchill, a Norfolk doctor held as a prisoner by the Japanese, found himself watching a medical gunso declaring men fit for work who were clearly seriously ill, `I saw the outline of his round head and I promised myself that if ever I got the chance to hit that hard skull I would smash it.'[1064] This otherwise mild-mannered Norfolk GP had thus contemplated enacting a revenge killing in cold blood, driven by a feeling of hate.

Some Christians found themselves further along the killing spectrum, having to kill in cold blood. Michael Snape recently demonstrated that in the US Army, despite similarly high levels of proclaimed religious allegiance to that of the British Army, with less than 1% of recruits being professing atheists, there were instances of brutality, many verging on being war crimes.[1065] Although there is no evidence of Christians in the British armed services behaving in such a manner, occasionally soldiers were faced with the prospect of threatening to kill men on their own side. During the Battle of Kohima, Bruce Hayllar had to threaten to shoot men of Indian extraction who were under his command. The Indian troops were being goaded by men of the Japanese-supporting Indian National Army to shoot their own officers, including Hayllar, 'It was a horrible situation.'[1066] Fortunately his threats worked, and over a short period of time he had learnt the lesson, `You don't lead people in battle. You drive them.'[1067] A worse dilemma faced Brigadier John Masters, commanding the

[1062] Ibid
[1063] Frank Bramhall, Private Family Papers
[1064] Palmer (ed.) *Prisoners on the Kwai,* p.43
[1065] Michael Snape, *God and Uncle Sam* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), p.576
[1066] Keane, *Road of Bones,* p.249
[1067] Ibid, p.249

Chindit 111 Brigade, who had to take the decision to order his medical staff shoot nineteen of his own wounded men, rather than let them be captured by the Japanese, or to impede the retreat of two thousand other men. Ruggles Fisher, then a junior officer in that brigade, recalled that it had caused him to examine his own faith, `I had to think deeply when some of my own severely wounded soldiers had to be shot by our own soldiers to prevent them being captured by the Japs.'[1068] Despite the tribulations faced by both Hayllar and Fisher, they both emerged from the war with the resilience of faith to become future Anglican ministers.

Some men faced the challenge of acquiescing in the cold-blooded and calculated combat methodology employed by others. Norman Kirby found a difficulty in giving approval to of some of the actions of members of the French Resistance, with whom he had to liaise. Discovering their use of young French women to lure German soldiers into a vulnerable state, before male resistance members stabbed them with a sharpened knitting needle, Kirby questioned his role, finding a response from the gospels:

> `Why am I here?' `What am I doing?' `Why am I talking to this man?' `What have we in common?' The answer always came back. `You are in a war. These are your allies and those are your enemies. This is what you have in common. Now get on with it.' [1069]

Kirby also drew on his Anglican upbringing and understanding of the Bible to reconcile himself to his association with the Resistance, although not without an inner spiritual tussle:

> The main pressing duties of the moment (for a soldier, `set under authority', `Go and he goeth; `Do this, and he doeth it') usually kept other uncomfortable thoughts at bay, those which had been absorbed many years ago as a child at my mother's knee and in Sunday School about other ways of dealing with enemies.[1070]

Therefore, Kirby entered agentic mode to keep at bay his revulsion for some of the combat methods used by his French allies. This was not enough to prevent him

[1068] Ruggles Fisher, Private Family Papers
[1069] Kirby, *1100 Miles With Monty*, p.33
[1070] Ibid, p.34

from feeling an inner disquiet over these episodes decades later. In common with Christians of whom acts of killing were required, it did not lead to any crisis of faith, but led Kirby to draw on beliefs imbued during his youth, and to set his wartime experience within this religious context.

The Mass Killing of Civilians

During the Second World War, allied aerial bombardment killed 800,000 German and Japanese civilians. Known variously as obliteration bombing, carpet bombing, saturation bombing and mass bombing, these attacks culminated in the dropping of two atomic bombs on the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, ushering in a new era of warfare. Ever since, the strategic efficiency and ethical implications of these acts have been debated. The positioning of the views of active Christians in the services on these contentious acts of war will shed further light on the question of whether the war occasioned any loss of faith.

Max Hastings argued that whilst bomber crews rarely enjoyed their work as fighter pilots did, they rarely `agonised much, or at all, about the fate of those who died beneath their bomb doors.'[1071] Nevertheless, even before the war, the potential of a mass bombing policy had caused consternation amongst the British Churches. W.R. Matthews, in a pre-war assessment of the moral dilemmas faced by the Christian in wartime, wrote `it is surely beyond the bounds of tolerable paradox to assert that airmen raining death and destruction on a crowded city could be doing so in a spirit of love and forgiveness, and it strikes us as little short of blasphemy when they say they are fighting in the cause of Christ.'[1072] Sir Stafford Cripps, a devout Christian who served as Minister of Aircraft Production between 1942 and 1945, also questioned the ethics of this mode of warfare. In a talk given at Bomber Command Headquarters in 1945, he offended senior officers by stating that a bombing mission needed to be justified on moral, as well as strategic grounds.[1073]

William Temple continually repositioned himself on this issue throughout the course of the war, moving from claiming in June 1940 that there would be `nothing left fighting for' if a policy of bombing civilian areas were adopted, to one in April

[1071] Max Hastings, *All Hell Let Loose: The World at War, 1939-45* (London: Harper Collins, 2011), p.471
[1072] Matthews, `War: The Christian Dilemma', p.10
[1073] Collins, *Faith under Fire.* p.89

1944 in which bombing was `most effectively done by the total destruction of the whole community engaged in the work than by attack on the factories themselves, which can be repaired with astonishing rapidity.'[1074] The pressure on Temple, as the senior cleric in the Anglican church, meant that, in the estimation of Andrew Chandler, the `argumentative position that he was encouraged to adopt led him steadily into a dismal corner, from which he strained to discern the moral imperative.'[1075] This is a harsh judgement, as most senior clergy were in favour of the policy. Archbishop Garbett claimed that only military centres were being targeted, and that the bombing would shorten the war, saving many lives.[1076]

For some clergy, the Blitz on British cities had made reprisal bombing of German cities morally acceptable. Bishop Haigh of Coventry spoke shortly after his city had been devastated in December 1940, `Nor do I believe that a nation need be morally degraded even by doing horrible things of a new kind in a war which it believes itself morally right in waging.'[1077] However his friend and biographer, Bishop Barry of Southwell, whilst agreeing that Haigh was correct in raising the issue, disagreed with this stance, `I do not myself believe that obliteration bombing can have any possible moral justification.'[1078] Bishop Bell of Chichester argued that the clergy should play no part in condoning acts of war and repeatedly called for the bombing of German cities to cease. He recognised that all the forces of the state had to be harnessed to win the war, but that the moral authority of the church was not part of those resources. Bell came under heavy criticism for appearing to be in favour of the principle of the war, but not its execution.[1079]

The Anglican press did not concur with the viewpoints of Temple and Haigh. The *Church Times* thundered in March 1945, `if the German tale, that a million lie dead beneath the tumbled walls, is even one-tenth true, the Christian has cause to bend the knee and implore Almighty God's forgiveness for the wickedness of civilized war.'[1080] This was certainly the view of Bomber Command Headquarters' own

[1074] Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*?, p.261
[1075] Andrew Chandler, `The Church of England and the Obliteration Bombing of Germany in the Second World War', *The English Historical Review*, 429 (1993), 920-946
[1076] *The Times*, 25 June 1943, p.2
[1077] F.R. Barry, *Mervyn Haigh* (London: SPCK, 1964), p.137
[1078] Ibid
[1079] Kenneth Slack, *George Bell* (London: SCM Press, 1971), p.96
[1080] *Church Times*, 9 March 1945, p.131

chaplain, Rev L. John Collins, who described carpet bombing as `evil.'[1081] Collins related the contents of a letter he had received from a radio operator who had formed part of a Christian fellowship group at RAF Yatesbury. After his initial operational flight, a night raid on Hamburg, he had written ,`It was a nightmare experience looking down on the flaming city beneath. I felt sick as I thought of the women and children down there being mutilated, burned, killed, terror-stricken in that dreadful inferno – and I was partly responsible.'[1082] Collins' correspondent went on to question why the churches and chaplains broadcast the message that the bomber crews were performing a noble task, rather than a necessary evil.

Although not directly involved in the killing of German civilians, Stanley Johnson, a wireless technician with the RAOC from a Quaker household, later came to regret the attitude he had shown during the war, `I am somewhat ashamed of the fact that at that time we gloried over the bombing of Dresden.'[1083] Of particular distaste was the `killing of women and small children – together with irreplaceable architectural gems.'[1084] For Johnson, Britain had descended to the `same barbaric tactics' as Hitler and was exhibiting an unchristian spirit of revenge. Concern over the destruction of buildings as well as human life was a theme echoed by Harry Boal, a wireless operator on a Lancaster bomber. Boal was part of the crew which inadvertently dropped seven bombs on Rouen Cathedral in April 1944. He recalled that after the flight debrief, the bomb aimer looked `pretty sick' and Boal himself still regretted the destruction six decades later.[1085] On a visit to the site in 2005 he reflected `To stand there and know for sure that you are responsible for it is a pretty rotten, feeling.'[1086] However during the war, he did not show the same level of regret for civilian casualties as for the destruction of a Christian building. On being challenged on the role of Bomber Command by a `very religious' aunt whilst on home leave, he tried to explain that the targets were military and industrial, with the aim being to foreshorten the war.[1087] Whilst accepting that he did think of the civilian casualties

[1081] Collins, *Faith Under Fire*. p.69
[1082] Ibid p.85
[1083] Stanley Johnson, *On Stanley On: Being the Memoirs of Stanley G. Johnson* (Bishop Auckland: Pentland Press, 1996), p.42
[1084] Ibid
[1085] James Taylor and Martin Davidson, *Bomber Crew* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2005), p.300
[1086] Ibid, p.446
[1087] Ibid, p.436

being sustained, he asserted that the main battle for him was against the Luftwaffe fighters trying to intercept their missions.

Whilst some members of Bomber Command felt relatively comfortable at the loss of life their work entailed, and members of the army such as John Broom commenting on the `splendid record of the RAF', there were Christians who challenged these views. [1088] Harold Nash, a Methodist from Birmingham, was shot down and taken prisoner in September 1943. Whilst being escorted to prison, he was offered a piece of bread by three German women from a recently-bombed area. A decade after the war, a remark at a party about Christ turning the other cheek turned Nash into a committed pacifist, working for reconciliation between the peoples of Germany and Britain. He refused to condemn his comrades for the carpet bombing but protested at the erection of a statue of Arthur Harris, as he claimed it represented approval for the decision taken by Churchill and Roosevelt to target German civilians.[1089]

Sometimes indiscriminate bombing could prove counter-productive. Ken Tout considered the obliteration bombing of Caen in 1944 in this light, as it made it harder for his tank formation to advance, leading to heavier casualties, `With hindsight the RAF raid was too hard and wasteful to crack the nut of Caen.'[1090] In addition, in the cases of Hamburg and Dresden `the force used was excessive for the objective set.' Thus, Tout also saw bombing in terms of its practical results, as well as from an ethical standpoint. He concluded that any taking of civilian life was wrong, no matter the scale, `Morally [obliteration bombing and the atomic bombs] were wrong. But so was I, firing an explosive shell into a house full of Germans.'[1091]

Therefore both the Churches and some men engaged in bombing raids over Europe did question the ethics of the execution of the war. Although thoughts of vengeance for the blitz on British cities were evident, the thought that they were directly responsible for so many civilian deaths troubled many men. In this instance, the failure of the Churches and chaplains to provide a clear, unified and consistent

[1088] John Broom, Letter, 22 August 1944
[1089] Taylor & Davidson, *Bomber Crew*, p.446
[1090] Ken Tout, Private Family Papers
[1091] Ibid

message often led to guilt, doubt and recriminations both during the war and the succeeding decades.

On 6th and 9th August, America, with the agreement of the British government, dropped two atomic bombs on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, killing around 130,000 people immediately, and many tens of thousands more in the succeeding months. These actions have been the subject of intense debate ever since.[1092] The immediate justification from the American government was that the bombs saved the lives of many more soldiers, prisoners of war and civilians by averting the need for a protracted ground campaign. By the early 1950s, however, G. Stephens Spinks was able to detect a `delayed sense of guilt for Hiroshima and Nagasaki.'[1093] Some historians have accused President Truman of racism and the desire to prove his own masculinity.[1094] Others accused the USA of using the war in the Far East as a pretext for demonstrating to the USSR the power of nuclear technology. [1095] Far from being an ethically sound action designed to bring the war to a swift conclusion, Truman and scholars who supported his action, `hammered away at the `lives saved' argument because it placed the atomic bombings in the realm of moral virtue.'[1096] From a British perspective, Max Hastings argued that critics of the atomic bombs were demanding that the USA take the moral responsibility for the sparing of the Japanese people that had been abrogated by their leaders, `No sane person would suggest that the use of the atomic bombs represented an absolute good, or was even a righteous act. But in the course of the war, it had been necessary to do many terrible things to advance the cause of Allied victory.'[1097]

Although a more nuanced recent historiography has sought to paint a less binary picture of the ethical choices surrounding the dropping of the bombs, the decision to use such a new and fearsome weapon is one which Christians found

[1092] J. Samuel Walker, `Recent Literature on Truman's Atomic Bomb Decision: A Search for Middle Ground', *Diplomatic History*, 29 (2005), 311-334
[1093] G. Stephens Spinks, *Religion in Britain Since 1900*, (London: Andrew Dakers Limited, 1952), p.224
[1094] Ronald Takaki, *Hiroshima: Why America Dropped the Atomic Bomb* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company 1995); Robert Jay Lifton and Greg Mitchell, *Hiroshima in America: Fifty Years of Denial* (New York: Harper Perennial 1995)
[1095] Gar Alperovitz, *Atomic Diplomacy: Hiroshima and Potsdam* (New York: Pluto Press, 1965)
[1096] Lifton and Mitchell, *Hiroshima*, pp.180-181
[1097] Hastings, *All Hell Let Loose*, p.650

problematic to reconcile with Biblical precepts.[1098] Michael Snape has argued that whilst American civilian churchmen and the Christian press condemned the bombings, such sentiment was not representative of the wider American public.[1099] Furthermore, Snape demonstrated that support within the American armed services was even stronger. There were similarities in the reaction of the British Christian and military milieux to that of the American. According to Kirk Willis, the significant difference between American and British churchmen's response to the atomic bomb was the spiritual aspect.[1100] The new power of destructive capability gave rise to `a stark spiritual challenge that could be met—indeed, could only be met—by churchmen themselves.'[1101] However their inability to reach anywhere near a unanimous conclusion on the morality of using nuclear weapons was postulated by Willis as a further example of the marginalisation of the British churches from influence in society.

