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The Anglican Church and War

After Britain and the United States invaded Iraq in March 2003, Tony Blair invited George W. Bush to Britain. The organisers did their best to avoid demonstrations against the war. President Bush only gave one speech and that was not announced beforehand. This meant that potential demonstrators had no opportunity to gather in London. Subsequently, Blair took Bush to his Sedgefield constituency in the north of England. There people had advance warning and the Anglican vicar led his flock in a peaceful demonstration against the war outside the inn where Bush and Blair were lunching. The demonstration was reported but commentators did not remark the change which it represented in the behaviour of the established Church. In the 19th century, the bishops never intervened in debates on warfare and leading a hostile demonstration against the prime minister would never have occurred to Anglican clergy. But it was in those years that the forces were taking shape which would overturn the *modus vivendi* between Church and state, based on the distinction between civil and foreign wars, that had lasted since the 16th century and which had left the government to decide when the country should intervene overseas. In 2003, the vicar of Sedgefield had the sympathy and support of the Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams. The Churches had now become only the most cautious and conditional supporters of intervention abroad.

It was in the First World War that the Anglican hierarchy under Randall Davidson began for the first time to participate in the three crucial political debates about any conflict, the justification for intervening in the first place, the methods used in the fighting and the subsequent peace terms.¹ It was only when the Second World War broke out that an archbishop of Canterbury spoke on behalf of the Christian community in the House of Lords and that some clergy, led by Bishop George Bell

of Chichester, began openly to criticise the strategies being employed to defeat the enemy on the grounds that they were immoral, caused unnecessary suffering to civilians and would lead to permanent bitterness between the belligerents.² It was only after the Second World War that the Church of England began again to use the traditional doctrine of the Just War to analyse the doctrine of deterrence and the conflicts in which governments chose to involve the country.

Western societies in general and British society in particular have become steadily more secular.³ Fifty-seven per cent of British people told pollsters in 1993 that they lacked confidence in the Church against only 23 per cent who lacked confidence in the police.⁴ Out of a population of 58 million in 1992 the Anglican Church had 1.81 million members and the total membership of Trinitarian Christian Churches was about 6.7 million.⁵ But in Britain and the United States, we expect clergymen to agonise over political and social issues, to support humanitarian causes, to deplore violence in general and war in particular. We expect them to emphasise the contrast between the sometimes ruthless or, at best, insensitive behaviour of national leaders with the teachings of the Christian Gospels and to focus public attention both on the ends for which governments use force and the means they propose to employ. Many people assume that the clergy have always voiced concerns over international wars. But history was more complex.

As we have seen in the previous chapter, British society was shaped by its religion and its religion, in turn, reflected its culture. During the Reformation in the 16th century, England broke from the Roman Catholic hierarchy and established a national Church. Over the centuries there were dissenters, Quakers, Roman Catholics and others, but the Anglican Church was the major formative influence in England until the 18th century when Nonconformists grew in numbers.⁶ It cooperated with Henry V111 and his successors to prevent the sort of ravages inflicted by the Wars of the Roses in the 15th century. The Church's attitude towards warfare was of vital importance to the country's military strategy and foreign policy because, as we have seen in the previous chapter, in the pulpit the Church had the most effective, indeed virtually the only, means of communicating regularly with the illiterate majority.

The new Church published a set of *Homilies* in 1547 which were supposed to be read every Sunday particularly by clergy who 'had not the gift of preaching'. The political message propagated by the *Homilies* was of the vital importance of order and obedience.⁷ The authors argued that the people should not rebel even against a bad government since rebels would be tempted into 'envy, wrath, murder and desire of blood'⁸

and civil war would devastate the countryside. The rebels would gather together and bring famine and plague.⁹ The authors spoke from experience, sickness usually caused far more casualties than the fighting itself and armies spread pestilence and famine as they moved through the countryside seizing the food on which the peasants depended for survival.¹⁰ The problem for the authors was that their warnings against the results of rebellion and civil war could be applied as easily to foreign conflicts. The Church emphasised the fallibility of human nature, all warfare exposed men to temptation. However, Tudor monarchs could not afford to damn international wars since they had to defend their country from external attack and to preserve the European balance of power. Thus the *Homilies* went on to distinguish the two types of struggle: those who fought in foreign wars 'die in good conscience for serving God, their Prince, and their country, and be children of eternal salvation', while rebels 'be rewarded with shameful deaths, their hands and carcasses set upon poles, and hanged in chains, eaten with kites and crows, judged unworthy the honour of burial'.¹¹

