

# ‘WAR IS A SCOURGE’: THE FIRST YEAR OF THE GREAT WAR 1914–1915: CATHOLICS AND PASTORAL GUIDANCE

by JOHN DAVIES

When Britain<sup>1</sup> declared war on Germany in August 1914 few could have foreseen that it would last four years or predicted the slaughter it would bring. The parishioners of the Catholic parish of St. Peter Seel St., in the docklands of south Liverpool, along with Catholics throughout the country, on the first Sunday of the war were exhorted to pray for peace. The assumption seemed to be that the war would be a short one. The lessons of Britain’s last major conflict, the South African Wars at the turn of the nineteenth-century, seemed not to have impinged on popular imagination. It would, however, be only a relatively short space of time before the news of local young men ‘killed in action’ began to appear in the notice books of St. Peter’s and other Catholic parishes, bringing a growing realisation that this war was ‘different’.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps it would not end quickly and certainly as the horror of events in Belgium and France began to appear in the press, national, local and ‘confessional’,<sup>3</sup> the conviction grew that indeed this was no ‘ordinary’ war. How did the leaders of the Catholic community respond? What guidance and comfort were offered to the community, which was largely working class, whose sons found themselves in the front line?<sup>4</sup>

Catholics educated in the parochial schools, established from the late 1840s onwards by the Catholic Poor Schools Committee, were more than familiar with the concept of ‘the just war’<sup>5</sup> and it was this issue that was addressed almost immediately by Cardinal Francis Bourne, Archbishop of Westminster and leader of the Catholic Church in England and Wales. Bourne was in no doubt of the justice of the cause for which Britain fought. Speaking at a parade service of the Irish Guards at Westminster Cathedral a few days after the declaration of war he reflected that in the past many soldiers had been ‘harassed in their minds’ as to whether the war in which they fought was a just one. There was no question of the justice of this war and he called down on the parading troops ‘the blessing of God now and hereafter’.<sup>6</sup> In November he reiterated his conviction about the justice of the war: when war was waged by ‘a competent authority for a just cause in a rightful way’ it was justified in the sight of God. There could be no hesitation as to ‘the justice of the cause for which we are fighting’.<sup>7</sup> Bourne was

concerned that Catholic young men volunteering to fight for their country should not be troubled in their consciences. In a commissioned article for the *London Standard* in August 1914 he reassured them that war could not be a sin because God Himself on many occasions had 'actually commanded war'. God could not have 'commanded anything sinful'.<sup>8</sup> He did not believe there could be any one in the country who had any doubt about the justice of Britain's cause. Britain had entered the war to keep its 'pledged word':

We feel that, fighting as we are in a cause which was just in its beginning, and which has now become a cause of self-defence, we are justified in the sight of God.<sup>9</sup>

Bourne's conviction was supported by Archbishop Thomas Whiteside of Liverpool who declared the 'just and religious' Christian teaching was that a war was just provided 'certain conditions were observed'. He believed Britain was 'observing' them in this war.<sup>10</sup> Louis Casartelli, bishop of Salford, believed the British Government had worked steadily for peace but had been 'dragged into the terrible struggle'. British soldiers were fighting in a 'just cause' for 'truth and justice'.<sup>11</sup> Bishop Frederick Keating of Northampton, later Archbishop of Liverpool, insisted in February 1915 that 'every scrap of evidence that comes to light, every new phase in the conduct of the war' strengthened his conviction of the justice of Britain's cause and hardened the determination of the British people to 'see this quarrel through'.<sup>12</sup> Popular preachers such as the Dominican Fr. O'Dea and the Jesuits, Fr. Bampton and Fr. Bernard Vaughan, supported the claims of the bishops. O'Dea argued that Britain was not fighting for 'aggrandisement' or territorial expansion but solely in support of her 'solemn obligation' to defend Belgium. She was fighting a 'just war'.<sup>13</sup> Bampton's view was that even in time of war there were grounds for comfort in the thought that 'our cause is just and righteous'.<sup>14</sup> Fr. Bernard Vaughan emphasised the sanctity of international treaties. If they were torn up and tossed away as so much rubbish 'faith in the natural order' would be destroyed. An Englishman's word was his bond and 'England's word was her honour'.<sup>15</sup>

The just war argument segued into an attack on 'German militarism'. The war was just, contended Fr. Bampton, because it gave hope that the world would be saved from 'an insolent and aggressive militarism', which was the enemy of peace and which threatened to inflict 'untold misery'.<sup>16</sup> Bishop Ambrose Burton of Clifton believed the war was not merely one in defence of justice, right and 'good faith' but was a life and death struggle against a 'savage and relentless foe' who loved war for war's sake. He warned against the danger of heeding those writers and 'spouters' who in the name of a 'bastard Christianity' called for a truce with 'Prussian Kultur, Pan-Germanism and all the spawn of Luther'. The Catholic Church stood to lose or gain much by the war.<sup>17</sup>