Alan Wilkinson claimed that, as in America, the British public was only too glad that all hostilities were now over and did not stop to consider the ethical implications of the use of atomic weapons. This was because `consciences had been blunted by the acceptance of obliteration bombing.'[1102] One correspondent to the *Church Times* cited a widespread `deterioration of moral standards through the war', but that the atomic bomb marked a different level of aggression with `not one definite Christian to whom I have spoken has approved it (sic).'[1103] This was not a universal view, drawing swift rebukes from other correspondents. One pointed out that the destruction of ten million people over six years by pre-atomic bombs was not logically different to that of three hundred thousand (sic) in a matter of twenty seconds.[1104] It was argued by another cleric that as the weapon had been used by the allies who were `civilized people' rather than `German or Japanese savages' the action was

[1098] Barton J. Bernstein, `Eclipsed by Hiroshima and Nagasaki: Early Thinking about Tactical Nuclear Weapons', *International Security* 12 (1991), 149–73; Barton J. Bernstein, `Understanding the Atomic Bomb and the Japanese Surrender: Missed Opportunities, Little-Known Near Disasters, and Modern Memory' *Diplomatic History*, 19 (1995), 227–73; J. Samuel Walker, *Prompt and Utter Destruction: Truman and the Use of Atomic Bombs against Japan* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1997)
[1099] Michael Snape, *God and Uncle Sam* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2015), p.579
[1100] Kirk Willis, `"God and the Atom": British Churchmen and the Challenge of Nuclear Power, 1945-1950', *Albion*, 29 (1997), 422-457
[1101] Ibid, p.424
[1102] Wilkinson, *Dissent of Conform?*. P.264
[1103] Letter from Douglas Lockhardt, *Church Times*, 17 August 1945, p.463
[1104] Letter from Allan Cooper, *Church Times*, 24 August 1945, p.475

justified.[1105] There was no agreed standpoint among British Christians, with some justifying the mass killings in terms of the subhuman otherness of the victims.

The Anglican hierarchy was broadly condemnatory. Bishop Henson of Durham denounced their use in a rare example of discord between him and Churchill over the execution of the war, whilst Cuthbert Thicknesse, Dean of St Albans, refused use of the cathedral for a VJ Day thanksgiving service. Archbishop Garbett claimed that the means for the destruction of all civilisation had been invented and that the formula for their use should be handed over to a neutral international body. Archbishop Fisher referred to them as `weapons of darkness', although acknowledging that it was a weapon not different in kind, but only degree, to any other form of killing.[1106] Bishop Chavasse of Rochester preached against their use in front of Montgomery, a longstanding personal friend, although he later came to see atomic weaponry as necessary in the context of the Cold War.[1107]

However, the mood of Christian Britain was not uniformly admonitory. In the weeks following VJ Day many clergy preached that the bombs had prevented a continuation of the war. The Dean of Ely, Lionel Blackburne, expressed indignation that those who condemned their use `would have preferred a long drawn out war and a hideous slaughter of fine lives while they themselves remain in security.'[1108] Methodist minister Rev I.G. Fogg offered prayers of thanks for a weapon which had saved thousands of lives.[1109] In contrast, the Chairman and Secretary of the Congregational Union wrote to Prime Minister Attlee urging the abolition of such `devastating instruments of destruction.'[1110] Eventually, according to Willis, the Methodist Church aside, Britain's Free Church leaders lapsed into silence and left the running to individual clergy and laymen, often pacifists who articulated views far from the denominational mainstream.'[1111] The Vatican condemned the use of the atomic bomb, a stance echoed by British Catholics. Prominent Catholic writer and broadcaster Ronald Knox wrote that only an increase in the `energy in the life of most Christian souls' could forestall the prospect of a world blighted by weapons of terror, ethical

[1105] Letter from John Herold, *Church Times*, 24 August 1945, p.473
[1106] *The Times*, 20 August 1945, p.3
[1107] Gummer, *The Chavasse Twins*, p.159
[1108] *The Times*, 21 August 1945, p.2
[1109] *Manchester Guardian*, 16 August 1945, p.5
[1110] *Daily Mail*, 11 August 1945, p.4
[1111] Willis, `God and the Atom', p.442

ambivalence and rampant nationalism.[1112] This energy should come from all Christians regardless of denomination or nationality.

Although reaction in the higher echelons of the British Churches was largely negative, further down there were disagreements. Amongst civilians, a Mass-Observation report identified domestic reaction to the bombs to be `somewhat confused.'[1113] Whilst most respondents felt their use was right, both in terms of foreshortening the war and as justified punishment for Japan, many doubts were expressed about the destructive power of scientific knowledge and the morality of punishing innocent civilians. Although the most high-profile voices became those articulating the pacifist view, those of men in the armed forces have been largely ignored in the succeeding historiography. The evidence amongst this milieu points to a greater expression of support for the decision to drop the bombs. This is hardly surprising for, in many cases, theirs were the lives saved, either through the cessation of hostilities in which they were directly involved, or by them being freed from three and a half years of a brutality, starvation and disease-ridden captivity.

Contemporary and subsequent reactions from within the armed services indicate a feeling of relief, although many would not have been in a position to know the full implications of the new technology. Private Alistair Urquhart, a Gordon Highlander prisoner, felt the effects of the Nagasaki blast from a few miles away. Surveying the wreckage of the city following his release, he found it `difficult to comprehend. Yet it would take more than this strange sight to spoil our party.'[1114] Captain Harold Atcherley noted in his diary his `delight and shock of sudden, incredible, wonderful news.'[1115] Leonard Cheshire, who had been the RAF's observer for the Nagasaki raid, `said quite plainly he did not want to discuss the ethics of the thing' in a talk to the University of Oxford Air Squadron, witnessed by RAF pilot Tony Benn, in 1946.[1116] This lack of sympathy for the victims was also evident in responses from Christians.

[1112] Ronald Knox, *God and the Atom* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1945), p.165
[1113] University of Sussex, Mass-Observation Archive (MOA), FR 2272, `A Report on Public Reactions to Atomic Bomb', 23 August 1945
[1114] Alistair Urquhart, *The Forgotten Highlander: My Incredible Story of Survival During the War in the Far East* (London: Abacus, 2009), p.264
[1115] Sir Harold Atcherley, *Prisoner of Japan: A Personal War Diary: Singapore, Siam and Burma, 1941-1945* (Cirencester: Memoirs Publishing, 2012), p.345
[1116] Tony Benn, *Years of Hope: Diaries, Papers and Letters, 1940-1962* (London: Arrow Books, 1995), p.98

There was a mixture of relief, although tinged with sombre reflection on the ethical implications of such huge blasts. At the most exculpatory end of the spectrum of responses was Brigadier General G.B. Mackenzie, who saw the bombs as God's way of answering the prayer for the cessation of the war. Furthermore, Mackenzie saw the bomb as a `judicial act' on those who had denied the Godhead, equating the atomic explosions with God's judgement on Pharaoh's Egypt in the Book of Exodus.[1117] A more typical feeling was one of relief, tinged with some sense of regret that the bombing had been necessary. One officer in the Far East theatre of war, Captain Ruggles Fisher, who had taken part in the second Chindit mission, recalled a feeling of relief amongst his comrades. Their next task would have been to invade Malaya and recapture Singapore, almost certainly sustaining heavy casualties in the process. This did not mean that ethical considerations were cast aside, as Fisher considered `all types of warfare are incompatible with Christianity, but are sadly caused by the sinfulness of mankind.'[1118] For John Wyatt it was `an event that was to save my life and the lives of thousands of my colleagues in the Far East.'[1119] Wyatt considered that the effects of the coming winter would have killed off many thousands of prisoners, and whilst `I regret the tragic loss of Japanese lives in those cities […] it saved the lives of many Allied Prisoners of War.'[1120] Indeed he condemned the `hypocrisy of the Japanese government in describing American bombing of their cities as `bestial' whilst allowing their guards to administer horrific treatment.[1121] Bill Frankland was another who considered that the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki saved his life, recalling machine gun nests being set up covering the parade ground at Blakang Mati camp, in readiness for what the men believed to be a mass execution in the event of a ground invasion of Japanese-occupied territory.[1122]

In contrast, for Hugh Montefiore the use of nuclear weapons was an act of moral turpitude, `I was appalled, horrified, disgusted. Should I resign my commission?'[1123] Nearly four decades later, Montefiore reconsidered this viewpoint on a visit to Japan, after meeting an Anglican Japanese chaplain, who contended that

[1117] Brigadier General G.B. Mackenzie, `The Master Key', *Practical Christianity*, September 1945, p.27
[1118] Ruggles Fisher, Private Family Papers
[1119] Wyatt, *No Mercy from the Japanese*, p.125
[1120] Ibid, p.147
[1121] Ibid
[1122] Bill Frankland, Private Family Papers
[1123] Montefiore, *Oh God, What Next?* p.55

their use had shortened the war and saved tens of thousands of lives. Even with the benefit of hindsight, he concluded, `I am still rather ashamed of what we did', the `we' taking upon himself the collective responsibility for decisions taken at the highest level of American military command.[1124] Ken Tout echoed the view of Archbishop Fisher, that the atomic bombs were an extreme weapon, but on the same moral plane as any act of killing, `the second atom bomb on Nagasaki was probably excessive viewing the horrors of Hiroshima. The Japanese emperor would either capitulate after Hiroshima or not at all. However, I see these as tactical errors, not as any worse morally than a bayonet in an enemy's belly.'[1125] John Broom struck a matter-of-fact tone in his reaction to the news. He noted that one of his colleagues would not have to be sent to Burma `with the Jap war over' and hoped that his parents `are enjoying VFE day or whatever they call it. Guess Dad has a couple of days off – good show.'[1126] Most of the memoirs provided by Christians who had served in the Far East mention the matter in passing, and do not seek to apportion praise or denunciation to the action. For example, Eric Lomax was told about the dropping of `a weapon of terrible power' being dropped on Hiroshima but does not mention any further consideration of the ethical implications of the action in his memoir.[1127]

Conclusion

Joanna Bourke has argued that `An insistence upon personal moral integrity was typical of those engaged in fighting.'[1128] Unsurprisingly, this was true of active Christians. Ken Tout wrote, `Once you have gone to war you tacitly agree to share the blame of the actions which are erroneous or excessive.'[1129] However Christians occasionally went beyond the scope of moral integrity and feelings of self-blame to experience a sense of thrill or blood lust. This was usually of a temporary nature, being part of a maelstrom of emotions felt in the heat of battle, before subsequently subsiding into regret and moral culpability. This was evident across the spectrum of killing, whether anonymised or intimate.

[1124] Ibid, p.56
[1125] Ken Tout, Private Family Papers
[1126] John Broom, Letter, 15 August 1945
[1127] Lomax, *The Railway Man*, p.195
[1128] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p.7
[1129] Ken Tout, Private Family Papers

Michael Burleigh concluded that in the decades following the war, whilst some men regretted having killed, many did not.[1130] The evidence from those active Christians who killed demonstrates substantial regret. Men attempted to mediate ways of reconciling their acts with their consciences, with varying degrees of success. Some, such as Roger Hall and Michael Benn, showed swift remorse and revulsion whilst others were only able to publicly express their feelings many years later. None demonstrated a retrospective insouciance or pleasure at killing.

That Christians were able to perform acts of killing came as result of many factors; institutionalisation within the armed services; a loyalty to their comrades; the fear of being killed themselves, and the sense, encouraged by the Churches and leading politicians that they were fighting a just war for noble ends. For most Christians the issue of killing never went away. Combat did not terminate social relationships; rather it restructured them, and the extent to which this changed relationship with life was managed in following years was a product of the context in which it took place, the proximity to the victim and the mental resilience of the individual. It was certainly not a task undertaken with relish, often with revulsion and frequently with regret.