The authors may be criticised for their complicity with the state, and yet it would have been unrealistic for them to believe that they could transform the nature of international relations. Dean Colet, the founder of St Paul's School, could preach before Henry V111 and denounce war as unchristian; Erasmus, the theologian and Biblical translator, could write to him praising his attempts to secure peace and complain to his other correspondents that 'the justest war can hardly approve itself to any reasonable person', but Henry went to war from time to time nonetheless, because of his ambitions, typical of a King of the period, and because he thought that it was necessary to secure his country's interests.¹² In England, where they had influence, the Anglican hierarchy did their best to warn of war's dangers and the distress which conflicts would bring. Their simple rural audiences undoubtedly missed the learned, classical allusions in the *Homilies* but they could hardly have misunderstood the drift of the political advice. Church and state were united in condemning rebellion, those who ignored such warnings would suffer appallingly in this world and be damned in the next. The mural above the chancel arch showing the Last Judgement when the good would be sent to paradise and the bad prodded by smiling devils into the boiling inferno of hell rammed the point home.

Of course, however often the *Homilies* were read in churches throughout the land, they could not prevent rebellion, particularly if the Church itself appeared to be under threat. The distinguished lawyer Francis Bacon listed 'innovation in religion' as the first of his ten causes and

motives of sedition in the collection of his essays published in 1625. And so it was under Charles 1 and James 11 when the English Reformation seemed to be menaced by monarchs determined to restore Roman Catholicism. The clergy of all persuasions excited their followers to participate, provoking a contemporary historian of the rebellion, to complain that 'no good Christian can without horror think of those Ministers of the church who, by their function being messengers of peace, are the only trumpets of war and incendiaries of rebellion'.¹³ The clergy were again stirred into action to support the 'Glorious Revolution' against James 11 in 1688 and at the end of the 18th century when they came to regard the French Revolution as a threat to all religion. Parsons referred to the revolutionaries as the 'Apocalyptic Beast' and Napoleon as the 'Anti-Christ', although there was also a widespread view that Providence was punishing France for its sins. Of course, by no means all were in favour of British participation in the war against France, pointing out the damage which wars would cause and the need for forgiving enemies. But the majority stoutly supported the government in what they clearly believed was a righteous conflict against the forces of evil.¹⁴

When the 19th century opened the Anglican Church had, thus, provided the country's official ideology for 250 years and maintained a symbiotic relationship with the state. Yet the tide of change was already beginning to flow, the diary of a Somerset clergyman like William Holland, shows that he was already being affected by the competition from the new Methodist Church and influenced by the newspapers he received. As the Century wore on, the Anglicans were challenged intellectually by Darwinism, by the growth of industrial cities and by the education of the mass of people. A more egalitarian, open and pluralistic society was developing, though it remained suffused with Christian values. In regard to warfare, for a time, the old cooperation between Church and state survived, but its days were numbered.

The surviving diaries and sermons written by 19th-century clergy show a spectrum from muscular, belligerent Christianity to support for pacifism as an ideal to be realised as society progressed.¹⁵ J. B. Mozley, the Regius Professor of Divinity at Oxford, admitted that it was, at first sight, shocking that Christian nations should fight each other using weapons which they had taken years to perfect.¹⁶ Mozley condemned the sins which led to war and the excesses of some of those involved, but he did not find these sins worse than the sins committed in everyday life; 'who can say that more sin is not committed every day in every capital of Europe than on the largest field of battle?'¹⁷ It was only later, when, thanks largely to the media and the proximity of the battlefields,

British people were able to imagine the struggles in the trenches of the Somme, in a way that they had not visualised the losses in San Domingo and Spain during the French Wars, that such comparisons between the sins of peace and the excesses of war would come to strike clergy and laity alike as unfeeling and even bizarre.