Bishop Keating was convinced that 'Divine Providence' had given Britain the duty of ridding Europe of the 'curse of militarism' which was so 'unsocial in its aims and ruthless in its methods'.<sup>18</sup> For Archbishop Maguire of Glasgow the war was one against Prussian culture, which claimed that 'eugenics, sex instruction, ethical education' were 'worthy substitutes' for the Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount. He saw the war as a 'new crusade' of Christianity against a paganism, which totally disregarded law, justice, honesty and truth in pursuit of its 'cynical maxim' that the end justifies the means.<sup>19</sup> Archbishop Whiteside also saw the war as one of Christianity against atheism, arguing that Protestantism in Germany had completely failed. Apart from the Catholics that country was 'practically atheist'.<sup>20</sup> T. P. O'Connor, the veteran Irish Nationalist M.P. for the intensely Irish Catholic constituency of Liverpool Scotland, similarly described German militarism as one of the most 'pernicious doctrines and systems' that the world had produced. Europe had been haunted for over half a century by the 'devil' of militarism: it must be 'exorcised'.<sup>21</sup>

The most vociferous and persistent Catholic critic of 'German militarism' was the celebrated Jesuit preacher, Fr. Bernard Vaughan. Britain, he urged, was fighting so that the enemy would never again be able to 'menace the peace of Christian civilisation' and so that the nations of Europe, great and small would be able to live at peace with their neighbours. The enemy had tried to 'Kaiserise Russia, to Prussianise Germany and to Germanise Europe'.<sup>22</sup> Britain was fighting against a 'diabolical power' from Hell. Luther was the source of a German philosophy and theology which had exercised a baneful influence in Britain. God had 'done a grand work' in allowing the war to sweep away any illusion that German philosophy and theology should be regarded as the 'highest expression of mentality'.<sup>23</sup> Vaughan saw himself as a 'crusader' when he preached on the war. The allies were engaged in a war for the 'living' Gospel of Christ, fighting to defeat the 'brutality' of Germany, which was opposed to that Gospel.<sup>24</sup> He hoped that when the war was fought to a 'righteous' peace his 'non-Catholic brethren' would be able to see the truth of 'Prussian doctrine'.<sup>25</sup> He thanked God that the war had come because it had made 'us turn from Odin back again to Christ'. Prussia had once thrown off Rome now it intended to throw off Christianity. Opposing 'Pan-Prussianism, Pan-Paganism and Pan-Brutalism' filled him with the spirit of a crusader.<sup>26</sup>

*The Tablet*, which regarded itself as a leading source of Catholic views and as an opinion former among thinking Catholics viewed 'German War Ethics' sufficiently seriously to devote an editorial to the issue in May 1915. It was important to realise, it argued, that civilisation itself, as it had been understood for the last two thousand years, was at stake. A destructive philosophy had developed over the previous century and was gradually 'corroding' a whole people. German thought had attacked

and undermined traditional beliefs. German and, particularly, Prussian teachers and writers had exercised a 'destructive influence' on the old moral and mental life of nations. A 'materialistic theory' was being imposed on the world at large. German 'Kultur' wanted to replace Christianity by the 'new religion of the superman'. The gospel of Nietzsche was a direct negation of the Sermon on the Mount. It was now taught in Germany that the nation existed for war and that peace was 'degrading'. The 'value and dignity' of the human soul and the higher aims and purpose of life had been rejected.<sup>27</sup>

How should the Catholic community and, in particular, its young men respond to the country's call for volunteers to fight in this 'just war'? Cardinal Bourne having declared that the war was being fought in a just cause suggested that the shortest road to permanent peace would be achieved when everyone who was free to do so devoted themselves by 'personal service' to their country's cause. In November he presided at a meeting of the Catholic Federation of the Archdiocese of Westminster which passed a resolution calling on all Catholics to recognise the urgent necessity to secure recruits for the army which was fighting bravely to defend 'the liberty and civilisation' of Europe.<sup>28</sup> In July 1915, after almost a year of the war, it was an 'immense' consolation to Bourne and a matter of general 'satisfaction' that Catholics had been second to none in their willingness to answer their country's call. The numbers of Catholic volunteers were 'extremely high' in proportion to the numbers of Catholics in the country.<sup>29</sup> Archbishop Thomas Whiteside also, while declaring the war to be a just one, called on Catholic young men to volunteer for military service. If any of them had previously been reluctant to do so because of a 'lack of sufficient Catholic chaplains' that should no longer be a matter of concern as the War Office had 'pledged to remedy that situation'.<sup>30</sup> In December 1914 he rejoiced that although tens of thousands of young Catholic men from the diocese had volunteered for the army, Sunday Mass attendance had 'never before reached such a high level'.<sup>31</sup> Bishop Casartelli, preaching at Salford cathedral early in the new year of 1915 was 'gratified' that so many young Catholic men had 'listened to the call of duty'. Having carried out a diocesan audit he calculated that 18,000 Catholics from his diocese had joined the army. This was a 'very creditable' proportion, which far exceeded that contributed by any other section of the community. This gave Casartelli 'great joy' as he believed they were fighting for truth and justice. For Catholics not to have volunteered would have amounted to a neglect of duty.<sup>32</sup>

Even more forthright in his support of voluntary enlistment among Catholics was Archbishop Maguire of Glasgow. For him there was no question of the justice of the war and therefore the young men of Clydeside needed to weigh no arguments as to whether they should volunteer or not: they need consult 'no clergymen or professors'. The case was too

clear. They were called to fight for Europe's 'religion and civilisation' against the 'powers of darkness sitting in high places'. In July 1915 this was more clearly the case than at the beginning of the war.<sup>33</sup> In November 1915, when the possibility of the introduction of conscription seemed increasingly likely, Maguire took the unprecedented step of issuing a direct appeal, to be read in all churches, to the young men of his diocese. Britain must win the war or 'our liberty is lost'. There was for Maguire clear proof of what 'Prussian domination' would mean—'despotism, brutality, slavery'. Maguire was an opponent of conscription, fearing that it would breed 'servility'. He wanted young men to be willing helpers of the State, not its slaves. He admitted that there was an incongruity in a bishop playing such an active role in the recruiting process. But Britain was engaged in no ordinary war. It was struggling for life and liberty and for 'the lives and liberty of Europe'.<sup>34</sup>