The exculpation provided by the Churches meant that men from their congregations who did have to kill did not need to feel resultant alienation from their previous religious milieu. The pre-war Christian pacifist movements in the UK, although generating much publicity, never amounted to more than 15,000 members, therefore men could return home to a supportive religious network.[1131] Furthermore, as the full extent of Nazi atrocities became apparent, it was easy to portray the war as a struggle between the righteous and the devil incarnate. Chaplains assisted in this soothing of troubled consciences. Gordon Zahn's study of RAF chaplains, many of whom had served during the Second World War, found that 90% of them harboured few or no qualms about their men being ordered to take no prisoners.[1132] Chaplains were able to compartmentalise their roles between military and religious requirements, and thus provide spiritual relief to men who had been required to kill, as `Forgiveness was freely given.'[1133]

[1130] Burleigh, *Moral Combat* p.362
[1131] Martin Ceadel, `Christian Pacifism in the Era of Two World Wars', in W.J. Shiels (ed.), *The Church and War* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983), p.404
[1132] Zahn, *Chaplains in the RAF*, p.139
[1133] Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, p.295

Therefore, in acts of killing enemy combatants, there is little evidence of a rift between active Christians in the armed services and the British Churches, and nothing to suggest the potential for any post-war loss of faith within this milieu caused by this aspect of their war experience. Indeed, some of the examples cited here went on to lives of Christian ministry, thus it could be argued that the experience of killing, and the ways in which those actions were internally resolved, were central to their spiritual development.

Reactions to the dropping of the atomic bombs by active Christian service personnel recognised the ethical implications but were naturally tinged with a sense of relief that it brought a swift end to the war in the Far East, and for many saved them from possible death. These responses appear to have been formed from experience, rather than from any lead given by the British Churches at the time. The outrage evident in the reactions of some Christians on the home front indicates some disconnect between Christians serving in the armed forces and those who were not. Whilst the most widely reported voices have been largely condemnatory in tone, Britain's Christian servicemen gave a strong measure of exoneration. There is little evidence that even the biggest single act of killing in the war occasioned any crisis of faith for active Christians.

Chapter Seven – Shifting Patterns of Individual Faith

Introduction

Shifting patterns of personal faith within active Christians in the armed services are of central importance to understanding whether the period marked any decisive shift in the secularisation of British society. Although challenged by a range of experiences including combat, imprisonment, physical and emotional hardship and the suffering and loss of comrades, most who went into the war with an active Christian faith found that it remained intact and was often strengthened. It was, claimed Callum Brown, a religious upbringing, involving Sunday Schools, church youth activities and Sabbath Observance, rather than a revelatory conversion experience, that provided the bedrock of faith for most people. [1134]

Stephen Parker argued that popular religion in wartime Birmingham remained broadly similar in character to the preceding decades. Churches continued to play a role in the wider communal life of the city, and schools still taught in a broadly Christian language with religious morality and stories to the fore.[1135] There was no slide in religious observance despite wartime disruptions. Therefore, for Callum Brown, `far from fitting in with previously accepted stories of religious decline and creeping secularisation, British popular religion was a continuing and vital seam of socio-cultural life.'[1136] Conversely, Richard Sykes' study of nearby Dudley and Gornals argued that the war had a profoundly negative effect on religious belief and practice, undermining `the social and communal patterns of life which had underpinned the vitality of the Churches.'[1137] Sykes thought that the seeds of the dramatic collapse in British Christianity from the 1960s onwards could be located in the weakening of the bonds between church and people during the war. However a previous study by Parker and Snape had argued that `the experience of the Second World War momentarily strengthened rather than weakened the Christian self-consciousness of British society.'[1138] Therefore the domestic religious context into which demobilised Christian service men and women would return would appear to

[1134] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain,* p.185
[1135] Parker, *Faith on the Home Front*
[1136] Ibid, p.214
[1137] Richard Sykes, `Popular Religion in Decline: A Study from the Black Country', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 56, (2005), p.295
[1138] Snape and Parker, `Keeping faith and coping', p. 401

be a varied one, with some areas having seen a marked decline in church attendance due to wartime disruptions, whilst in others the Churches maintained a ministry and presence which defied domestic and external challenges.

Michael Snape suggested that the British Army of the First and Second World Wars was host to a diffusive Christianity which reflected society at large but was also shaped by experiences of warfare. [1139] He argued that a broad spectrum of responses, from the orthodox and devout, through to the superstitious and supernatural were common currency in the citizen armies of the period, with British churchmen being too ready to `dismiss symptoms of more orthodox religiosity among soldiers as worthless manifestations of emergency religion.'[1140] Within the rank and file, although many men held heterdox beliefs, there was no overall drift towards atheism and little to suggest that the experience of warfare acted as a secularising influence on the millions who served in the army.

Snape's later essay. which examined a range of religious themes in the context of the American, British and Canadian Armies, suggested that the period did not mark a significant juncture in the subsequent secularisation of British society, and to some extent halted the trends of the previous two decades.[1141] Thus, a more detailed examination of the development of faith in individual Christians would be expected to demonstrate a sustenance, and even strengthening, of religion within many. However, Christopher McKee's study of the wartime culture of the navy suggested that `if naval ratings of 1900-1945 became indifferent to, lost or seriously questioned their previously held religious faith, or if they were simply confirmed in agnosticism or atheism, it was because they personally and directly experienced the random, irrational, and overwhelming horrors of war.'[1142]

Clive Field provided an alternative perspective on patterns of faith during the war, examining a swathe of church statistics and contemporary polling data, asserting that `there was hardly any irreversible collapse of religion' and that `war is therefore not seen as a particularly major milestone in Britain's secularization history.'[1143] However Field's analysis was, like Parker's and Sykes', confined to the home front

[1139] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, pp.19-58
[1140] Ibid, p.58
[1141] Snape, `War, Religion and Revival', pp.135-158
[1142] McKee, *Sober Men and True*, p.141
[1143] Field, `Puzzled People Revisited', 446-479

and therefore the question remains unanswered as to whether the experience of self-defining Christians in the armed services would indicate the potential for a religious revival in the 1950s, or evidence of the recasting of Christian faith, or signal any major landmark in the dechristianisation of British society.

Historians of religion have made reference to the war years, with Alan Gilbert identifying the period as having exacerbated the 1930s trend of declining membership of the Protestant Churches.[1144] Denominational discipline, the process whereby `backsliders' were expelled from Nonconformist Churches for unchristian behaviour or lack of commitment, weakened, indicating the loosening grip of the Churches on setting acceptable standards of faith for their adherents. Conversely, for David Bebbington, `The legacy of war was a willingness to consider ultimate values in the population at large and a preparedness to respond on the part of the churches.'[1145] For Callum Brown, what made Britain a largely Christian society was a diffusive Christianity which `infused public culture and was adopted by individuals, whether churchgoers or not, in forming their own identities.'[1146] Alan Wilkinson suggested that the Second World War acted as a spur towards denominational ecumenism at organisational levels, and increased consideration of divine providence and prayer, both evidence of a resilience of faith.[1147]

Some historians of wartime military culture have noted the significance of religion in the popular experience of warfare. Brian MacArthur claimed `The most uplifting moments of captivity, often even for those without faith, were the services conducted by the padres.'[1148] Midge Gillies argued that whilst the horror of battle may have prompted some men to question the existence of God, personal faith was put to the test in Far East prisoner of war camps in a way that was missing in Europe.[1149] For Alan Allport, `the consolations of the Christian afterlife cannot be dismissed as one factor in keeping soldiers going.'[1150] In robust disagreement, Sean Longden stated `Onward Christian Soldiers? Nothing could be further from the truth […] religion was

[1144] Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain*, p.77
[1145] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, p.254
[1146] Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, p.8
[1147] Wilkinson, *Dissent or Conform*?, pp.233-264
[1148] Brian MacArthur, *Surviving the Sword: Prisoners of the Japanese* (London: Abacus, 2005), p.209
[1149] Midge Gillies, *The Barbed-Wire University: The Real Lives of Allied Prisoners of War in the Second World War* (London: Aurum Press, 2011), p.227
[1150] Allport, *Browned Off*, p.257

surprisingly unimportant for many of the soldiers.'[1151] Paul Fussell concurred, claiming that `The Second World War was a notably secular affair' with any display of religious behaviour being dismissed as superstition and treated with scepticism within the allied armies.[1152]

In an examination of wartime faith, social surveys can provide a snapshot of beliefs, practices and attitudes which, according to Clive Field, `escape dependence upon misleading anecdote or rhetoric.'[1153] In addition, by design, they encompass views of a broader range of people than a qualitative study can hope to assess, tending towards objectively-selected samples rather than the somewhat self-selecting and willingly-recorded qualitative evidence. Conversely an illuminating approach within a qualitative framework was demonstrated by Richard Schweitzer in his work on the British and American Armies of the First World War.[1154] Schweitzer placed different expressions of religious faith on a spectrum. This study will place the wartime faith of active Christian service men and women along such a continuum to suggest that faith broadly remained resilient. Some statistical information will also be used to set the findings within a quantitative context.

A 1942 Mass-Observation survey found that, of those who considered themselves to have faith prior to the conflict, 26% considered it strengthened and only 3% considered it lost.[1155] It suggested that where faith was deeply held in the first place, it had been reinforced by the experience of war, whereas in cases where it had been superficial, ritualistic or superstitious, it had been weakened or lost. In general, a greater value had been placed on non-material things. As one interviewee put it, `The War has caused me to think a lot more. It has not shaken my faith, but has caused me to look at its foundations more earnestly.'[1156] A further report concluded that the war confirmed pre-existing religious attitudes, with those with a self-defined faith declaring it strengthened, and only a tiny proportion (1-4%) losing it. The figures suggest a `considerable strengthening of faith since the war among those who were already fairly deeply religious [...] but they do not suggest in any way that new people

[1151] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, p.36
[1152] Fussell, *Wartime*, p.51
[1153] Field, `Puzzled People', p.449
[1154] Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*)
[1155] MOA, FR 1525, `Religion and the Future', 1942, p.5
[1156] Ibid, p.6

are turning to religion.'[1157] Although the war had caused no major shift in personal faith, there was a widespread criticism of the British Churches, both among the religious and irreligious, with many questioning how ecclesiastical leaders in both England and Germany could claim to have God on their side, criticising the wealth of the bishops and finding it hard to reconcile the teachings of turning the other cheek and loving your neighbour with the Churches' exhortations to kill the enemy.[1158]

It was also found that 20% of the population claimed to have no religious faith, albeit this was a self-selecting definition with no suggested criteria as to what this faith might entail. This figure rose to around 40% of people under the age of 40.[1159] Therefore, within the age group that made up the vast majority of those in the armed forces, 60% claimed some degree of faith. Of the 80% of people of all age groups who were self-defining Christians, 40% of the population claimed adherence to an organised denomination and 40% felt that their faith was personal to them and unaffiliated to any church. Within these groups, the data evidenced a spectrum of allegiance towards the British Churches, similar to that apparent for men and women in the armed services. Mass-Observation's findings were confirmed in a further survey of a larger and more representative sample conducted by Gallup in 1941, which identified 27% of respondents as non-religious, a figure within a similar range to that found in the M-O reports.[1160] 55% confirmed they derived some comfort from their religion. However, it is not clear whether this sample would have included members of the armed forces and would almost certainly not have included those on active service overseas.

An Odhams Press survey published in 1947 revealed that 21% of people were less interested in religion than they used to be, with 7% of people claiming they had specifically lost interest due to the war, this group being disproportionately young men.[1161] They cited their experiences of war, loss of contact with organised religion and criticisms of the Churches as reasons for their lessening of interest.[1162] However this must be set alongside the fact that 13% said they were more interested in religion than they used to be. This survey suggests a slight statistical decrease on the balance

[1157] MOA, FR 1566, `Religion and the People', 1942, p.7
[1158] Ibid, p.10
[1159] Ibid, p.12
[1160] Hadley Cantril (ed.), *Public Opinion, 1935–1946* (Princeton University Press, 1951), p.742
[1161] *News Review*, 23 October 1947
[1162] Ibid

sheet of religious faith arising from the experience of war, giving weight to Fussell's and Longden's assertions of a wartime decline in religious faith. Conversely, data gathered by Mass-Observation during the early part of the war on the beliefs of men in the RAF demonstrated that one quarter reported that their faith had been strengthened `considerably' or `slightly' since 1939, with 47% reporting no change, 10% a weakening and 18% having no faith at the outset or offering no reply.[1163] This data suggests a slight strengthening of faith amongst those in the services, confirming Snape's and Parker's arguments of a resurgence of religious belief and practice during wartime.

Thus, available contemporary statistical data suggests some movement at the margins of faith. This pattern was repeated in a sample taken five decades later. In a self-selecting sample of respondents volunteering to answer a questionnaire about chaplaincy in the British Army in 1998, fifty-nine out of seventy-one men from a range of denominations and ranks replied that there had been no change to their religious beliefs as a result of the war, with eight claiming it strengthened, two having it weakened and two being converted to Roman Catholicism from Protestantism.[1164] Due to the how the respondents were recruited, via the religious and military press, they were likely to show confirmation bias towards having a long-lasting Christian faith. However, the figures cited are broadly in line with wartime surveys and those conducted in the immediate post-war period.

Leading political and literary figures were prominent in public discussions about faith. Sir Stafford Cripps, then Leader of the House of Commons, recognised both the public and personal importance of faith, `Faith can be a reformer's zeal or a mystic's quiet vision, a noble spur to particular public measures or a fine and private thing.'[1165] C.S. Lewis questioned the nature of faith in a series of radio broadcasts given between 1942 and 1944. For Lewis, faith was `the art of holding on to things your reason has once accepted, in spite of your changing moods.'[1166] This would reinforce the contention that the faith of active Christians would strengthen in wartime,

[1163] MOA, FR 622, `RAF Trends', 1941
[1164] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC) Archive, Alan Robinson research files
[1165] *Manchester Guardian*, 4 October 1942, p.4
[1166] Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, p.140

whereas beliefs which melt away when buffeted by events would not constitute an enduring faith.