Political leaders had established the convention, which continues to the present, of appealing to morality rather than interest, when they defended their decision to go to war. Although there were hard-headed strategic reasons for preserving the balance of power and, thus, going to war in 1793, 1854, 1914 and 1939, politicians chose to put less stress on these, when they justified their decisions, than on the defensive nature of the war or the infamy of their enemies.¹⁸ This reflected the absorption of Christianity in the national culture and was more likely to inspire military and civilian commitment than cold-blooded and apparently abstract strategic or economic interests. In any case, politicians did not distinguish between a policy from which their country would benefit and one which they thought was for the general good. In 1793 the Prime Minister William Pitt argued that the government was not responsible for the French declaration of war and that the revolutionaries had already been waging 'at our very doors a war which aimed at an object no less destructive than the total ruin of the freedom and independence of this country'.¹⁹ On 31 March 1854 the Foreign Secretary, the Earl of Clarendon defended the 'generous and high-minded people of this country, who detest aggression, whatever form it may assume, and who are always ready to protect the weak against the strong... it was [out of] a sense of national honour, a sense of duty' that people and government had determined to stand up for Turkey against Russian aggression.²⁰ The Foreign Secretary Edward Grey told the House of Commons on 3 August 1914, 'we have consistently worked with a single mind and with all the earnestness in our power to preserve peace'.²¹ The government's papers would make it clear when published, 'how strenuous and genuine and whole-hearted our efforts for peace were'.

Following these political reassurances, the 19th-century bishops made little or no contribution to debates on war in the House of Lords. The Archbishop's only input during the Crimean War was to support the proposal to set aside a day for 'humiliation and prayer'.²² The Church of England apparently accepted the justice of the intervention. Nor had the situation apparently much changed during the Boer War. It was left to 5000 Nonconformist ministers to sign a petition against Britain's methods of dealing with the Boer guerrillas which involved burning their farms and 'concentrating' their families in unhealthy camps.²³ The

silence or the support of the bishops over Britain's wartime policies was in marked contrast to the vociferous objections to successive wars from some of the political parties.²⁴ The Church leaders were very close to the country's political elite and either trusted that elite to make correct moral and political judgements on international affairs or regarded it as inappropriate to intervene in mundane matters.

But the situation was changing radically. The introduction of free and universal education meant that the mass of people, including the clergy, could now derive their political ideas from their teachers and from newspapers. The central position of the Church in society was thus threatened; the influence, stipends and status of the Anglican clergy declined, while the importance and income of the teachers grew.²⁵ The Darwinian revolution undermined traditional Christian teaching about the age of the Earth and man's relationship with the natural world.²⁶ In its Social Darwinist form it also suggested that war was in itself a good because it winnowed out the weak, the very opposite of the principles enunciated in the *New Testament*. Charles Darwin himself was humane; he loathed slavery and deplored the impact of European peoples on the inhabitants of Argentina, New Zealand and Australia. But his descriptions of this impact gave credence to the notion that there was an inevitable struggle for survival amongst human tribes just as much as there was between animal species.²⁷

The Church hierarchy was now squeezed between the Social Darwinists who deplored Christian pacifism and the liberal critics of war who despised the Church for not denouncing all violent conflicts. The radical economist J. A. Hobson typified the second tendency. During the Boer War he demanded:

When has a Christian nation ever entered on a war which has not been regarded by the official priesthood as a sacred war? In England the State Church has never permitted the spirit of the Prince of Peace to interfere when statesmen and soldiers appealed to the passions of race-lust, conquest and revenge. Wars, the most insane in origin, the most barbarous in execution, the most fruitless in results, have never failed to get the sanction of the Christian Churches.²⁸