Leading Catholic preachers were keen to emphasise the loyalty of Catholics, a loyalty which had been called into question as recently as the South African Wars.<sup>35</sup> The Dominican Fr. O'Dea stressed that loyalty to the throne and 'the constituted powers' had always been an important part of Catholic teaching. Nations, like individuals, had rights. When other nations tried to destroy these, there was a just case for going to war as perhaps the only way of 'preventing evil'. Catholics should not only have hearts 'bursting with loyalty' but should be prepared to fight to keep the enemy 'from her shores'. Those Catholics who could fight should volunteer in 'God's name'.<sup>36</sup>

The most active Catholic recruiter was, however, the Jesuit, Fr. Bernard Vaughan. Vaughan can perhaps justly be described as a 'society preacher'.<sup>37</sup> He was in great demand to officiate at the weddings of the Catholic aristocracy and gentry. In the early months of the war he often turned such occasions into recruiting events. In September 1914 the Hon. Bernard Fitzalan Howard, in military uniform, married Baroness Beaumont. Vaughan described the bridegroom, a scion of the Norfolk family, as 'encased in the armour' of his bride's love and 'shielded with the weapon of prayer'. He had responded to the call to defend the rights of his country and to uphold its honour against an 'unscrupulous and aggressive foe'.<sup>38</sup> In February 1915 at the marriage of his cousin, Richard Weld Blundell, and Mary Mayne, Vaughan expressed his pride that the bridegroom held a commission in the Coldstream Guards but was equally proud that his brother, the best man, Louis Weld Blundell, was a private in a Liverpool regiment. The sons of the British Empire had rallied to the flag in their thousands but its daughters, who remained behind at home, were as equally active in the cause as their men folk at the front.<sup>39</sup>

Vaughan was in demand at recruiting meetings. In September 1914, as the national campaign to recruit volunteers gathered pace, he spoke at such meetings at Knaresborough, Harrogate, Hull and Leeds. At Knaresborough he proclaimed that there was no platform in the British Empire

he would not wish to be on to call his countrymen to 'rally to the flag' and to keep it 'flying topmost high'. Never had men 'rallied' so well to the flag. England had never been more determined. He asked his audience of young men 'How could any man die more splendidly than by laying down his life for his friends and brothers?' All those capable of fighting should step forward.<sup>40</sup> In May of 1915 having preached at the Jesuit church in Worcester he spoke later on the Sunday afternoon at a recruiting meeting in the Theatre Royal. He praised the men of Worcestershire who had fought from the beginning of the war and had 'delivered the goods at every hour'. But although the flag was 'flying high' still more men were needed. He, himself, was too old to fight but it was his duty to 'push' others to volunteer. All those capable of bearing arms should leave their names on the 'great scroll' of Worcester men who were fighting for King and country and 'doing their part' in the great struggle.<sup>41</sup>

A question which troubled many Catholics in Britain was: given the obvious justice of the Allies' cause in the fight against Germany and her allies why did the newly elected Pope, Benedict XV not make a clear and unequivocal statement of support for that just cause? An anonymous correspondent in *The Tablet*, 'English Convert' expressed the concerns of many Catholics in a series of questions. Catholics in the Allied Countries, he said, were convinced they were fighting for 'civilisation' or rather for Christ Himself against the 'inhuman attack' of the Germans. Why did the Pope show neither approval nor disapproval of that stand? Would the Papal silence now lead later to a loss of moral authority? These questions should be answered because they deeply affected the faith of Catholics in the 'moral guidance' of the Church and their confidence in Papal authority.<sup>42</sup> Most of the Catholic bishops conspicuously failed to address this kind of concern.<sup>43</sup> However, Cardinal Bourne, perhaps appropriately as head of the Catholic Church in England and Wales, did attempt to answer the question in a sermon at the end of May 1915. The Pope, he stressed, was the shepherd and teacher of the whole flock and of every nation. He had to consider them all equally. People in Britain had no doubts about the evils committed by the Germans, for example in Belgium. But it could not be ignored that similar accusations had been made against Britain's ally Russia in its treatment of the Galician Poles. Bourne was unable to pass any judgement on the truth or otherwise of these accusations but the Pope, if he were to speak 'publicly in condemnation', would be failing in his duty of justice and impartiality if he did not take all such allegations into account. Catholics, above all, should realise how 'extraordinarily complex' the issues were. Those who accused the Pope of silence when they had absolutely no way of knowing the 'details of his action' were certainly guilty of rash, if not of false, witness.<sup>44</sup>