Prominent Church figures took a more robust line on the importance, not just of an individual working out their own faith but allying it to the efforts of organised religion. Archbishop Temple, in an address to the Church of England's Men's Society in 1938, saw faith as being best expressed via the organised churches during National Days of Prayer and times of crisis:

> Whenever people in this country are deeply moved [...] in multitudes that astonish they flock to the churches. It was so at the Jubilee of King George and at the Coronation, and now we have seen the great volume of prayer that went up during the [Munich] crisis. Let us not belittle that. No doubt there was something about it of a sudden return to God when we had forgotten him, to ask Him that he would spare us what we feared.[1167]

W. Thompson Elliott recognised the importance of an inner faith as well as public displays of religiosity, `what ultimately matters in this war is the spiritual victory which must begin and be maintained in our own souls.'[1168] In such an environment `half-hearted Christianity is not going to save the world, and nominal Church-membership is worse than useless.'[1169] `B.S.', in a review of Alfred Noyes' apocalyptic *The Edge of the Abyss*, whilst recognising the decline in the authority of Christianity, ascribed this trend to the weaknesses of the Churches, rather than the faith of individuals, `Perhaps the springs of faith are deeper than we have been taught to think and a Reformation is again required to renew our touch with them.'[1170] This discrepancy between the resilient faith in many individuals and the declining authority of the Churches deepened as a result of the ways in which self-defining Christians maintained and recast their faith during service in the armed forces.

Faith in the Forces

Despite the importance the above commentators attached to notions of spiritual victories and deep springs of faith, there were profound doubts as to whether 1940s Britain possessed the requisite strength of conviction necessary to withstand the test

[1167] Quoted in *the Manchester Guardian*, 29 October 1938, p.14
[1168] Elliott, *Spiritual Issues of the War*, p.10
[1169] Ibid, p.26
[1170] *Manchester Guardian*, 17 March, 1944, p.3

of globalised warfare. Michael Snape noted `By the 1940s, symptoms of religious ignorance and confusion among the British Army and the British public were all too evident.'[1171] Many who attested as Anglicans were demonstrating acceptance of a code of respectable morals rather than a practised Christianity of church membership and regular attendance at services. One Anglo-Catholic army chaplain complained of a `pagan generation.'[1172] However, this study contends that this did not apply to the third of the population who self-identified as active Christians. Rev Ronald Selby Wright's impression was of a deep vein of religiosity which ran through the wartime generation, but he viewed this as being in the private realm, `At heart most men are religious; every man is really much more religious than he hopes the other fellows think he is; not in the sense of being interested in religion necessarily […] but in the sense that in every man there is a reaching out for God.'[1173] However Wright noted that this did not translate into church membership or attendance, `the ignorance of the meaning and content of the Christian Faith is in many cases quite appalling.'[1174]

For some active Christians, personal faith had to spring from a decided conversion, rather than from an upbringing within a certain tradition or a routine. John Broom contended that faith was the moment of salvation, disagreeing with a sermon preached by an Anglican curate `who thinks that salvation is a process & not an act, & that even at death nobody can say he is wholly saved. You can guess that I took a poor view of his burblings.'[1175] Broom was more impressed with a speaker he heard at the Methodist Wesley Hall in Whitby, whose idea of faith was of something that should permeate every aspect of life, of giving God the inn, not just the stable. The preacher was quoted as paraphrasing the attitude of nominal Christians as:

> Oh yes, we won't leave him out altogether. We haven't got room for Him in the inn, but we'll let him have the stable. So people talk to themselves today. "Oh of course we couldn't have Christianity in business, but you can put our name down as a subscriber to your Church Fund. No, there's no room for Him in all these things, but of course we wouldn't be thought of as atheists. It's

[1171] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.26
[1172] P. Mayhew, *The Ministry of an Army Chaplain* (London: Pax House, n.d.)
[1173] Wright (ed.), *Soldiers Also Asked* p.vi
[1174] Ibid
[1175] Broom, Letter, 3 November 1940

> respectable to have a sort of distant connection with the church. Yes, there's the stable He can have."[1176]

For Broom, only a tiny minority of Britons held true faith and, in direct contrast to the figure of 99% of men who confirmed some denominational allegiance upon army attestation, asserted that `ninety-nine out of a hundred will die like that without spiritual comfort or belief.'[1177]

In a similar vein, Ernest Burbridge, a member of a strongly evangelical family, averred that the thirty professing Christians meeting for fellowship out of the five thousand on board a troop ship bound for Italy in 1944 were the `cream […] the children of God who have been quickened by the Spirit.'[1178] Hugh Montefiore, brought up in the Jewish faith, converted to Christianity aged 16 when an apparition of Jesus appeared before him. His was a faith that could withstand intellectual scrutiny. Whilst at Oxford University in the early 1940s, he joined the Student Christian Movement, which `took the Christian faith seriously, and had a fine tradition of spirituality; but it was not frightened by modern criticism and it was really interested in the getting at the truth of things rather than handing on church tradition.'[1179] This admiration of faith that could be intellectually challenged was reinforced when Montefiore accompanied William Temple on a three-sermon Sunday tour around Yorkshire, `he made a profound impression upon me. I realised that intellectual rigour could co-exist with deep faith and commitment.'[1180]

Albert Taylor, although spending his captivity in the Far East, `the greater part living like everyone else; hungry, weary, unwell, at times terrified, and at times in despair because we thought we'd never ever get out of it', found his faith was `something to grab hold of, a rock, I had an anchor and this poor heart was often overwhelmed'.[1181] An anonymous subaltern serving with the Chindits wrote how his faith had been strengthened by his battle experiences, `When morale has nothing outside on which to bolster itself, then it is that the inward heart supplies through Christ the strength to endure cheerfully. Christ can deliver the body from danger. He can also

[1176] Broom, Letter, 1 January 1941
[1177] Broom, 4 February 1941
[1178] Ernest Burbridge, Private Family Papers, Journal, 10 May 1944
[1179] Montefiore, *Oh God, What Next?*, p.35
[1180] Ibid, p.38
[1181] IWM, 19912, Papers of Albert Taylot

deliver the mind and soul from doubt and anguish.'[1182] Randle Mainwaring, another youthful convert to Christianity, testified to the resilience of faith through the gruelling campaign in Burma, `I shall never forget how, the Army and R.A.F. units having experienced the jungle conditions for so long, three or four hundred Christians, after converging on Rangoon, gathered together for worship in the Town Hall.'[1183] Even some who served lengthy spells a prisoners of war, such as Lieutenant-Colonel Brian Hulbert Bonham-Carter, could gain affirmation of faith from their trials, `One has gained a lot by this experience, both physically, mentally, but most especially spiritually, in the knowledge that one can cast one's care on God. One has been able to prove that and experience the peace which passeth all understanding.'[1184]

Those who claimed a revelatory born-again faith found that the war reinforced that belief. John Broom entered the military proclaiming `the way of the cross', in which 'God never leaves us for anything', and that enforced separation would strengthen the faith of his whole family.[1185] In early 1942, contemplating embarkation overseas, he wrote that `God still rules and the war is nearing its end every day.'[1186] Edgar Beresford Mash, who had undergone a conversion experience in 1933, found his devout faith was strengthened by his experiences leading up to the Dunkirk evacuation. He had trouble in adapting to military life, therefore `It became a vital necessity to reach out, as never before, for God's help and saving grace.'[1187] For some Christians, having experienced a moment of conversion, the military milieu, as with civilian society, was one in which they thought of themselves as a select few, set apart from the great mass of their comrades. Their own self-definition was an exclusive one, but not one which gave full recognition to the broad spectrum of Christian beliefs and practices across the armed forces.

Some individuals converted to Christianity because of their military experience, evincing a resurgence of faith in the forces. This was despite the fact other Christians found it surprising that in a time of evil the word of God could flourish, `It seems almost incredible in these so-different days that people are still responding to

[1182] `Behind the Japanese Lines: The Hand of the Lord in Burma', *Practical Christianity*, March 1945, p.4
[1183] Mainwaring, *Fight the Good Fight,* p.32
[1184] OCU, *A Time for War and Peace*, p.21
[1185] Broom, Letter, March 1940
[1186] Broom, Letter, 5 February 1942
[1187] Mash, *Up From the Gates*, p.14

the Gospel call, for the Devil is reaping a bumper harvest', commented John Broom to his mother.[1188] Some conversions were as a result of `foxhole religion', with men turning to Christ in times of extreme danger. Rev David Walters, an Anglican naval chaplain, visited a corvette which had been dive-bombed by a German plane on the morning of D-Day. `In the little wardroom a wine steward fell on his knees at my feet and said, "What can I do to be saved?" He was deeply shocked and hysterical […] The way in which our religion helped us at that time was, I think, in keeping us calm.'[1189]

It was in the prison camps of the Far East that Christianity could really take hold, as they became `fertile ground for local religious revivals.'[1190] Rev J.N. Lewis Bryan, Acting Assistant Chaplain-General in the Far East, noted that `For many it was their first experience of the saving and keeping power of a living Christ.'[1191] In July 1942, Bishop Wilson of Singapore officiated at an Anglican confirmation service for 180 men in Changi camp. Among those who discovered a new faith in the camps was Leonard Morrison. Morrison had rejected Christianity whilst a student at Cambridge University in the late 1930s, arguing that Christ's ideal could be realised on earth and, with his friends, `spent many gallons of beer and hours of time demolishing God and heaven and hell.'[1192] He was captured in 1942 and taken to Changi before working on the Thai-Burma Railway. Following his capture, Morrison described how he came to realise that the real enemy was within himself.[1193] The terror he felt created panic and the need to hold onto something firm. It was at this point that he felt God come to his rescue. His previous belief in humanism was destroyed by the jealousies and rivalries he witnessed between officers and other ranks, with regimental and class distinctions being perpetuated even in captivity. In addition, the irrationality of the Japanese guards working men to death made no sense to a humanist, and he came to realise he needed something greater than could be devised by man.

Morrison noted that the prisoners who were the least selfish were those who attended church services in camp. They also displayed, for him, the greatest moral courage and physical heroism when working on the railway. Once he returned to

[1188] Broom, Letter, 2 Feb 1941
[1189] Quoted in Taylor, *The Sea Chaplains*, p.449
[1190] Snape, `War, Religion and Revival', p.149
[1191] J.N. Lewis Bryan, *The Churches of the Captivity in Malaya* (London: SPCK, 1946), p.15
[1192] Leonard Morrison, `Reality Regained', in Guthrie Moir (ed.), *Beyond Hatred* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), p.73
[1193] Ibid, p.79

Changi, his faith began to take shape. In addition to the example set by lay Christians, Morrison was helped by `one remarkable priest, now a bishop here at home [Eric Cordingly].'[1194] Towards the end of his journey towards conversion, Morrison experienced a vision of being condemned to death for spying on Japanese officers in the Cotswolds. At that nadir of despair and emptiness, he heard the voice of God, `O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'[1195] Morrison became ordained after the war and served as a school chaplain.

Many others experienced a spiritual revival in the Far East camps, as they sought solace and strength from the starvation, beatings and diseases visited upon them. Joe Blythe recalled the experience of a hospital being shelled during the fall of Singapore as the point when he found renewed vigour for his subsequent Methodist ministry, `the horrors of War became so vivid in my mind that I said "If God spares to get me out of this, I will proclaim `PEACE' from the Pulpit as long as I have my being."' [1196] Captain John Leech, a former missionary who had returned to the army on the outbreak of war, found that many men became spiritually minded and `I saw some led to the Lord or deepened spiritually.'[1197] He also reported nightly Bible study meetings in one camp in Singapore, `It has been in the black darkness of despondency that God has been most real.'[1198] William Allchin found a deeper faith after attending a prison camp service about the Sermon on the Mount. His subsequent work for peace and reconciliation between the Japanese and British peoples was driven by his desire to live by his understanding of Christ's message in that sermon.[1199] For Douglas Firth, it was in a hastily constructed church on a hillside at Kanu camp that he and many others built up `an indestructible faith in the power of God.'[1200] Although many testimonies from Far East prisoner of war camps point to a deepening of men's faith, there is also evidence that, as in camps in Germany, the length of captivity could lead to a waning of enthusiasm for worship. Joe Blythe's diary entry for April 1943 stated `During these days we were still having our Sunday services, but they were not so well

[1194] Ibid, p.81
[1195] Ibid, p..82
[1196] Blythe, *Survival Through Faith in Adversity*, p.15
[1197] `In Japanese Hands', *Practical Christianity*, March 1946, p.4
[1198] Ibid, p.7
[1199] Allchin et al, *The Light of Experience*, pp.136-41
[1200] Firth, *Tapestry Story of the Kwai*, p.11

attended, as quite a few of the men seemed quite indifferent to Heavenly things these days.'[1201]

In some cases, conversion to Christianity was a gradual process, involving discussions with those of faith, rather than any direct appeal for conversion. Christopher Bulteel came from a non-religious background but gradually found a Christian faith during his time in the Eighth Army in North Africa and Italy in 1942-3. Whilst at Sandhurst he expressed a resentment of `silly Sunday Church parades.'[1202] On a troopship en route to Egypt, Bulteel decided that `I ought to take my religious inclinations a little more seriously', and began discussions with a comrade who was a self-defined Christian `because [he] was just brought up that way.'[1203] The pair began to attend communion services organised by the ship's chaplain and engaged in alcohol-fuelled discussions about religion. At that stage `The Christian life sounded far from pleasant! But the alcohol was.'[1204] Following action in North Africa, Bulteel became familiar with the Roman Catholic battalion chaplain, Fr Gough Quinn, but expressed reluctance to become `professionally involved' with him as `it seemed to me that it was my own business to sort out my salvation.'[1205] However by challenging Quinn, and through attendance with friends at a Bible study group in Libya, Bulteel reached a stage where `I think I do believe in God. […] I can't help feeling that I ought to make some gesture. […] Perhaps I should go into the Church, or something.'[1206] Quinn accused him of attempting to strike a bargain with God, asserting that that any faith he had was still a long way short of those Catholics under his pastoral care.