The Church's silence on warfare thus shocked an increasing number of its own members who pressed it to drop its neutrality. Just before and during the First World War this change became visible.²⁹ While it was confronted with a multitude of smaller issues, there were three basic problems in August 1914 and during the war years; first, whether to

support the national cause, then, as the scale of the conflict became apparent and the mass of ordinary people began to look at war afresh, the theological problem of explaining God's willingness to allow such suffering, and, finally, how far to interfere in strategic decisions? Given that the hierarchy had accepted intervention in previous wars, its support in this conflict might be taken for granted. But this was not so, Percival, the bishop of Hereford, was, for example, discussing on 2 August 1914 whether the clergy should not encourage parishioners to lobby the government in favour of maintaining Britain's neutrality. He had already protested against the 'jingo' press and encouraged the clergy to pray for peace. But for him and many others the German invasion of Belgium in violation of the treaties laying down its neutrality and despite Belgium's total irrelevance to the argument between the Central Powers and the Entente transformed the situation. Ten days later Percival's letter appeared in *The Times* supporting the government's decision to go to war in the face of Germany's 'shameful, cynical and flagrant disregard of all moral considerations'.³⁰ The position taken by Randall Davidson, the archbishop of Canterbury, was crucial.³¹ He was in close touch with the Prime Minister Herbert Asquith and was persuaded by Asquith on 31 July 1914 that protests by the Church, of the type that Percival was then meditating, would only give the impression that Britain was determined on neutrality and remove the incentives for the Central Powers to moderate their behaviour. Davidson was subsequently convinced that the government's decision to declare war was justified.

Belgium was the third small country that the Central Powers appeared to be menacing; Austria-Hungary had made humiliating demands on Serbia after the assassination of the Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo by a nationalist fanatic and had subsequently rejected Serbia's grovelling reply; Luxemburg was to be overrun by Germany, despite the international guarantee of its neutral status and now Belgium was threatened. The point of the balance of power was not just to preserve peace but the independence of small states, Berlin appeared to be bent on proving the need to uphold it. Furthermore, the Low Countries had always been a special case because of their pivotal strategic position to Britain, France and other powers. In the 18th century they had been protected under international agreement by a series of fortifications and, after the French wars, the barrier against French expansion was strengthened using the indemnity imposed on France.³² In 1830 Belgium asserted its independence from the Netherlands, and in November 1831 and April 1839 Belgium's status as a perpetually neutral

state was guaranteed by the Great Powers. This status was reinforced during the Franco-Prussian War when Britain signed separate treaties with France and Prussia guaranteeing to come into the conflict, but only to protect Belgium, if its neutrality was threatened by either of the belligerents.³³ It was hard to conceive of a firmer guarantee and, if it were set aside, then the whole of international law could be dismissed to suit strategic convenience. It was no wonder that the British government ignored Germany's offer to withdraw its army and restore Belgium's neutrality after the war.³⁴ In later years the reasons for Britain's declaration of war in 1914 have often been forgotten and there are some who characterise its abandonment of Czechoslovakia to the Nazis at the Munich conference in 1938 as a national disgrace, while dismissing the reasons for attempting to protect a country in 1914 whose neutrality had been repeatedly guaranteed by the major belligerents.

If Davidson and most of the Church accepted this view in 1914, the Archbishop subsequently separated Church from state in a way that none of his predecessors had done. He was particularly exercised about the conditions of prisoners of war and of the foreign civilians who had been interned. While he supported the visits by representatives of the International Red Cross to POW camps in Britain, he worried about the condition of British prisoners in German camps, an anxiety shared by US diplomats in Germany.³⁵ He pressed the government to come to an agreement with the Germans so that interned civilians could be returned to their homeland. He publicised the Turkish massacres of the Armenians and urged the government to protest more vigorously.³⁶ The Archbishop asserted the right of the Primate to interfere privately in the conduct of war by opposing the use of poisonous gas in retaliation for the initiation of chemical warfare by the German army. He wrote first to the King's secretary, Lord Stamfordham, in May 1915 when he heard that retaliation was impending. When Stamfordham told him that the soldiers were becoming angry that they could not respond to German chemical attacks, he wrote to Asquith, 'if anyone had suggested a few months ago that the British Army would use poisonous gases for creating fatal disease among its enemies, the notion would have been scouted as preposterous'.³⁷ He went on to argue that international agreements would be dishonoured by retaliation and that Britain would subsequently be ashamed of its actions. The use of shells containing poisonous chemicals had been prohibited by the Hague Peace Conference in 1899, though the Germans could claim that they released such chemicals from cylinders rather than shells, thus not breaching the letter of the agreement. What Davidson did not try to do was to discuss the issue