Failing a concerted response from the hierarchy, *The Tablet* as self-appointed defender of the Papacy had attempted to provide its readers

with an answer to this vexed question at the beginning of 1915. It recognised that there were many, some of whom should have known better, who seemed to think that the Pope should have made a 'solemn pronouncement' on the war, declaring which side was right and threatening those who supported the other side with 'ecclesiastical censures'. Many English Catholics were distressed that the Church had not declared which side was in the right. They were angry with the Germans and were convinced they were totally in the wrong, that there was no justice in their cause and that they were fighting a brutal and immoral war. English Catholics wanted the Germans to be defeated but they must realise that the world must settle its own differences without asking the Church to 'interfere' in them. In this matter of the war the Pope had 'no commission from Christ to teach'. His infallible authority only extended to questions of faith and morals and not to politics. 'Our Lord did not found the Church that she might teach us which side is in the right in a war between Christian nations'. The Church had other concerns. One thing the Pope must do was to avoid appearing to favour one side or the other. If Benedict XV had an opinion on the war it was only his private opinion. 'God forbid that he should seek to impose his private opinion on the whole Church'. If he did so it would be to the grave 'detriment' of many good Catholics, unhappily on opposite sides. Benedict would not so do. *The Tablet* concluded that there was no case in this 'lamentable' war for a Papal pronouncement. Britain must use every 'earthly' means to win the war. Catholics should look to the Church as their supreme guide in faith and morals. 'We do not ask her to undertake what is the business of our ships, guns and valiant soldiers'.<sup>45</sup> *The Tablet's* casuistry perhaps did not even convince itself let alone those who asked for the Papacy to make a principled stand on this issue.

Those who sought to defend the Papacy's neutral stance were not best helped by reports relayed by the news agency, Reuters, from Amsterdam in December 1915 that the Pope in an interview with the German press had defended the sinking of the liner *Lusitania* in May 1915 by German submarines.<sup>46</sup> It was claimed that Pope Benedict had justified the sinking on the grounds that the *Lusitania* was bound for an English port and that there was every reason to suspect that she was carrying ammunition. The story was reproduced in the British press and it was some days later before the semi-official Papal newspaper *Osservatore Romano* dismissed it as 'pure invention'. *The Tablet* lamented that by that time the damage had been done. Reasonably, it asked how many would have seen this official but late contradiction of the earlier story. Along with many Catholics, *The Tablet* had hoped that Benedict XV might be able to act as 'mediator between the warring nations'. It blamed the damage on German 'intrigues' in the press. The result was that public opinion in Britain had been poisoned against the Pope and the hopes of the Catholic world had been dashed.

People who have been taught by the German press to believe that the Pope approved the murder of the little children of the *Lusitania* are not likely to invite the Holy Father to assist at the framing of a peace treaty.<sup>47</sup>

A major concern of some among the leadership of the Catholic community was the effect the war might have on 'moral behaviour', particularly among the 'poorer classes'. Bourne's official biographer and long-serving editor of *The Tablet*, Ernest Oldmeadow, writing at the beginning of World War Two, and perhaps reflecting Bourne's own views of the earlier war, certainly believed there had been a decline in moral standards:

Christian citizens who were working for faith and father land in those dark days remember the lowering of moral codes which quickly followed the outbreak of war.<sup>48</sup>

A year into the war the Jesuit Fr. Ashton certainly articulated his concern about the collapse of Christian moral standards in populist imagery. He was worried about the growth of 'secularism' which 'manifested' itself in many ways. One of these was 'luxurious living' such as the world had never previously seen. This was a vice not only of the aristocracy but was also indulged in equally by people of 'lesser rank' who 'got drunk on beer when the rich got drunk on champagne'. He condemned particularly the 'idleness and laziness of women of the poorer classes': because of drink they neglected their religious duties.<sup>49</sup> Bishop Casartelli was sufficiently concerned by the rapid growth of the two great evils of 'intemperance and morality' to devote his Advent Pastoral Letter in 1915 to the issue. He was convinced that the 'miseries' of war were the 'wages of sin'. It was deplorable that in the 'widespread mourning' of a year of war intemperance and immorality were more rampant than ever. Although this claim had been contested in some quarters, Casartelli's own enquiries through the rectors of some of the diocese's largest town missions had convinced him that drunkenness was on the increase to a 'shocking extent', not only among men but just as much, if not more so, among women. He agreed with his Anglican counterpart in Manchester, Bishop Knox, that a pagan morality characterised by 'impurity' and 'race suicide' was 'patent and blatant'. Young people, as never before were exposed to 'immoral literature' in the form of books, papers, postcards, obscene advertisements, indecent posters and suggestive films. Was it any surprise that through such 'allurements' of the senses their minds and hearts were 'polluted'. Christian modesty in dress was 'perishing' and the 'prudent restraints' of behaviour and conversation of earlier generations had been discarded. He thanked God that by and large Catholics were not practitioners of 'race suicide' (birth control). Even here, however, there were some Catholics who had been led astray by 'perverse and poisonous' literature which peddled false and 'pernicious' ideas in direct contradiction to the law of God and the teaching of the Church.<sup>50</sup> Bishop Robert Cowgill of Leeds in his pastoral letter of the same Advent



reiterated Casartelli's message, if in rather less colourful language. The growth of intemperance, pleasure seeking, luxury, spiritual indifference, 'racial suicide', divorce and interference by the state with the rights of parents were, he argued, all the results of the 'neglect' of God's service.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps the most strident denunciations of the evils of drink, especially among women, came from the long serving parish priest of Holy Trinity, Bermondsey, Fr. Edward Murnane. In the early months of the war he ran an open air campaign in Bermondsey in an attempt to encourage all its residents to pledge themselves to total abstinence for as long as the war lasted.<sup>52</sup> His words evidently fell on deaf ears, or those who initially pledged themselves to temperance later lapsed, for a year later in October 1915 he attacked the 'increasing prevalence' of drunkenness among women since the outbreak of war. A thousand young Catholic men from the district had volunteered to fight at the front, he claimed. It was the duty of those left behind to pray with the 'utmost fervour' for these young men. But sadly the efficacy of prayer seemed to be little appreciated. Hundreds of women, whose husbands were fighting bravely at the front, were not seen in church praying but in public houses 'squandering' on drink the maintenance allowance for their homes and children. Terrible scenes had been witnessed in the district which led him after 'most anxious consideration' and in 'no Pharisaical spirit' to suggest that it would be better for many of these brave fighting men to 'find a resting place in a nameless grave' rather than to return to Bermondsey to find their homes desolate and the wives whom they loved 'hopeless and degraded drunks'.<sup>53</sup>