It was only after his VC-winning action at Salerno, when Bulteel was taken seriously ill with malaria, that he `went through a curious spiritual experience' that led him to believe that God had chosen him to live, and that it was not enough to wait for God to provide a clear message as to his future purpose, but to actively seek it for himself.[1207] Bulteel became an Anglo-Catholic after the war and served as headmaster of Ardingly College. His experience indicates that for some, a conversation to

[1201] Blythe, *Survival Through Faith in Adversity,* p.47
[1202] Bulteel, *Something About a Soldier,* p.17
[1203] Ibid, p.43.
[1204] Ibid, p.48
[1205] Ibid, p.105
[1206] Ibid, p.159
[1207] Ibid, p.165

Christianity was a long-term process, subject to input from comrades, and reliant on a constantly challenging and enquiring mind within the individual.

In addition to those who claimed a conversion during their armed service experience, there are many cases of faith being strengthened because of wartime circumstances. Lavinia Holland-Hibbert entered the ATS from a traditional Anglican background and reflected that being a member of a Church which had bishops to address the complex ethical and spiritual problems the war presented strengthened her faith. The church hierarchy:

> [B]atters away at the old questions that exercised me in the war; intercessory prayer; "Why not me?" and the seeming silence of God to the agonised appeal of the Jews in the Concentration Camps. However, if they can solve that one, I must accept it. But the fact of the Concentration Camps has changed my religious thinking more than any other single thing, and makes me thankful for the Bishops of our time, who struggle for me over the need to think through many traditional views of God.[1208]

Even padres could find that danger brought a greater realisation of faith. Rev Clifford Lever, a Methodist, questioned his own faith whilst sheltering in a farm seven miles outside Calais in May 1940 awaiting a German tank attack. His test of whether his faith was genuine was whether it would provide the `very present help' in a time of trouble promised in the 46th Psalm.[1209] He tried to reason with himself as to whether the faith was genuine, and in the end for Lever it came down to a feeling, `an irresistible affirmative that was overflooding the mind.'[1210] Faith overcame reason, `Instinct, not reason […] Intuition, not intellect […] Faith, not argument. This was the soul's affirmative.'[1211] Lever likened this to the experience of Paul on the road to Damascus, the `pure reality of God.'

An RASC officer, captured in Greece, described the near death experience of being raked by machine guns in an open ravine, when a prayer he had never heard before came into his mind, `The blood of Jesus, Lord for me!'[1212] He was overwhelmed by an inner peace and later stated that `Faith in Christ does answer all God's demands,

[1208] IWM, 6468, Lavinia Orde
[1209] Clifford Lever, *Epic of Calais* (London: Epworth Press, 1945), p.14
[1210] Ibid
[1211] Ibid, p.16
[1212] `Prisoners of War', *Practical Christianity*, September 1945, p.18

and takes away the fear of death.'[1213] Cliff Collinge, a Sapper with the Royal Engineers, who had been a choirboy in an Anglo-Catholic church as a youth, was another whose faith found a firmer footing in the war, being confirmed in Cairo Cathedral aged 20. Like Bulteel, Collinge considered that being able to enjoy a more personal relationship with the clergy whilst on active service meant that they come down from the `pedestal' on which he had placed them, as he was able to have direct discussions at a camp church, named `St Martin-in-the-Sand.'[1214] For Lieutenant-Colonel H.J.A. Thicknesse, it was not the direct combat that focussed the mind and spirit, but the absence of the routine distractions of life. He wrote that the fourteen months spent in North Africa were the happiest in his twenty-five years of soldiering.[1215] He found that, away from what he called the `tyranny of newspapers and radio', there was a `purging and purifying of the spirit.'[1216] Therefore, he and others `heard the voice of God in our hearts more clearly than we had ever done before.'[1217]

Despite the overwhelming resilience of personal faith for most Christians in the armed services, there were some for whom, as Sean Longden noted, `religious convictions entered a state of flux.'[1218] For those held in captivity for long periods by the Germans, the testing of faith appeared as a gradual wearing down of an inner feeling of spirituality, rather than an outright rejection. Clare Makepeace has identified three elements to the mental disturbances experienced by prisoners of war in German camps; claustrophobia caused by the physical limitations of the border fences, prisoners' inability to get away from each other, and the empty, monotonous time of captivity.[1219] Each of these acted to sap religious faith. Rifleman John Eldridge was taken prisoner at the fall of Greece in 1941. He soon fell victim to boredom and depression, and after more than two years in captivity complained `This is no life but just experience.'[1220] Even Christmas Day was `Not a joyous day for me as it should be. I cannot summon up any feeling of merriment.'[1221] However Eldridge did retain a

[1213] Ibid
[1214] Museum of Army Chaplaincy (MAC Archive), Alan Robinson research files, Cliff Collinge
[1215] OCU, *A Time for War and Peace*, p.22
[1216] Ibid
[1217] Ibid
[1218] Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, p.36
[1219] Clare Makepeace, `Going "round the bend" in prisoner of war camps', *The Lancet*, 390 (2017), 1483-1484
[1220] John Eldridge, Private Family Archive, Letter, 6 September 1943
[1221] IWM, 12703, John Eldridge, *War Diary*, 25 December 1943

faith which saw the providential hand of God, `I get fed up with life here sometimes but I realise that God has been good to me. I am alive and not wounded and shall be able to return home after the war. [1222] I am in good health for which I thank God', he wrote. [1223]

For Eldridge, it was impossible to endure captivity without a faith to cling on to, but the nature of that captivity made it difficult to live by Christian principles:

> In the various arguments which take place in this room I find how hopeless one must be without a philosophy of life to guide one. A man without a ph (sic) of life is like a ship without a rudder. For me that ph of life is Christianity. I try to base all my opinions etc on it and try to live it as well but it is very hard. I am afraid I get very short tempered when I argue with a person who does not accept Christianity. I know I should not but some people to me are just impossible.[1224]

This attitude was not limited to those missing their regular expressions of faith through attendance at a church service. Even chaplains could feel a strain on their faith, with both the Methodist Rev Ellison Platt, and Rev David Wild, an Anglican, admitting to periods of a lack of love for their fellow man.[1225] Platt recorded, `Woke up feeling very browned off. I took myself in hand, failed in the process, and by midday was worse.'[1226] However, despite admissions of irritation with his fellow captives, Platt also was able to draw on his faith to mediate through the prisoner experience, `Life as a prisoner of war makes one thrice thankful for an inner consciousness of invisible things.[1227]

Platt was also able to observe the range of religious observance amongst the officers under his ministry:

> Of religion one feels that it is moderately patronised by the majority, and to a minority it is vital and real. But it is at a low ebb: not perhaps in fundamental belief, or in the acceptance of its social and political idealism, but definitely so in the practice of worship. The first six months of captivity was different: consciousness of dependence on some power outside themselves was real, and

[1222] Ibid, 7 December 1941
[1223] Ibid, 23 July 1941
[1224] Ibid, 6 May 1943
[1225] Duggan (ed.), *Padre in Colditz*; Wild, *Prisoner of Hope*
[1226] Duggan (ed.), *Padre in Colditz*, p.80
[1227] Ibid, p.85

> a church service was one of the biggest things in camp life. Some who found a Christian experience then have kept it as the greatest meaning in life.[1228]

Therefore, after an initial strengthening of faith in testing circumstances, the daily tedium of prison life under German captivity wore away at men's spiritual vitality. Whilst not being weakened, Christian faith in Colditz was numbed as people found it increasingly hard to raise their spirits for church services and other acts of devotion. However Platt did find that the creation of a private space in a box room in 1944 gave him `the opportunity to give private interviews to officers and orderlies in mental, spiritual and moral difficulty […] I have found during this second lean period that more prisoners than ever are in mental distress, and more than usual are wanting to get a religious perspective on life', thus suggesting that the war would eventually bring out a greater degree of faith from those in whom it previously existed.[1229]

Captain W.C. Harris, taken as a prisoner of war by the Germans, valued the time his captivity gave him to reflect on his faith, in an almost monastic focus of contemplation:

> Free at last from the hustle and bustle of modern life, with all its diverting influences, its high pressure, and all its petty worries and troubles, many of these men at last found the necessary time and solitude to turn their thoughts in search of Eternal Truth and Beauty, seeking new values on which to found their future lives.[1230]

However, not all men, or indeed chaplains, found that being a prisoner of war of the Germans was conducive to a strong faith. Rev Douglas Thompson, a Methodist, imprisoned in Stalag Luft, found a United Board chaplain who had been captured in 1941 in Greece, suffering from a severe mental breakdown.[1231] The man spent most of his time lying on bed smoking, and was subsequently sent back to Britain by the Repatriation Committee. Thompson's own maintenance of faith was more whimsical. Referring about his good attendance at Christian Way lectures, he commented, `You had to go to something didn't you?'[1232]

[1228] Ibid, p.227
[1229] Ibid, p.274
[1230] Quoted in D.H.C. Read, *Prisoner's Quest: A Presentation of the Christian Faith in a Prisoner of War Camp* (London: SCM Press, 1944), p.5
[1231] London Imperial War Museum (IWM), 4650, Interview with Douglas Thompson
[1232] Ibid

Vacillations of faith occurred throughout the services. One RAF Squadron Leader retrospectively rebuked himself for trying to live a Christian life by his own strength. He ascribed his escape from a burning plane after a bombing raid in the Ardennes as a `miraculous answer to prayer.'[1233] On another bombing raid, he took courage from the words from Deuteronomy 33:27, `The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms.'[1234] Rev Arthur J. Symonds was present during the fall of Tobruk, and whilst preparing bodies for burial was told by one of his men, `Heaven and Hell are right here on earth, and these fellows have had it.' [1235] Symonds did not enter into an argument with them, but `those words for the moment weakened my faith and my fellow men.'[1236]

Norman Kirby questioned the depth of his faith, whilst waiting for replacement transport amongst piles of German corpses killed during the Battle of Falaise Pocket:

> There was much to think about during those hours spent in their company. It was not long after arriving in darkness at the new camp site that I was taken ill with dysentery and with what I can only describe as a spiritual sickness involving religious values and anxiety about life and death and human destiny. [1237]

It was only then that Kirby came to a full realisation of the impact of war, having:

> [U]p to that moment [been] enjoying (yes enjoying!) too much the feeling of being on some unique mission; still intoxicated by the adventure of Overlord and the awareness, encouraged by our politicians and war leaders, of being part of history, and too busy with endless duties to meditate on the larger issues of life and death.[1238]

Kirby's faith wore thin towards the end of the war. He found it hard to reconcile himself to the contrasts he saw in his role within Montgomery's Tactical HQ, `an incongruous mixture of military pressures, civilian miseries and light-hearted relaxations. The events of a single day could transport us from darkness to light and

[1233] `Air Battle', *Practical Christianity*, March 1946, p.17
[1234] Ibid
[1235] Symonds, *"You're free!"*, pp.4-5
[1236] Ibid
[1237] Kirby, *1100 Miles with Monty*, p.71
[1238] Ibid, p.71

back again.'[1239] This contrast was brought sharply into focus at Christmas 1944. Having played the organ at a carol service for which Montgomery had read the lesson, Kirby was summoned from listening to the playback of the service to explain to a grief-stricken mother how her four-year-old boy had been knocked down by a British lorry and killed.[1240] Whilst such experiences did not appear to lead believers to seriously question their faith, there was a sense of `spiritual fatigue' during the final years of the war from those in the North-West Europe campaign. Events conspired to constantly challenge the Christian as they were confronted with personal danger, the death of comrades and the contrasts of the ecstasy of the liberation of Belgium and the hunger and desperation in Holland and Germany.

Alec Guinness was one whose faith vacillated considerably during the war. Having been brought up in a traditional public school background of prayers at night and hymn-singing in the chapel, Guinness was confirmed in 1930 aged 16 but came away from the church `a confirmed atheist.'[1241] However by 1939, he had rediscovered some of the faith inculcated in his youth, writing to his wife, `In all this instability I'm beginning to believe in him again.'[1242] Guinness gained further encouragement in his faith during a short stay with an acquaintance, Rev Tomkinson. Here he was introduced to the works of St Theresa of Avila and St Francis de Sales. Having read them, Guinness appeared to experience a conversion, `a feeling of forgiveness and renewal swept over me. […] I was left so joyful.'[1243]

Having joined the RNVR in 1941, Guinness found that his faith was not unshakeable, `I'm a huge hypocrite and never stop doubting in the most horrible way. […] My constant prayer is for the Grace to be able to believe […] if asked exactly what I believe I would be stumped.'[1244] These prayers were answered for Guinness when, in April 1941, he revealed to his wife that he felt called to the priesthood. However by September that feeling had faded, and he admitted to feeling a religious confusion, `I still have my religious convictions but they have undergone deep sea changes one way and another and I have not lived by the Church, or prayer in the way

[1239] Ibid, p.113
[1240] Ibid
[1241] Read, *Alec Guinness,* p.31
[1242] Ibid, p.79
[1243] Read, p.115
[1244] Read, p.130

I genuinely tried to eighteen months ago.'[1245] His faith continued to oscillate between staleness and strength throughout the war, and in 1944 he sought out a Catholic priest with whom to make a confession, rather than the High Anglican naval chaplain with whom he was on good terms. Throughout the war and beyond, Guinness displayed a complex nature which loved gossip and associations with the theatrical world, but which intermittently `yearned for the serenity that came when he felt filled with the Grace of God.'[1246]

Harry Read, a member of the Airborne Division of the Royal Signals who came from a multi-generational Salvationist family, underwent two changes of faith during the war. In his early teens he had switched allegiance to the Methodist Church as his friends worshipped there. Read then rejected his parents' entreaties to stay in the protected employment of shipbuilding and volunteered for the army at the earliest opportunity. He claimed to have lost his faith shortly after joining up, partly as a rejection against his religious upbringing and a desire to assert his independence from his parents. [1247] Despite this, on D-Day Read had the `irrational feeling' that God was with him and began to reflect on `the transience of life in general and the meaningless of my life in particular.'[1248] Towards the end of the war Read reflected, `You don't really like the person you are becoming. You are capable of living a better kind of life than this, a more fulfilling kind of life than this. Unless you do something you are not going to be a very nice person to know.'[1249] Following demobilisation, Read entered the Salvation Army Training College. It was only at that point that he concluded he had fully entered the faith. Read's vacillations display the myriad aspects that made an individual faith; family background, personal experience and the predisposition to soul-searching, his war experience turning him from a potential backslider to a future church leader.