in military terms, indeed he expressly disclaimed military expertise. He needed to press Asquith on whether retaliation was really vital and whether it outweighed the damage to international law and to Britain's reputation if it resorted to 'German' methods. He might, otherwise, in theory, have been asking Britain to eschew a decisive weapon and to lose the war. Unfortunately, Bishop Bell, Davidson's biographer, did not analyse the issue in any detail though he faced the same dilemma in relation to strategic bombing in the Second World War. How great a sacrifice, if any, should a country make in its strategic policy in the middle of a total war, or rather should it ask its servicemen to make, in order to uphold Christian principles and both the letter and spirit of international law?

The autopsy on the First World War held by the Church in the 1920s showed that the national culture was now deeply fractured on interventionism and that the Anglican Church's traditional position as the unquestioning supporter of the state's foreign policy had been swept away. Davidson tried to heal the breaches in the Church by his passionate support for the League of Nations. 'Its key-note', he said in a highly emotional and deeply felt sermon in Geneva in September 1922, 'vibrates in harmony with the key-note of the Christian Faith itself, and the Christian Faith lies at the core of the progressive history of mankind'.³⁸ The Archbishop then broke with his predecessors' views and launched attacks on 'the awful, the horrible, the devil-devised barrier of war'. 'You and I', he told the congregation, 'have lived through the greatest war-cataclysm that the world has ever known'.³⁹ Davidson admitted the long-standing British tendency to romanticise warfare; 'we have long known something of what war meant, but our knowledge has been blurred and diverted by a sort of haze or glamour which has surrounded warfare when viewed from a distance, and by the memories of the heroism and the magnificent devotion to which it has given occasion'.⁴⁰

The dilemmas increased in the 1930s as the hopes in the League of Nations collapsed following the Japanese expansion into Manchuria, its withdrawal from the League of Nations and the Nazi occupation of the Rhineland and Austria. The British policy of appeasing the aggressors was gradually revealed as unrealistic, yet it was one the Church had largely supported. In 1939 Sir Alfred Zimmern, the Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at Oxford, published a devastating critique of the Church's naivety based on a series of lectures he had given earlier in the year. He began by noting the Church's increasing involvement in political affairs and, after examining its activities, concluded:

[International relations] is a sphere where ignorance and inexperience are particularly dangerous and where amateurs, even gifted amateurs, can do untold harm. I am putting it mildly when I say that it is open to doubt whether the direct influence of the Churches on British foreign policy has done more good than harm.⁴¹

Zimmern recalled that a diplomat, who was working on the British draft of the League of Nations Covenant in 1918, warned Archbishop Davidson against putting too much faith in the organisation, a warning which, as we have seen, he ignored in the years immediately after the war. The core of Zimmern's message was that 'there is a technique of politics. Caesar has a business of his own, which requires knowledge, training, skill, a special quality of judgement. Politics – and more especially international politics – require more than goodwill and fine aspirations.'⁴²

Despite such criticism, the Church did not abandon its new political activism and it would have been regarded by many of its members as failing in its duty if it had done so. Davidson's successor Archbishop Cosmo Lang and other bishops were determined to intervene in the national debates to a far greater extent than earlier bishops had done. In the epochal debate on 30 March 1933 begun by Lord Cecil on the persecution of the Jews in Germany, the Archbishop had made a brief but warm contribution associating the Christian community in Britain with the protests against German policy and encouraging the government to do everything possible to help the Jews. Because of his support for this campaign, the Archbishop became the subject of venomous attacks in the Nazi press.⁴³ In March 1939 Lang advised the government to build up its forces against the Nazi menace, to the horror of outright pacifists such as Lord Ponsonby, the former leader of the Labour party. When war broke out after Hitler's invasion of Poland in September 1939, Lang spoke in the Lords of the sympathy he felt for the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and the Foreign Secretary Lord Halifax for the failure of all their efforts to make peace, but no nation, he believed, could be allowed to trample on others: 'the primacy of this moral issue must be made plain, for it will enable us to enter upon that struggle with a good conscience'.⁴⁴ In saying so, of course, the Archbishop once again equated national interest in preserving the balance of power and the freedom of small states with moral rectitude.