Earlier in 1915 *The Catholic Herald*, quoting an unnamed parish priest from a large working class parish, had argued for prohibition during the war. Its concern was more with women than men drinkers. 'Something should be done to take the temptation out of the way of women, whose debauchery has a very bad effect on the home and on the future of the nation'.<sup>54</sup> Archbishop Maguire, however, when appealing to the young men of his archdiocese to volunteer for the army in November 1915 was dismissive of these stories of the intemperance of soldiers' wives as 'greatly exaggerated'. Such stories were often circulated by people in 'responsible positions' who when challenged had not been able to produce any proof of these accusations and had been 'rebuked by their own colleagues'.<sup>55</sup> Maguire, of course, may have been trying to calm the fears of the young men he was asking to enlist.

In contrast to the prophets of doom, such as Murnane, were those who rather than seeing a decline in moral behaviour and the practice of piety looked for evidence of a religious revival, firstly in France but then also in Britain.<sup>56</sup> Archbishop Whiteside thought there were signs of a religious revival in his archdiocese. In December 1915 he reported that attendance at Sunday Mass had never before been so high. Over 200,000 were regular Mass attenders and the total number of Communion received in the

previous year had increased by 390,000 to reach a total of over 5,000,000.<sup>57</sup> However, only a few weeks earlier Prior Gilbert Higgins CRL complained in Ilford, Essex of a 'lack of Sunday observance' and had linked that with a decline in the birth rate as signs of a moral decline during the war.<sup>58</sup> Similarly Fr. J. Noblett, chaplain to the military hospital at Fazackerly, Liverpool had earlier lamented the fact that hundreds of thousands of people 'never entered any place of worship'.<sup>59</sup> Fr. James Nicholson S.J. preaching in the same city of Liverpool at the opening of the new church in West Derby, St. Paul's, however felt that the war had brought a change for the better. In the period just before the war 'England seemed to have gone crazy over pleasure seeking'. But the war had 'steadied' people because death had claimed many whom they had known.<sup>60</sup> Similarly *The Tablet* on the occasion of a national day for intercession for victory in the war in January 1915 claimed that in this hour of peril British people 'throng their churches'. *The Tablet*, along with all Catholics was 'profoundly thankful' that British patriotism was deeply rooted in a 'sense of religion'. The journal's concern was that on this day of intercession Catholics should not forget their 'denominational differences' with their fellow countrymen. These could not lightly be 'set aside' but Catholics would pray at the same time and for the same cause as the rest of the nation. The later *Tablet* editor, Oldmeadow, however, some twenty years later, while accepting that a 'turning to God' could be seen in the lives of perhaps thousands of individuals, did not believe this was the case with 'the people at large'. He suggested that any religious revival had been short lived while the revival of 'paganism' had an 'ugly air of durability'.<sup>61</sup>

The war, which was expected to be over by Christmas 1914, ran on into 1915 and its 'horrors' became increasingly evident. In parish churches throughout the country lists of those who had 'fallen in action' were read out at Sunday Mass. Similar and more extensive lists appeared in the secular and Catholic press. The question 'How do we reconcile all this with an all loving God' was increasingly and more insistently asked. One of the first Catholic preachers to ask this question publicly, when the war was only a few weeks old in October 1914 was the Dominican Fr. Bede Jarrett, soon to lose two brothers killed in action in France.

How was the existence of God, the creator and Conservator of the universe, guiding it under the eye of His providence, compatible with the horrors foreseen and allowed in this war?

Jarrett's answer was 'We have no answer. We do not understand'.<sup>62</sup> Others were not so diffident. They were prepared to confront this question, a variation on the age-old question of the problem of evil.

In a series of sermons, 'Can War be reconciled with Christian teaching'? in November 1915 the Farm Street Jesuit, Bampton, asked, as Jarrett had done a year previously,

Can war be reconciled with Divine Providence, with belief in an all wise and all loving Providence ruling the world?

Bampton's answer was that far from being irreconcilable with Divine Providence, war was in fact part of the working out of that Providence. He saw war as an 'inevitable incident' of life, which was used by God as part of the operation of Providence governing the world. God, he believed used war for a definite purpose, the 'chastisement of the sins of men'.<sup>63</sup> Many others also saw war, and especially this war, as a chastisement or 'scourge'. For Bishop Peter Amigo of Southwark war was a scourge, which God allowed to compel men to ask 'pardon from sin' from Him whom they had offended and neglected.<sup>64</sup> Bishop John Stephen Vaughan, the auxiliary bishop of Salford, preaching at St. Mary's Highfield Street, Liverpool highlighted the 'terrible conditions' caused by the war:

Hundreds of thousands of men mown down; sorrow and desolation in every house; mothers, daughters and sisters weeping for the slain.