At the farthest end of the faith spectrum stood those who substantially lost their belief because of their war experiences. Some were either from rigidly dogmatic Nonconformist sects, who experienced life outside of the sectarian straitjacket for the first time, whilst others were nominal Christians whose faith vanished with little

[1245] Read, p.141
[1246] Ibid, p.177
[1247] Wetherby, Second World War Experience Centre Archive (SWWEC), 2316, Interview with Harry Read
[1248] Ibid
[1249] Ibid

challenge. Sergeant Edwin Bowman of the Royal Artillery had been brought up by a devout Anglican mother and had dutifully followed her lead through confirmation. He was badly wounded in Italy in 1944, eventually losing an eye and suffering severe intestinal problems. Whilst under the heavy shellfire which was to cause these injuries, a padre offered Bowman and his comrades Holy Communion. Bowman reflected on the religious ritual of his youth:

> Once upon a time, in my sheltered youth, even later as a recruit at Woolwich, I would have considered nothing amiss in his request. Regular attendance at Communion was a ritual not to be avoided in my home. There was even a prize for being the most promising scholar at Sunday-school, signed by the Revd Joseph Gorwall, MA, himself. Now, whatever simple faith I had assimilated was gone. No longer could I accept a benevolent protective Deity when suffering, carnage, betrayal and heart-break stalked around unchecked in my grim world.[1250]

However, Bowman recognised that this loss of faith was not typical of those serving in the army, `It was not the Army which was responsible. There were many devout believers who retained their faith and some who found that it was strengthened. I did not. I lost it. Later in life, well-meaning folk tried to convert me […] but I remained a lost cause.'[1251]

Dr Charles Evans of the RAMC, brought up in a Welsh Calvinist Methodist community, had rebelled against religion `as soon as I could think for myself.' [1252] Evans expressed some surprise at the credulity of many soldiers regarding religion. Despite this, as a doctor in the Fourteenth Army, he found comfort in the words spoken at a burial service.[1253] Captain J.H. Frankau of the Royal Engineers, who had been brought up as a `conventional morning prayer' low church Anglican found that his experience in North Africa made him less devout. [1254] Frankau `started as a Christian believer; I became an atheist from which position it has taken me a long time to recover.'[1255]

[1250] J.E. Bowman, *Three Stripes and a Gun* (Braunton: Merlin, 1987), p.224
[1251] Ibid
[1252] Charles Evans, *A Doctor in the XIVth Army, Burma 1944-1945* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998), p.146
[1253] Ibid, p.148
[1254] MAC Archive, Robinson, J.H. Frankau
[1255] Ibid

One such person for whom faith briefly flickered before fading was Sergeant Jack Farrow of the Norfolk Regiment, who became confirmed whilst a prisoner at Changi. Prior to the war Farrow had no discernible faith, although he had attended Sunday School as a boy. In March 1942 he attended a camp church service as he had `nothing else to do so go along to it.'[1256] He found the hymns `gave you a lift' even though he could only join in with a couple of lines he recalled from his Sunday School days.[1257] Later that month, he attended a church service `like a lot of other fellows, to pass the time.'[1258] Farrow became a regular attender and by the middle of April was considering attending confirmation classes. He found his first class `helps to drift my thoughts homeward again to my wife.'[1259] This developing faith displayed elements of irony, however, with Farrow writing in May, `As it's Sunday I go to church and with the rest pray for bacon and eggs.'[1260]

After being confirmed during the visit of the Bishop of Singapore in July 1942, Farrow questioned the sincerity of his conversion. On taking his first communion in July he pondered, `I wonder why I have been moved to take these religious steps. Have I seen the light or is it simply for something to do?'[1261] Farrow frequently referred to church attendance as a ritual to be observed, or part of a routine to pass the time. However, he did attend one Nonconformist chapel where he heard `a very good and wise service delivered.'[1262] He held discussions with a Methodist padre in an attempt to develop a deeper faith, and noted the ever-growing numbers attending camp services, although ascribed to many of the men the same confused rationale as he had.[1263] By Easter 1943, Farrow was expressing disquiet with the efficacy of attending camp church and by 1944 had no access to a Bible as he had used the leaves as cigarette papers. By June 1944 Farrow admitted, `I no longer go to Communion having just about lost all my faith in religion.'[1264] Although he perfunctorily attended a couple of services towards the end of 1944, and a thanksgiving service on release, Farrow's narrative acts as a counterpoint to the stories of faith rekindled or bursting forth.

[1256] Farrow, *Darkness before the Dawn,* p.97
[1257] Ibid
[1258] Ibid, p.105
[1259] Ibid, p.120
[1260] Ibid, p.124
[1261] Ibid, p.144
[1262] Ibid, p.196
[1263] Ibid, p.199
[1264] Ibid, p.239

Christianity had failed to deliver the consolations and answers for which Farrow had been searching and he did not return to religion in later life.

Captain Peter Davies of the 2nd Battalion Loyal Regiment found his captivity in Japanese hands gave him time to reflect on his previously nominal Anglican beliefs. As an officer, he felt it was his duty to lead the thirty men under him in a weekly service at Formosa Camp in 1944. Whilst maintaining a professional front, Davies later recorded:

> However, few people realised my own feelings in this matter. […] I had always been brought up to believe in God and automatically go to church every Sunday, without ever seriously thinking about it. I had never read the prayers properly, and it was not until I had to read them out aloud every Sunday in camp that I realised what drivel 99% of them were.[1265]

This caused him to further interrogate the beliefs taught during his upbringing, leading to four principal objections to the Anglican faith. Firstly, Davies identified a hypocrisy amongst the clergy and laity in their reluctance to live fully by Christ's way of thinking. Next came an objection to the assimilation of God as a `purely British (excluding Eire) institution' and that `a pagan domination of the world for a time might be the eventual salvation of Christianity and the world.'[1266] Thirdly, Davies considered the notion of the Holy Spirit a man-made myth with no basis in Christ's teachings, and finally he noted that religions that rely on priests will always come to grief, as many abuse this position.

These thoughts did not lead Davies to an outright rejection of Christianity, but to move to a position of sympathetic agnosticism to Christianity or any other iteration of faith in a God:

> Christ, in my opinion, was the greatest man who has ever lived. Whether I believe he was God, or if there is a God, I don't know and won't deny; I hope there is a God, and think there must be. If there is, we are all going the wrong way about believing in him, and I can't think of a way out; I wish I could. The sudden and utter disillusionment has left my life rather lacking in something.

[1265] London, Imperial War Museum (IWM), 448, Papers of Peter Davies, *Idle Thoughts of an Idle Fellow*
[1266] Ibid

> Maybe one of those obscurer religions about which I know nothing is the answer to my troubles, but being too lazy and self-indulgent I can't be bothered. That is the matter in a nutshell.[1267]

Strict Scottish Baptist Eric Lomax, having marshalled his inner faith to help sustain him through three-and-a-half brutal years as a prisoner of the Japanese, found it ebb away on his return to Britain. The lack of interest amongst civilians in his experiences, the chasm between everyday life and his recent vivid experiences and the impression of `a world that seemed cynical and petty compared to the companionship and the seriousness that came from facing death' led to Lomax experiencing a then-undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder.[1268] The feeling of disconnect from his pre-war life extended to the chapel, `I was as passive about being drawn back into it as I was about everything else.'[1269] Lomax resented the political jealousies among the chapelgoers, such as complaints about someone sitting in a seat traditionally assigned to another person, and persistent grumbles from members about how tough fire-watching duties had been during the war. He `became impatient at their ignorance and their sheer hypocrisy' and drifted away from an active Christian faith.[1270] The chasm between the experience of faith in Lomax's war, and the reaction of his home church proved unbridgeable.

Iris Brewer, a WRNS wireless operator, was a pre-war conventional Anglican. However, she began to study politics `to find out why I was fighting my friends the Germans.'[1271] From this she began to question the teachings of Christianity she had learned at school, such as the consignment to eternal hell for one lifetime's actions. Whilst stationed in Devon, she cycled to the local parish church for a Sunday service, but was made to feel unwelcome. Questioning her faith, Brewer consulted a senior naval chaplain and was redesignated an agnostic and relieved of the compulsion to attend church parades. Two decades later, she began to attend church again, believing in the teachings of Christ but unable to accept clerical doctrines. Thus, a lack of an answer as to the meaning of conflict, allied to a perceived slight from a domestic church congregation, saw Brewer reject the nominal faith she had been brought up

[1267] Ibid
[1268] Lomax, *The Railway Man*, p.205
[1269] Ibid, p.208
[1270] Ibid, p.216
[1271] Iris Brewer, Private Family Papers

with, and it took decades of enquiry before she returned to church attendance, albeit without totally accepting the doctrine of any denomination.

Alec Waldron was brought up in an Exclusive Plymouth Brethren family and, although his father had tried to switch to the less dogmatic Open Brethren, he had relented under pressure to return to the Exclusives. The theological rigidity of the sect did not form a firm foundation for lasting faith in Waldron's case. He followed their ritual of `conversion' into `fellowship' during 1938. However, this was after a cross-examination by a handful of church elders, Waldron admitting to undergoing this so he could spend time with a young woman for whom he had fallen, `an act of hypocrisy that had "inevitability" written all over it.'[1272] He failed at the first effort as his answers appeared to lack conviction but succeeded at the second attempt.

Waldon became convinced during 1939 and 1940, whilst serving in the Admiralty Civil Service, that he should join the armed services. This would result in expulsion from the strictly-pacifist Brethren. After a four-hour haranguing in a chapel, he was `withdrawn from', leaving in him a state of near exhaustion. The extent to which the faith of fear had penetrated him was shown by `the thought that God would strike me dead before I made my escape.'[1273] Following that experience Waldron `re-examined, bit by bit, the foundations of my faith and found them wanting.'[1274] The pressure to return to the fold continued as two Brethren arrived at his billet in Redruth to suggest he register as a conscientious objector. They only stopped when Waldron threatened to report them to the army authorities for subverting a solider in the course of his duties. On his journey away from Christianity, Waldron still admired people of faith, writing of a Regimental Sergeant-Major's `great inner strength which undoubtedly stemmed from his unshakeable faith.'[1275] Waldron's search for belief in a set of ideas saw him briefly join the Communist Party in 1943, `some kind of replacement to fill the void created by my leaving the Exclusives, an equally disciplined and doctrinaire organisation.'[1276] Following the war, Waldron did not return to Christianity. Thus, for those who lost their faith because of their war experiences and the immediate aftermath, it was the distance created between their

[1272] Waldon, *From Pacifist to Glider Pilot*, p.69
[1273] Ibid, p.79
[1274] Ibid, p.79
[1275] Ibid, p.131
[1276] Ibid, p.132

perceptions of the world and the inflexibility and incomprehension of the communities of faith with which they were associated, which created the disconnect.

Conclusion

Individual men and women entered the war with a wide spectrum of religious practices. Some worshipped and prayed multiple times per week whilst others considered themselves Christians by maintaining a minimal church attendance on major festival days. For some, the war would challenge and shift their faith whilst for others it was reinforced. From a starting point of what Michael Snape termed this `broad theistic consensus', self-defining Christians also developed a more personal conceptualisation of faith. The war meant people in the armed forces began to work out their own meanings of life, albeit within frameworks that had been presented during their upbringing. Therefore, faith became a more immediate and personal construct than it had been for many before their wartime service.

There was a remarkable resilience of faith for active Christians in the forces, with few claiming to lose their faith completely and many drawing on it in times of trouble, thus finding it strengthened. Michael Snape's contention that `the soldiers of the United States, British and Canadian armies were exposed to an institutional process of rechristianisation during the Second World War, a process that was widely reinforced by a deepening religious faith at a personal level' is borne out in the majority of testimonies from active Christians in the British armed services.[1277] Their faith was re-energised, and they emerged from the war with a deeper understanding of their beliefs, having applied them in a more challenging context than their domestic milieu.

Those who did lose faith, or who came close to rejecting Christian beliefs, tended to come from two opposite ends of the pre-war religious spectrum. Firstly, those like Eric Lomax and Alec Waldron who had been brought up with a strict, unyielding set of religious practices and Harry Read, who rejected the all-encompassing nature of Salvation Army membership. Secondly those like J.H. Frankau, Jack Farrow or Iris Brewer, with a nominal Anglican background for whom religion had been a matter of routine, and for whom it did not form a firm bedrock in challenging circumstances.