The argument was now between those who believed that Britain should limit the methods it used in the conflict against the Axis and those who insisted that, once having taken the plunge to go to war,

the priority was making sure of victory. The issue came to a head over bombing. For years airmen had argued that aircraft could be used most effectively in attacks on enemy cities and were inherently unsuited for defence since bombers could evade the fighters sent to intercept them.⁴⁵ However, when war broke out, both Germany and Britain had hesitated to attack each other's cities for fear of retaliation. It was only during the Battle of Britain in 1940 that mutual deterrence collapsed with British attacks on Berlin and the German blitz on London and Coventry. Now that the British army had been expelled ignominiously from Europe, the British had no way of bringing their power to bear on the Nazis except through naval blockade and air attack, and such attacks were too inaccurate in 1941 to target anything smaller than a city. Thus began the main British bomber offensive which was to turn German cities into smouldering ruins, to kill thousands and to 'unhouse' many more.⁴⁶

If we believe the crude opinion polls available, opinion was initially evenly divided over the issue, but rallied to the government when Britain turned to strategic bombing. In November 1940, 46 per cent of those who responded to Gallup were in favour of a policy of indiscriminate retaliation against German cities following the start of the blitz on London, and 46 per cent against.⁴⁷ Those in favour argued that the offensive was the only way of restoring morale after successive defeats and of hitting a hated and feared enemy. George Bell voiced the opposition to this view. Throughout the 1930s the Bishop had struggled to find ways for the Church to encourage the democracies to resist the Axis while avoiding the blanket hatred of 'the enemy', which was so much a part of the total warfare of the 20th century, yet he insisted on facing ethical and political dilemmas squarely. He had a better sense of the horrors that Nazism portended than most in Britain. He had met Ribbentrop and other leading Nazis in the course of his abortive efforts to help German churchmen and to give them some modicum of independence.⁴⁸

Bell's opposition to bombing German cities flowed from the distinction he made between government and the governed and his condemnation of the Darwinian idea that each nation was involved in an untrammelled struggle for survival with its neighbours. In November 1939, when the fighting had hardly begun, he told the readers of the *Fortnightly Review*:

The Church must guard and maintain those moral principles in the war itself. It must not hesitate, if occasion arises, to condemn the infliction of reprisals, or the bombing of civilian populations, by

the military forces of its own nation. It should set itself against the propaganda of lies and hatred.⁴⁹

In May 1941 he added:

One of the most barbarous features in the whole war is the night bombing of non-combatants. This is not only an added torment to the huge volume of suffering, but a degradation of the spirit for all who take part in it.⁵⁰

We now know from the *US Strategic Bombing Survey* of German public opinion that Bell was partly right and that the night attacks were, indeed, as they were intended to be, one of the most demoralising features of the war for German civilians.⁵¹ Whether they were a degradation of the spirit of the airmen is more questionable. The aircrews went about their highly dangerous tasks in a professional fashion with any doubts quietened by the code of discipline and by the general anger against Nazi Germany. Doubts, if any, only came later.