God allowed 'evil men' to exercise their 'passion or ambition or hate' for His own purposes to punish wickedness. God was chastising men in his way and according to his plan. The war was the 'scourge of God' although many refused to see God's hand in it because they would not admit that they deserved punishment.<sup>65</sup>

Bishops Casartelli, Lacy of Middlesborough, Mostyn of Menevia and Hedley of Newport all saw the war as the 'scourge' of God. God made use of the 'terrible scourge of war' argued Casartelli, for 'chastisement' but also for the healing of his people. Britain as a nation, like all the other nations of Christendom, needed to admit that it had 'merited' its 'share of the scourge'.<sup>66</sup> The Church regarded war as a 'chastisement' for sin, Bishop Richard Lacy reminded the Catholics of his diocese. In her solemn litanies the Church prayed for deliverance from famine, pestilence and war. Although this war was a just war it was no less a severe chastisement 'sent to us in mercy for our amendment'.<sup>67</sup> Francis Mostyn, Bishop of Menevia and later Archbishop of Cardiff, emphasised how terrible was the 'scourge' of war. Every day brought its own new story of 'carnage, destruction and misery'. Thousands of men had been killed fighting for their respective countries. Their deaths brought grief to homes which had hitherto been happy. Additionally tens of thousands had been wounded and maimed and would never again be able to support their families. Non-combatants had been slaughtered in cold blood, whole countries had been devastated, homes had been destroyed, churches burned down and people forced to flee for safety. War was indeed a 'fearful scourge' but it was one allowed by God to bring men to their senses so that they should remember that they belonged to him. God punished men but he did so as a fond parent would punish his child. He punished men for their own good and it was for them to draw

'a blessing from His chastisement'.<sup>68</sup> Bishop Hedley of Newport, writing shortly before his own death, also believed that God allowed or even sent 'temporal visitations and calamities'. God intended that these should 'turn men's hearts to Himself'. They were warnings to convert sinful men and nations and to 'perfect the virtue and spiritual well-being of God's servants'. If they failed to do so it was because of men's 'perversity'.<sup>69</sup>

These attempts to reconcile Providence and war, however, led to further questions. If God used war for the chastisement of sin did this mean that God was responsible for evil, the evil of war? How could this be reconciled with an all wise, all loving Providence? Bampton attempted to answer these questions. He argued that the evil of war, appalling though it was, was at its worst only a 'physical evil', which was used by God to 'suppress moral evil'. There was, he claimed, an easy going tolerance of 'moral evil' which showed no understanding of how God viewed it. Moral evil was an 'abomination' in the sight of the Lord, the 'curse' of the world which had threatened to undo God's work and had caused 'myriads' of men to fail to achieve their 'high destiny'. It had caused the 'blackest crime' in the world's history, the crucifixion of Christ. In comparison to such moral evil all physical evils were insignificant. The physical evil of war, 'God's avenging angel', was used to defeat the far greater moral evil of sin and was not a contradiction of the idea of an all wise, all loving Providence. War as used by God was thus a 'paternal chastisement', punishing men now to spare them hereafter. The curse of war was thus turned into a 'blessing'.<sup>70</sup>

Out of the evil of war could come good, believed Cardinal Bourne. Through the war God in 'His eternal designs' had allowed men's wickedness 'to work out its natural result'.<sup>71</sup> God had taken into His own hands the 'enforcement on our minds' of eternal truths. By allowing the consequences of men's neglect of his law and commandments, the great 'scourge' of war, to afflict them he was preaching as no earthly preacher, however gifted, could. As a result the true meaning of life had become clear to many who had forgotten that life on earth was merely one stage in man's existence. In particular, young men in their thousands now had a 'new consciousness' of the real purpose of their lives. They now knew there was a more valuable life beyond the grave. Many other people also now viewed life and death differently than in the days of peace.<sup>72</sup>

God had allowed the passion and death of Christ because of the good that came from it. Could he not then, asked Bishop Joseph Cowgill, also allow the 'calamities' then afflicting the world because of the war if He saw that the good which resulted outweighed the evil done? If the war brought men back to God's service and purified the world of sin, the good indeed would outweigh the evil.<sup>73</sup> God was infinitely good in Himself and infinitely good to men but He used 'natural means' in his

dealings with men, Bishop Richard Collins of Hexham and Newcastle reminded his flock. All men were in the 'hollow of God's hand'. They had to bow their heads before God's 'almighty designs', accepting that it was Him that saved them.<sup>74</sup> Bishop Lacy of Middlesborough reflecting in December 1915 that the horrors of war had now lasted with 'systematic reiteration' for over fifteen months, refused to accept that these 'unparalleled calamities' were the result of mere chance or that the 'design of the master-hand' could not be seen in them. God was the sovereign of life and death and the author of peace. He alone could lift the 'appalling scourge' which afflicted the world. But before He did so men must acknowledge their sin and turn away from evil. If they wished to enjoy the blessings of peace they must make themselves worthy of them. They must acknowledge God's dominion over them and pay Him 'loving service'.<sup>75</sup>