[1277] Snape, `War, Religion and Revival', p.151

Most active Christians returned home with a deeper understanding of their relationship with God, and fresh perspectives on divine dealing. For many, the Bible remained a constant guide, unlike the shifting denominational doctrinal manoeuvrings of the British Churches. There would appear to be little evidence to support a view that the roots of any subsequent secularisation of British society can be found in the wartime experiences of men and women in the armed services. There is much to support Michael Snape's contention that the religious experience of soldiers in the British Army was a significant factor in the subsequent decade's religious revival.[1278]

However, the fact that frequently many individuals had had to work out how their faith in God related to their situations without the support of ordained clergy, the immediate influence of their home congregations and family, and without the regularity of church ritual and attendance, meant that religion had become more of a personal concern rather than a collective one. As Clive Field put it, `Congregational links were broken, however temporarily.'[1279] Whilst most evidence indicates active Christians leaving the military continued to be keen Christians and churchgoers after the war, they had demonstrated that faith could flourish without the ongoing presence of formal church structures. Thus, there was a marginal weakening of obedience and automatic respect for church hierarchies. More emphasis was placed on one's relationship with God than the formalities of worship. This made it more difficult for the organised Churches to retain a grip on people's religious observance in subsequent decades. Austin Muir concluded that wartime evangelism was weak and that `all denominations failed to take advantage of their captive audiences to encourage active participation in Church life after the war.'[1280]

The absence of an aggressively evangelistic tone from those charged with armed service religious provision was a precursor of the eventual decline of British Christianity a generation later. It became evident to many men and women of a self-defined faith that their beliefs could prove resilient and even be strengthened despite prolonged lapses between episodes of formal liturgical input. This was particularly the case for those brought up in denominations that required a strict adherence to a routine of observance and the following of a moral lifestyle. As Salvationist Ken Tout recalled,

[1278] Ibid, p.136
[1279] Field, `Puzzled People', p.448
[1280] MAC Archive, Robinson, Austin Muir

`If a guy smoked a cigarette, it didn't mean he'd lost his religion, but maybe found a new religion better suited to him.'[1281] As a youth. Tout had to attend eighteen citadel services per week. Once church members had tasted different ways of experiencing faith during the war, they were often reluctant to totally ascribe to denominations which demanded control over their personal habits and lifestyles. Tout claimed `Some people found a clear vision of what God might be, or be able to do, but did not want to come back into a particular ordered religious environment.'[1282] Faith was strengthened, but the Churches were not.

[1281] Ken Tout, Private Papers
[1282] Ibid

Chapter Eight – Conclusions

General Conclusions

Christianity in the British military services in the Second World War remained resilient for those of an active faith. However, just two decades later Britain was in the throes of a dramatic decline in Christian observance, one that has continued to the present day. The causes of this decline have formed the basis of the secularisation debates over the past three decades. This is a contentious subject, with disagreements about its origins, nature, rapidity and form. Therefore, to establish the significance of the Christian service experience during the war, it is first necessary to understand the context of the debates about post-war Christianity.

A 1948 Mass-Observation Report asserted that `whilst the idea of religion being a good thing is still widely accepted, the practice of worship has fallen into an obvious decline.'[1283] The same report found that nearly 40% of the population attended church at least once a month, although there were marked regional variations within this figure, and for every two Anglican attendees there was one Roman Catholic or Nonconformist.[1284] Family prayers were never observed by 80% of Britons.[1285] Some generalist historians have subscribed to the narrative that 1950s Britain was not a particularly religious society, without suggesting that this was linked to the experience of war. For Peter Hennessy `mid-century Britain was still a Christian country only in a vague attitudinal sense, belief being more a residual husk than a kernel of conviction.'[1286] David Kynaston agreed, stating that `it is hard to see how Britain in the 1950s can, in any meaningful sense, be called a Christian society.'[1287]

However, specialist religious historians have developed a more nuanced picture of 1950s Britain. Currie, Gilbert and Horsley suggested a relatively solid state of British Christianity with their calculation that, between 1945-1960, formal membership of the Church of England and Church of Scotland remained stable, whilst Roman Catholic membership grew, and Nonconformist Churches continued their pre-

[1283] University of Sussex, Mass-Observation Archive (MOA), FR 3027 `A Report on Churchgoing', August 1948; p.1
[1284] Ibid, p.7
[1285] Ibid, p.3
[1286] Peter Hennessy, *Never Again Britain, 1945-51* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1992), p.436
[1287] David Kynaston, *Family Britain, 1951-57* (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), p.535

war trajectory of decline.[1288] However this statistical metric should only provide a background against which to interrogate the qualitative evidence. David Herbert argued that in post-1945 Britain, studying the ways in which religion influences peoples' lives is more instructive than measuring church attendance.[1289] Greater attention has been paid to offering different modes of interpretation, drawing on philosophy, theology and the history of ideas, in addition to sociology or social history.[1290] This methodology has meant a reinterpretation of conceptual frameworks within which secularisation can be analysed, adding further weight to the central contention of this thesis that wartime Christianity was recast rather than rejected.

Other commentators have painted a gloomier picture of British Christianity in the immediate post-war period. E.R. Norman described the era as `post-Christian', whilst Ian Machin thought that the 1950s could hardly be described as sturdily and clearly Christian.'[1291] Churchgoing met not hostility, but apathy, and for large sections of the population Christian observance was limited to rites of passage ceremonies. Machin argued that `The Christian beliefs held by most of the population had become largely privatised, being maintained apart from demonstration at public services.'[1292] This tendency had been a feature of wartime religion in the military, with service personnel taking increasing ownership over their own patterns of observance in the absence of regularity of formal worship. Although the Churches preserved a measure of stability up to 1960, there was no discernible revival of numbers of influence.[1293]

Rowntree and Lavers considered that `despite the devoted adherence to the Churches of millions of ordinary men and women, who make up church membership, it remains true that in the lives of a large majority of people of all classes of the community the Church is no longer relevant.'[1294] Simon Green argued that there was no revival, and that any growth seen in certain denominations or regions was merely a minor redistribution of those already actively religious towards the Established

[1288] Currie, Gilbert and Horsley, *Churches and Churchgoers*, p.32
[1289] David Herbert, *Religion and Civil Society: Rethinking Public Religion in the Contemporary World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003)
[1290] Garnett et al, *Redefining Christian Britain*
[1291] E.R. Norman, *Church and Society in England, 1770-1970* (Oxford: OUP. 1977), p.32; Machin, *Churches and Social Issues,* p.138
[1292] Ibid, p.139
[1293] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues*, p.172
[1294] B.S. Rowntree and G.R. Lavers, *English Life and Leisure: A Social Study* (London: Longman, 1951), pp.344-5

Churches in England and Scotland.'[1295] For Green, the 1950s was a decade of false hopes for the British Churches, and `Britain had ceased to be a Christian country by 1960.'[1296] Alan Gilbert stated that any religious revival of the late 1940s and 1950s was `minimal.'[1297]

Nigel Yates saw the years between 1950-1970 as a single period of `considerable moral, religious and social change' in Britain.[1298] Yates further claimed that the ground for the sexual and moral revolution of the 1960s was laid in the 1950s., as the Churches became bystanders from the dynamics of moral transformations in British society between 1950 and 1970.[1299] In contrast, Callum Brown challenged the prevailing narrative of the 1950s as a continuation in the long-term decline of British Christianity. He identified the period as one of religious revival, `Historians and sociologists have never come to terms with the growth of institutional religion in Britain between 1945 and 1958.'[1300] He argued that the decade immediately following the end of the war witnessed the greatest church growth that Britain had experienced since the mid-nineteenth century, with Church membership, Sunday School enrolment, and Anglican confirmations all increasing.[1301] This religious revival was aided by the high-profile Billy Graham crusades of 1954-56, in conjunction with more traditional mission activities from domestic Churches. For Brown, it was only in the 1960s that a religious decline set in, with the rapid disappearance of a Christian culture within British society. He ascribed the 1950s increase in religious activity to those who had been too young to fight in the war, with females showing greater degrees of piety than males. However, this did point to the continuing `discursive power of the evangelical narrative which had been sustained through wartime.'[1302]

Clive Field, having harvested an unrivalled amount of quantitative source material through the *British Religion in Numbers* project, subjected Callum Brown's

[1295] S.J.D. Green, `Was there an English religious revival in the 1950s?', *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 7, (2006), 517-38
[1296] Ibid, p.537
[1297] Alan Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain: A History of the Secularization of Modern Society* (London: Longman, 1980), p.77
[1298] Nigel Yates, *Love Now, Pay Later? Sex and Religion in the Fifties and Sixties* (London: SPCK, 2010), p.154
[1299] Ibid
[1300] Callum Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (London; Routledge, 2009) p.170
[1301] Ibid, p.168
[1302] Ibid, p.174

claims of a significant 1950s revival to detailed scrutiny.[1303] He concluded that in terms of self-identification, Britain remained a Christian society during the `long 1950s.' There were very few self-professed atheists, and the proportion of the population aligning themselves with the Church of England increased in this period, whilst Nonconformist Churches went into slight decline. Church membership as a proportion of population was lower in England than in Wales and Scotland. However, for Field, these affiliations were not in general strongly held, and crucially, not passed on to children.[1304]

This lack of significant movement in religious statistics was despite high-profile efforts from most of the mainstream Churches to stimulate a revival. The Church of England produced a report, *Towards the Conversion of England*, the Methodist Church ran the Christian Commando Campaign, whilst the 1950s also saw the Baptist Advance, the Congregational Forward Movement, the Church of Scotland's Tell Scotland Movement and crusades organised by the Catholic Missionary Society.[1305] Between 1939 and 1949, the number of Roman Catholic churches and Mass centres in England and Wales rose from 2475 to 2821, with the number of adherents rising from 2,375,000 to 2,650,000.[1306] However, despite marriage and the family having a privileged place in Catholic culture, there was a transformation in the role of parental authority. Young people had full employment and higher wages, threatening the traditional isolation from the rest of society of Catholic culture.[1307]

Hugh McLeod contested Brown's view of a widespread 1950s revival, suggesting his conclusions might be skewed by his Scottish perspective.[1308] In Wales there was a significant decline in Nonconformist church membership and attendance, whilst in England, Anglican church attendance did not reclaim its pre-war levels. Methodist membership remained static whilst the Baptist and Congregationalist Churches experienced modest decline. However, McLeod did agree with Brown that

[1303] Field, *Britain's Last Religious Revival?*
[1304] Ibid, p.107
[1305] Commission on Evangelism, *Towards the Conversion of England: A Plan Dedicated to the Memory of Archbishop William Temple* (London: Church Assembly, 1945)
[1306] Denis Gwynn, `Growth of the Catholic Community' in George Beck (ed.), *The English Catholics, 1850-1950* (London: Burns Oates, 1950), p.435 (pp. 410-441)
[1307] John Fulton, `Young Adult Core Catholics', in Michael P. Hornsby-Smith (ed.), *Catholics in England, 1950-2000,Historical and Sociological Perspectives* (London: Cassell, 1999), pp. 161-181
[1308] McLeod, *Religious Crisis of the 1960s*, p.38

Britain maintained a broadly Christian culture in the 1950s, with a great rupture in faith occurring from the early 1960s onwards. Grace Davie partially challenged interpretations of the 1950s as a period of religious torpor, suggesting that Christianity in Britain since 1945 can be characterised a period of `believing without belonging', even if this belief drifted further from traditional Christian dogma.[1309] Adrian Hastings argued that, in the 1950s, Christianity experienced a mini-boom in intellectual circles, with religious societies expanding in universities and prominent writers such as C.S. Lewis actively promoting the Christian faith.[1310]

Stephen Parker argued that the resilience of Christian belief on the home front in the war had a direct impact on a post-war religious revival:

> [T]here is every reason to believe that the apparent revival of fortunes experienced by Christianity after the war and into the 1950s came about because of the temporary strengthening of the populace's commitment to Christian protocols during the Second World War. Perhaps out of a sense of gratitude to God, or the Church, for their faithfulness to the people in the midst of wartime difficulty, the post-war revival of churchgoing […] is explicable in light of the strength of wartime diffusive and discursive Christianity, and the widespread wartime air-raid shelter spirituality.[1311]

For Michael Snape, `the war itself served to demarcate decades of apparent religious decline […] from an era of apparent religious revival in Great Britain, Canada and the United States.'[1312] Furthermore, the experience of individual soldiers was a:

> [S]ignificant contributory factor to the religious revival of the post-war era […] these comparatively young and upwardly mobile returnees were ideally placed to reinforce a religious revival that was stirring in the war years and which was to mark all three societies until the religious ferment of the 1960s.[1313]

The findings of this study demonstrate a wide-ranging resilience of Christianity in the British armed services between 1939 and 1945, confirming the findings of Brown, Davie, Parker and Snape of a robust Christian culture emerging from the war,

[1309] Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain since 1945: Believing Without Belonging* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994)
[1310] Hastings, *A History of English Christianity,* p.494
[1311] Parker, *Faith in the Home Front,* p.214
[1312] Snape, `War, Religion and Revival', p.135
[1313] Ibid, p.135 & 151

with the foundations of a post-war revival in many congregations through much of the 1950s.

It was argued in chapter two that some aspects of military religious provision were viewed with scant regard, particularly the church parade when on home service. However, the existence and increased prominence of army chaplains was, according to Michael Snape, `fundamentally indicative of the abiding importance of religion in contemporary British society and of the military value of religious belief in modern conflicts of unparalleled magnitude.'[1314] The fact that in the Royal Navy commanding officers often took on the role of the chaplain, indicated that whist Christianity often operated within formal structures, it did not necessarily need sanctioned or ordained clergy for it to take place. Thus. religious practice could continue without the organised Churches.