Bell continued his campaign despite the increasing hostility with which he had to contend. As pointed out earlier, debates are muted in warfare because each nation unites against the enemy and those who voice dissent can expect to be ostracised.⁵² Nevertheless, Bell tried to involve Lang's successor, William Temple in July 1943, though the Archbishop refused to commit himself.⁵³ Temple's biographer F. A. Iremonger describes the 'kid glove' school of warfare as the 'most tiresome' of the Archbishop's correspondents and quotes from a letter Temple wrote on 24 May 1943 that once the decision to resist the Nazis had been taken, the allies must do,

what is required in order to defeat the enemy other than the infliction of useless suffering. I think there is no doubt that the bombing of the Ruhr dams was a perfectly legitimate act of war. There is a great deal to be said for refusing to fight, though I think myself that in this case it would be the shirking of duty. There is still more I think to be said for fighting in support of freedom and justice, but there is nothing whatever to be said for fighting ineffectively.⁵⁴

Subtle as Temple's theological views may have been, this over simplified the moral and practical issue. In this case, and particularly as the war progressed, there were other ways of using airpower than attacking enemy cities. The RAF might, or might not, have been less effective, but

it would not have been ineffective if it had used all its power in support of the army and Royal Navy, and interdicting enemy supplies. Bell was brave to raise the issue and to remind the government that intervention only had such widespread support if it continued to achieve a synthesis between morality and interest.

The views on international affairs expressed during the two World Wars by Davidson, Lang, Bell and others may have been right or wrong, naïve or wise, prescient or short-sighted but collectively their willingness to voice their opinions represented a major change. The Church now believed that it had a duty to comment on political issues and particularly on war. While it was more influential than the other religions, it was no longer so close to the government and aristocracy that it simply mimicked their views. While Britain became more secular, the Church was liberated to judge political actions by Christian standards. The problem was to bring these to bear on the exigencies of political life. Never was this truer than in the Cold War which froze East–West relations for 45 years. Lurking behind the tensions was the nuclear threat which the 1948 Lambeth conference saw:

Lifts [war] into a new dimension, multiplying its destructive power a thousand fold and making civilians its chief victims... We are faced with a choice between the avoidance of war and race suicide. The issue before us is a matter of sheer survival. Peace is no longer merely desirable; it is an absolute necessity.⁵⁵

The dilemma was increased by Western reliance on nuclear weapons to deter Soviet expansion and to balance the perceived Soviet superiority in conventional forces. The British government claimed in 1953 that the Soviets had some 4.6 million men under arms and over a million men in its allies' armies.⁵⁶ Accordingly, most of the Anglican hierarchy accepted that deterrence was, for the moment, the least bad alternative though, not surprisingly, some priests took the view that the threat to use nuclear weapons was so abhorrent that no Christian could support it.⁵⁷ No doubt, disillusionment with the failure of the League in the 1930s, fear of communism and suspicion of Soviet intentions played the major roles in encouraging Churchmen to remain quiescent.⁵⁸

Because of the moral ambiguities of the Cold War and the prevalent guilt about past colonialism, religious idealism came to be channeled more and more into support for Oxfam and other humanitarian organizations. Indeed, if the Anglican Church was once described ironically as 'the Tory party at prayer', it now became 'Oxfam at prayer'. Churches

were festooned with photographs of the Third World poverty and suffering. Embarrassment with the contrast between increasing Western prosperity and conditions elsewhere grew because of the feeling that one was the cause of the other. Private and official donations flourished and so, for a time after the end of the Cold War, did peacekeeping forces to try to abate the civil wars which plagued Africa. The number of troops from various nations involved in UN peacekeeping expanded from some 10,000 in the 1980s to 75,000 by 1994 and the annual cost grew to three billion dollars.⁵⁹ Again these were usually popular commitments inside the Churches and amongst the British public in general. Western countries had an interest in stability in the Third World since instability and violence led to tides of desperate refugees trying to enter Europe, to drug running and to disease, but, once more, it was moral passion rather than self-interest which was the prime motivator.

The Church of England had rediscovered the just war criteria for judging the rights and wrongs of a particular conflict during the Cold War. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the West had, for a time, overwhelming conventional power against any combination of other countries, they provided standards by which the use of that power could be judged. The *jus ad bellum* criteria lay down that a war has to be authorised by the legitimate authority, the cause must be just, peaceful means of resolving the dispute must have been exhausted, there must be a reasonable expectation that more good than evil will come out of the war and there must be a probability of victory. Of course the re-emphasis on these principles has not necessarily brought greater agreement; whether a war is a last resort and whether it will bring more good than evil will always be questions of military and political judgement.⁶⁰ Does the last resort mean, for example, that all other ways of settling the dispute have been tried or that, if war is not made now, the opportunity of fighting with most chance of success will have been lost? The point is not theoretical; Britain and France had the best chance of defeating the Nazis in a limited war in March 1936 when Hitler's army re-occupied the Rhineland in breach of the Locarno Treaty which an earlier German government had negotiated. Waiting another three years in the hope that Hitler could be appeased meant that France was defeated in 1940 and Britain only escaped the same fate because Germany was unable to dominate the Channel.