War could be a 'purifying' experience for men and nations. Bishop Keating saw a 'vision' of a new England 'purified and sanctified by her children's blood'. The men who fell in battle doing their duty would earn a prize beyond compare, 'the prize of eternal life'.<sup>76</sup> God had permitted the war, contended Archbishop Maguire, not so much to punish people for their sins but to bring them to their senses.<sup>77</sup> As for those who lay in 'quiet graves' in Belgium, France, on the shores of the Dardanelles or under the sea, they had been 'purified' by 'stress and strain' and their deaths though sudden were not 'unprovided for'. They were now at rest. Even the most 'thoughtless' among them had seen that there was something 'higher' than making money or leading a life of pleasure. It was better that life should be 'shortened by heroic death than that it should be spent in intemperance and impurity'.<sup>78</sup>

Fr. Hugh Pope O.P., the Prior of Woodchester, in a striking sermon at St. Dominic's, Haverstock Hill in January 1915 used Ezechial's vision of the resurrection of the dry bones to illustrate God's purpose in the war. One day God would breathe on all those who had fallen on the battlefield and the dead would live once again. But for the present, war was not for the dead but for the living. It was the living who must see God's 'mighty purpose' in it. The war would not have done its work until men asked 'Why has it come about? Why did it happen?' Ezechial in describing his vision of the valley of the bones had tried to stir the faith of his listeners. Similarly the war had to stir the faith of the present generation in a 'practical fashion'. Men would ask why the war had happened and why had God allowed it. Hugh Pope's answer was that this world was but nothing when compared to the next.

If we had remained unstirred it might have been found that we had no part in glory but rather in condemnation.<sup>79</sup>

In the first fifteen months of the Great War the bishops and other leaders of the Catholic community in Britain were faced with their greatest

challenge since the restoration of the hierarchy in 1850. The Catholic community in the early twentieth century, its ranks swelled by Irish migrants and the families of those migrants, was a significant minority within the greater national community, particularly so in the great urban centres. In the face of a war, which it soon emerged was on an unprecedented scale the Catholic community looked for leadership, counsel and consolation. How would and should the Catholic community respond to the national emergency? Loyalty of Catholics to the national cause had been a matter of dispute since the reign of Elizabeth I. During the South African Wars, less than fifteen years earlier, the Catholic community had been split and uncertain in its response with many of its members with Irish affiliations seeing the cause of the Boers as a mirror image of their own, a struggle for independence from their English oppressors. But in the autumn of 1914 the divisive issue of Irish Home Rule, it was believed, had now been removed with the commitment of the government and parliament to implement it as soon as the war was over. Irish Catholics and those with Irish sympathies could, it was believed commit themselves fully to the nation's cause. The first call on the hierarchy then was to emphasise the loyalty of British Catholics. That loyalty would find its proof in the numbers of Catholic young men volunteering for military service in the war. The bishops and leaders of the Catholic community actively encouraged volunteers to come forward. But to do that they felt it necessary to remove any doubts as to the justice of Britain's cause. Britain, in the terminology of the catechism and apologetics, was fighting a 'just war'. This wholehearted commitment to the cause of Britain and her allies brought with it, however, its own complications. If Britain's cause was a just one why did not the Pope give his open support to the Allies in their struggle against the Central Powers? Further what was the position of Catholics fighting in the presumably unjust cause of the Central Powers? Why were they not condemned? These issues had to be addressed, not always successfully or convincingly. But the problem of the Pope's position paled into insignificance when compared to the problems, pastoral and theological, posed by the attempts to reconcile the war and the slaughter which it brought with the Church's teaching of an all loving and all powerful God whose Providence watched over and guided mankind. How could God allow the horrific and seemingly meaningless deaths of so many thousands of soldiers and civilians? This question and others related to it sorely taxed the pastoral and theological capabilities of Catholic leaders. They struggled manfully, if perhaps not always successfully or convincingly, to see a higher purpose, God's purpose, in this war of unprecedented slaughter and to console those who mourned the deaths of their loved ones. The full horrors of the war were at the end of 1915 as yet still unknown and yet to come. The Catholic community along with the rest of the nation could have no concept that this war would continue for a further three years.