For United Board chaplains serving in the army or RAF, due to them having full-time commissions therefore no pastoral responsibilities outside of the military, it meant that for a period of half a decade or more, they had minimal connection with a home church. For Baptist and Congregational chaplains, this was a significant shift away from a congregationally-governed religious environment into one in which power and command was exerted from above. Therefore, for both self-defining Christians and the men charged with providing a daily diet of Christian service, observance of denominational rituals and formalities lessened, certainly within the Protestant denominations. This challenge to established practices meant a weakening of the authority of the organised Church hierarchies. The privatisation of religious beliefs identified by Machin had been given a stimulus by the exigencies of life in the armed services.

Chapter three argued that the key religious tropes which were necessary to underpin the privatisation of religious experience, a knowledge of the Bible and Christian hymns, and the ability to turn to God in prayer, were securely founded in active Christians in the military. In addition, the pre-war ecumenical tendencies of the main Protestant Churches meant that these Christians could usually find people with whom to share experiences of Bible study and prayer. That these features of faith remained strong during the war, would suggest that, having been tested in the most

[1314] Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, p.137

trying of circumstances whilst in uniform, Christians would emerge into the post-war world with a buoyant faith which would not easily melt away during the subsequent decade and beyond.

The issues of sexual behaviour and Sabbatarianism were discussed in chapter three. Callum Brown described the period between 1945 to 1963 as the `nation's last Puritan age' in terms of sexual morality.[1315] Matthew Grimley identified this residual sense of Puritanism as continuing a tradition in Britain's national culture.[1316] The values of order, duty, thrift and respectability remained strong as the generations who had fought the two world wars tried to restore a world that had been severely disrupted by conflict. This suggests a wartime resilience of Christian moral values amongst the active Christians in the armed services. Sabbatarianism remained strong, as Callum Brown argued, `The church, Sunday School and family were memorials to their parents' history which the young endured in that decade', and the 1950s Sunday was only marginally more liberal than its Edwardian predecessor.[1317] The Welfare State established by the Attlee government was founded on Victorian values of thrift and the notion of contributory benefits. The Christianised rhetoric of William Blake's vision of a `New Jerusalem' was appropriated by Attlee to provide a broad vision of this new society.

However, Ian Machin paints a less restrictive picture, arguing that the Church of England did not object to the Sunday opening of cinemas, as long as the films were of good quality and were timed not to clash with local church services.[1318] However, the Churches' views had less impact on social and cultural behaviour, `Church assumptions were no longer having the endorsement of social conventions and habits. Instead, new habits and conventions were arising to challenge them.[1319] Although the Sabbath habits of the general population may have been changing, by the mid-1950s 30% of the adult population attended church or heard at least one broadcast Sunday service weekly, a proportion broadly in line with pre-war levels, thus indicating that

[1315] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, p.9
[1316] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.906
[1317] Brown, p.175
[1318] Machin, *Churches and Social Issues*, p.161
[1319] Ibid, p.163

the war and its aftermath had not led to any significant diminution of religious observance amongst those for whom it was important.[1320]

Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, according to Brown, the state continued to censor books, films and plays to control public morals. Homosexual men were actively prosecuted, with an increase in arrests for homosexuality after 1945, and the BMA arguing that homosexuals could be `cured' by religious conversion.[1321] Both the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Churches continued to campaign against the widespread availability of birth control. Brown commented `By the 1950s organised Christianity had become characterised by the support of a harsh and vindictive state apparatus that oppressed many pleasures without reason.'[1322] This would imply that active service personnel who had returned from the war, having been generally more tolerant of their comrades' sexual behaviour whilst in the services, found that the Churches at home were slower to adopt liberal attitudes. However, in November 1957 the Church Assembly voted narrowly in favour of accepting the Wolfenden Report, which recommended that private homosexual acts be taken outside the scope of criminal law, leading Matthew Grimley to conclude that `Their reluctant conclusion that this moral community could no longer be sustained is an important aspect both of the process of secularisation, and of the creation of a 'permissive society' in post-war Britain.'[1323] Thus whilst a liberalisation of attitudes in the British Churches lagged behind the experience of Christians in wartime, it was certainly on a trajectory of greater tolerance.

In chapter four it was argued that, in general, self-defining Christians in the armed services conformed to the wider historiographical narrative of a generation forced reluctantly into the armed services, particularly the army. Their faith was not sufficient to keep away the resentments of petty discipline, and often the new milieu in which they found themselves was not conducive to a life of Christian faith and witness. However, through the experience of active service, men came to forge new identities, as part of a fighting unit, as part of a ship's crew or as part of an RAF Squadron. They took pride in their new identities, alongside others who did not share

[1320] Ibid, p.165
[1321] Patrick Higgins, *Heterosexual Dictatorship: Male Homosexuality in Post-war Britain* (London: Fourth Estate, 1996), p.34
[1322] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain*, p.200
[1323] Matthew Grimley, `Law, Morality and Secularisation: The Church of England and the Wolfenden Report, 1954–1967', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 60 (2009), p.741

the same depth of faith as themselves. This new consciousness was often at a remove from family and church congregations at home. Their war experiences never left them, sometimes being openly shared, but more often kept within, a portion of their own experience that could only be shared with others who had been through a similar existence. Even some chaplains, such as the United Board's Rev S.A. Shaw, found the military a more conducive atmosphere for genuine fellowship. Shaw loved the comradeship of army life and regretted its passing when he returned to the civilian church, finding his room for manoeuvre restricted by the pattern and demands of church meetings. Shaw recalled he had a much broader scope for ministry than in the confines of a local church, able to run `my own show without any interference.'[1324] The disengagement between those who had served and those who had not was also highlighted by Rev Lloyd Harding, a Baptist chaplain, who wanted to work with ex-servicemen as a rehabilitation officer, but `unfortunately the denomination at the time did not recognise this as "ministerial" service […] the leading figures in the B.U […] could not see the need to oversee the moral and spiritual needs of ex-servicemen.'[1325] Thus some in the British Churches remained oblivious to the long-term implications of the war for their members, and those whom their clergy wished to serve. Military chaplaincy, and by extension military service of any kind, was seen as work to be tolerated in war, but not to be talked about within the peacetime life of the Churches. This disconnect between the British service man and woman and their previous existence occasioned, according to Steve Bruce and Tony Glendenning, a legacy of disrupted community ties and family formation, negatively impacting the transmission of faith from one generation to the next.[1326]

Whilst chapter five suggested that active Christians found little difficulty in amalgamating the dual identities of Christianity and Britishness, the idea of Britain as being favoured by God's providence went into decline in the years immediately post-war years. The final National Day of Prayer took place in 1947, the same year which witnessed the symbolic beginning of the dismantling of the British Empire as India was granted independence. As Matthew Grimley put it, `the assertion that God had a place for the nation now seemed rather forlorn and threadbare. […] Providentialist

[1324] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.90
[1325] Ibid
[1326] Steve Bruce and Tony Glendenning, `When was Secularization? Dating the Decline of the British Churches and Locating its Cause', *British Journal of Sociology*, 61, 2010, pp.107-126

ideas could not easily be fitted into new narratives of national and imperial decline.'[1327] The Suez Crisis of 1956 brought no renewed enthusiasm for the revival of National Days of Prayer, demonstrating the extent to which the belief in a divine national destiny had declined over a decade. For Grimley, this was a feature of the deterioration in religious observance from 1960 onwards, with a rejection of an `imaginative identification with a common religious past' forming part of the refutation of tradition in the 1960s.[1328] The waning of the ideas of providentialism and national character did not have its roots in the experience of active Christians in the armed forces in the Second World War. Therefore, this change in the religious character of Britain was not occasioned by any loss of personal faith or conflict between dual identities arising from the war.

As argued in chapter six, although Christians were called upon to take the lives of others, directly and indirectly, or to be complicit as agents of death, there is no evidence that this weakened faith in the long-term. There was evidence of a questioning of faith under such circumstances, but in general it was bolstered, as a fundamental Christian faith served to sustain men ordered to kill. The thesis that the act of fighting the war was secularising agent, as propounded by Paul Fussell, has been further challenged in the cases of active Christians in the forces. Christians who did not directly kill were keen to shoulder collective responsibility for their actions, and this moral culpability was underpinned by a clear theological line from most Church leaders that they were engaged in a just enterprise. Even the horrors of the atomic bomb had little discernible impact on religious faith. If the most morally-challenging requirements of war did not lead to a crisis of faith for most service men and women, it follows that within individuals, there would be an overall recasting or strengthening of religious belief caused by the overall experiences of six years of war.

These shifting patterns of faith formed the focus of chapter seven. In addition to the minority who experienced a conversion to Christianity, there were many who found their existing faith strengthened as a result of their wartime adventures. Michael Snape's recent study on religion in the American armed forces in the Second World War suggested that captivity and combat were situations that were likely to stimulate

[1327] Grimley, `Religion of Englishness', p.905
[1328] Ibid, p.906

a religious response.[1329] A Mass-Observation investigation into army chaplains stated that a `religious revival' was discernible amongst some troops on active service in the Middle East.[1330] Therefore the war caused a reaffirmation of faith for many men and women on active engagements.

However, although the faith in individuals appears to have held firm, there was a weakening in the authority of the British Churches over some of their more nominal adherents. During padre's hours, Rev R.J. Blofeld received repeated questions from different groups challenging the need for church attendance, demonstrating an increasing insistence that it was possible to be a Christian without adherence to one particular creed or dogma.[1331] However, the fact that men were willing to suggest possible changes does suggest a residual interest in and respect for organised religion. The possibility of faith without Church membership or attendance was repeatedly raised in discussions such as `Can't I be a Christian and worship in the open air or on my own?' and `Is an organised church necessary?'[1332] Blofeld concluded that the thrust of questions was aimed at `evading the challenge of church-going. […] There is an implicit attempt to put forward the view that decency of conduct is all the religion a man needs; and this leads to an effort to dispense altogether with Bible-study, belief and the Church.'[1333] One indication of this trajectory of a weakening of faith for those in whom it had not been significant was the judgement of one contemporary 1950s commentator, that at least a fifth of Britons considered themselves agnostic or atheist.[1334]

The wartime publications, *Front Line Religion* and *Soldiers Also Asked*, by Rev Ronald Selby Wright demonstrated a continuing interest in Christian faith and ethics both amongst troops and a wider readership. However, Neil Allison stated that this interest was concurrent to British society being generally less committed to the Church.[1335] People wanted to discuss the Christian faith and its practical application in the world, but were `less inclined to respond to dogmatic pronouncements.'[1336] Allison demonstrated how many United Board chaplains considered themselves ministering

[1329] Snape, *God and Uncle Sam*, p.395
[1330] MOA, FR 1870A `The Chaplain to the Forces', July 1943, p.30
[1331] `Soldiers' Questions', *The Spectator*, 30th June 1944, p.588
[1332] Ibid
[1333] Ibid
[1334] Geoffrey Gorer, *Exploring English Character* (New York: Criterion Books, 1955), pp.237-53
[1335] Allison, *United Board Chaplains*, p.122
[1336] Ibid

in a progressively secularised environment, and that the average soldier was turning his back on church worship and membership. These perspectives are at odds with Callum Brown's argument that, as secularisation is not merely a process of church decline, `but of the end of Christianity as a means by which men and women, as individuals, construct their identities and their sense of "self"', then neither the war, or for Brown, the 1950s, met this description.[1337] Indeed, he went further to state that `Not since the late Victorian period had there been such powerful evidence of a professing Christian people in Britain.'[1338] The resilience of Christianity in the wartime faithful would provided a base for such overtly Christian values in British society. Despite Allison's view of the armed services forming a `progressively secularised environment', this study asserts that this had no long-term negative impact on the faith of active Christians. They were able to conceptualise their faith as existing beyond the boundaries of church worship and membership, needing less external input and relying increasingly on the personal or small-group tropes of Bible study and prayer.

Summary Conclusion

Ron Hassner's recent study on the significance of religion in twentieth century warfare concluded that:

> [T]he effects of war on the religiosity of soldiers are anything but straightforward. The religious experience of Western soldiers of the twentieth century exhibited variation across wars, across units in wars, and across different phases of war, but the exact sources of that variation remain to be discovered.[1339]

Michael Snape agreed, stating that whilst there existed numerous studies of chaplains, pacifists and clerical opinion, coverage of the wartime experience of the ordinary man and woman remained patchy, `What are notable by their absence are studies of religion on the home and fighting fronts.'[1340]

This study has addressed aspects of the effects of war on the religiosity of actively Christian men and women in the British armed forces during the Second World War. It is suggested that, far from being an agent of secularisation as suggested

[1337] Brown, *Death of Christian Britain,* p.2
[1338] Ibid, p.5
[1339] Hassner, *Religion on the Battlefield*, p.132
[1340] Snape, `War, Religion and Revival', p.135

by, amongst others, Fussell, Sykes, Longden and Bruce and Glendenning, the experience of war reinforced the faith of those for whom religiosity was already a significant component of their identity. This aspect of the religious experience of warfare echoes the conclusions of Snape and Parker that Christianity remained a resilient force both on the military and home fronts. As Parker noted, it is tempting to assume that, as wartime disruptions brought congregational depletion, there was a nadir in religious observance.[1341] However, he found this this was an oversimplification. Similarly, Fussell's interpretation of the war as a notably secular affair has been thoroughly debunked by Michael Snape's detailed examinations of the religious cultures in the British and American armies.

This thesis strongly ascribes a central significance to the religion of millions of British service personnel throughout the war. It is a subject that has been hiding in full view for too long, and it is hoped that this work will bring a greater focus to this under-researched area and reinforce the growing historiography which places Christianity firmly at the centre of the cultural experience of war for the British nation.

[1341] Parker, *Faith on the Home Front*, pp. 213-4

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