Despite such difficulties, just war criteria do provide some of the best standards we have by which interventions can be judged and Catholics and Anglicans now employ the same terminology on these issues. In February 1991, for example, the Pope condemned the US-led war to

liberate Kuwait, even though he had previously denounced the Iraqi invasion of the small Gulf state. He was concerned that more evil than good might come out of the war, stressing both the suffering involved and the dangers of it spreading to the rest of the Middle East. The Catholic Primate of All-Ireland, Dr Cahal Daly said that the power of modern weapons made it impossible to describe the Gulf War as 'just' and, like the Anglican Bishop of Manchester, he argued for the continuation of economic sanctions against Iraq as a lesser evil. Rowan Williams, who was to become archbishop of Canterbury in 2003, also argued that the war was unjust because the allies were only concerned about their own interests. He accused the United States and Britain of double standards for reacting with force in this case while failing to deal with the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, the Chinese invasion of Tibet and Israel's occupation of the West Bank.

Robert Runcie, the archbishop of Canterbury, and Richard Harries, the bishop of Oxford, who was the Church's leading expert on the ethics of warfare, rejected these criticisms. Harries denied that self-interested motives undermined the just cause or that the allies' failure to free Tibet or Palestine falsified the case for liberating Kuwait, not least, no doubt, because 'freeing' Tibet would have caused a world war, producing vastly more evil than good. Archbishop Runcie defended the allies' right to use force to expel Iraqi troops from Kuwait once other means were exhausted and denied that this would mean they had initiated the conflict, it was the Iraqis who had done this by seizing the small Gulf state. His general position was firmer than the one taken by his designated successor George Carey, who argued that the war might be justified while trying to avoid labeling it as just under the traditional criteria.⁶¹ In the controversy over the Anglo-American attack on Iraq in 2003, Harries and Williams were in agreement this time that the war did not fulfil the just war criteria. To Harries it seemed likely that this war would unleash more evil than good. Williams, now archbishop of Canterbury, argued that it lacked 'right authority' because no government should simply decide on its own whether a war was justified and that the British and American governments had paid insufficient attention to the UN or to international law.⁶²

Such arguments were useful because they integrated moral and political considerations. As pointed out before, British leaders tended to justify foreign intervention in moral terms even before the Churches participated in the debate because this fitted with British culture and was more likely to appeal to the population. Now priests, rabbis and mullahs operate as part of the conscience of the nation, reminding

statesmen that they have to articulate their ends and to defend the violent means they choose to achieve them. During the First World War Asquith, Lloyd George and their colleagues wrestled with the terrible dilemmas presented by the military stalemate on the Western front; Randall Davidson forced them to defend the case in private for retaliating against German use of chemical weapons. Winston Churchill expressed Britain's objectives during the Second World War with a fervour and idealism to which people responded, Bishop Bell agreed with the objectives but made the elite aware of the moral dilemmas raised by Bomber Command's obliteration of German towns. The Archbishop of Canterbury and the Cardinal Archbishop of Westminster made common cause in 2003 in their protests against the government's decision to attack Iraq.⁶³ They forced the government to defend its belief that the Iraqis had chemical and biological weapons in breach of international agreements and that this justified their decisions.

The danger is always that religious arguments can be dismissed as unrealistic or irrelevant, but none of those quoted above could be simply rejected in this way. The Churches had widened the debate and performed a useful social role. Their arguments are appealing because Western society is suffused with Christian values. The Churches had also played a major part in the growth of the pressure groups which are the subject of the next chapter because they have had a major impact on debates about warfare.