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Contemporary usage favoured 'England' and 'English' rather than 'Britain' or 'British' although it was often stressed that it was the British Empire that was at war with the Central Powers.
- <sup>2</sup> Liverpool Record Office (LRO) 282 PET/3/15 *Notice Book St. Peter's Seel St. 1912–1916, passim*.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Catholic Herald*, which published regional editions, carried extensive accounts of events at the front.
- <sup>4</sup> Much of the pastoral guidance lay Catholics received came in the form of sermons and pastoral letters read from the pulpit. Extended versions of many of the pastoral letters appeared in the Catholic press. Sermons or extracts of sermons given by prominent Catholic preachers also appeared. Martin John Broadley, the biographer of Bishop Louis Charles Casartelli of Salford, argues that Casartelli was the only English bishop to speak about peace and the danger of war in the months leading to the outbreak of World War One. M. J. Broadley, *Louis Charles Casartelli: A Bishop in Peace and War* (Manchester, 2006) p. 132ff. See also Michael Snape, 'British Catholicism and the British Army in the First World War', *Recusant History*, 26(2) October 2002, pp. 314–358. Snape's major focus is on Catholics and the British Army but he also touches on some of the issues raised in this article.
- <sup>5</sup> Casartelli's Lenten pastoral letter in 1914 before the war, *Pax Christi*, dealt with this issue. Broadley, *Casartelli*, pp. 132–133.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Tablet*, 15 August 1915.
- <sup>7</sup> *The Times*, 23 November 1914.
- <sup>8</sup> Reginald J. Dingle, *Cardinal Bourne at Westminster* (London, 1934) p. 105.
- <sup>9</sup> Dingle, *Cardinal Bourne*, pp. 106–107.
- <sup>10</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 28 November 1914.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 15 August 1914 and 9 January 1915.
- <sup>12</sup> *The Tablet*, 27 February 1915.
- <sup>13</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 30 January 1915.
- <sup>14</sup> *The Tablet*, 10 October 1914.
- <sup>15</sup> *The Tablet*, 17 October 1914.
- <sup>16</sup> *The Tablet*, 10 October 1914.
- <sup>17</sup> *The Tablet*, 11 December 1915.
- <sup>18</sup> *The Tablet*, 27 February 1915.
- <sup>19</sup> *The Tablet*, 6 March 1915.
- <sup>20</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 18 December 1915.
- <sup>21</sup> *The Tablet*, 30 January 1915.
- <sup>22</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 13 November 1915.
- <sup>23</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 4 December 1915.
- <sup>24</sup> *The Tablet*, 11 December 1915.
- <sup>25</sup> *The Tablet*, 18 December 1915.
- <sup>26</sup> *The Catholic Herald*, 18 December 1915.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Tablet*, 8 May 1915.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Times*, 24 November 1914.
- <sup>29</sup> *The Tablet*, 24 July 1915.
- <sup>30</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 28 November 1914.
- <sup>31</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 11 December 1914.
- <sup>32</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 9 January 1915. Broadley, however, points out that Casartelli never addressed assembled troops nor appeared at recruitment meetings as Bourne and Whiteside of Liverpool did. Broadley, *Casartelli*, p. 141.
- <sup>33</sup> *The Tablet*, 17 July 1915.
- <sup>34</sup> *The Tablet*, 13 November 1915.
- <sup>35</sup> J. Davies, 'British Catholics and the South African War, 1889–1900' in J. A. Hilton, *Turning the Last Century: Essays on English Catholicism circa 1900* (Wigan, 2003) pp. 47–65.
- <sup>36</sup> *Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 30 January 1915.
- <sup>37</sup> C. C. Martindale, *Fr. Bernard Vaughan S.J.* (London, 1923). Geoffrey Holt, 'Bernard John Vaughan', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) vol. 56, pp. 159–160.
- <sup>38</sup> *The Tablet*, 12 September 1914.
- <sup>39</sup> *The Tablet*, 20 February 1915.
- <sup>40</sup> *The Tablet*, 2 September 1914.
- <sup>41</sup> *The Tablet*, 22 May 1915.

- <sup>42</sup> *The Tablet*, 30 October 1915. Letter from 'English Convert'.
- <sup>43</sup> Casartelli, for example, found himself in some difficulty throughout the war attempting to explain and defend Benedict XV's position. Broadley, *Casartelli*, pp. 145–147.
- <sup>44</sup> *The Tablet*, 5 June 1915.
- <sup>45</sup> *The Tablet*, 16 January 1915.
- <sup>46</sup> The sinking of the *Lusitania* in May 1915 had been seen as perhaps the greatest outrage in the war to that date and had led to a storm of anti-German feeling in Britain, especially in the *Lusitania*'s home port of Liverpool.
- <sup>47</sup> *The Tablet*, 11 December 1915.
- <sup>48</sup> Ernest Oldmeadow, *Francis Cardinal Bourne* (London, 1940) vol. 2, p. 123.
- <sup>49</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 3 July 1915.
- <sup>50</sup> *The Tablet*, 18 December 1915. Broadley, *Casartelli*, pp. 149–150.
- <sup>51</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 4 December 1915.
- <sup>52</sup> *The Tablet*, 17 October 1914.
- <sup>53</sup> *The Tablet*, 9 October 1915.
- <sup>54</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 17 April 1915.
- <sup>55</sup> *The Tablet*, 13 November 1915.
- <sup>56</sup> *The Tablet*, 16 October 1915.
- <sup>57</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 11 December 1915.
- <sup>58</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 27 November 1917.
- <sup>59</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 9 January 1915.
- <sup>60</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 10 July 1915.
- <sup>61</sup> Oldmeadow, *Bourne*, vol. 2, p. 124.
- <sup>62</sup> *The Tablet*, 10 October 1914.
- <sup>63</sup> *The Tablet*, 20 November 1915.
- <sup>64</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 16 October 1915.
- <sup>65</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 23 October 1915.
- <sup>66</sup> *The Tablet*, 27 February 1915.
- <sup>67</sup> *The Tablet*, 27 February 1915.
- <sup>68</sup> *The Tablet*, 13 March 1915.
- <sup>69</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 2 October 1915.
- <sup>70</sup> *The Tablet*, 20 November 1915.
- <sup>71</sup> *The Tablet*, 7 August 1915.
- <sup>72</sup> *The Tablet*, 20 February 1915.
- <sup>73</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 4 December 1915.
- <sup>74</sup> *The Tablet*, 13 March 1915.
- <sup>75</sup> *The Tablet*, 11 December 1915.
- <sup>76</sup> *The Tablet*, 1 May 1915.
- <sup>77</sup> *The Catholic Herald (Liverpool)*, 20 February 1915, *The Tablet*, 6 March 1915.
- <sup>78</sup> *The Tablet*, 30 October 1915. Requiem for soldiers and sailors killed in action.
- <sup>79</sup> *The Tablet*, 16 January 1915.