

“The Mighty Hand of God”: The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and the Great War

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This paper concentrates on the reaction to the Great War of one Scottish religious denomination, the Free Presbyterian Church. The way that the Free Presbyterians reacted provides a fascinating glimpse at the complex nature of British society's attempts to come to terms with what was in many ways the single most shattering event of the twentieth century, and it makes clear the enormous pressures that the Great War placed upon traditional religion. The paper inspects the Free Presbyterian Church and the Great War from four angles: the Church's explanation of the reasons for the War; their support for the British cause; the provision of chaplains; and finally their opposition to the popular theological innovations that the Great War created. What is clear, and significant, is that the Free Presbyterian response to the War was a reflection of its own complex identity as Church that was both supportive and critical of the British State, and a Church that was national in scope and vision but Highland in reality. It also reflects the enormous challenges that the Great War posed for traditional understandings of life, death, God, church, and country.

Keywords First World War; Free Presbyterian Church; Scotland; Chaplains; Remembrance

Introduction

The First World War was a war in which around 9 million men were killed and in which many million more were wounded; approximately 5,500 men died every day. It was by a long way the most disastrous war that Europe had ever seen, killing perhaps twice as many men as all the significant wars of the previous 130 years.¹ And it had a particularly devastating impact on Scotland, with approximately 20% of all Britain's war dead being Scots.² It has been estimated that more than one-quarter of all the Scots who fought were killed and that of all the nations that fought, only the Serbs and the Turks sustained worse casualties.³ The War probably killed about one-tenth of Scottish males between sixteen and fifty,⁴ and it had a particularly shattering effect on the already-depopulated northern Highlands.⁵ In the words of one Scottish churchman, it was nothing less than a sign of "the mighty hand of God."⁶

This paper will concentrate on the reaction to the Great War of just one Scottish denomination, the Free Presbyterian Church. The Free Presbyterian Church was heavily concentrated in northern part of the country known as the Highlands, with 93% of its congregations being Highland in 1900,⁷ and it had been in existence for only 21 years when the war broke out. It had been founded when several thousand members of the Free Church of Scotland, led by two aged ministers and about a dozen bright young divinity students, had chosen to secede in protest over a series of changes that had taken place in the Free Church over the decades leading up to the 1890s. Over the next two decades their numbers grew, and by the outbreak of the Great War the Church had congregations all over Scotland and had even established a presence in Australia and southern Africa. There is a lot to be learned from examining the impact of the War on this small but dynamic Highland Church and the way that the Free Presbyterians reacted. It provides a fascinating glimpse at the

James Lachlan MacLeod

complex nature of British society's attempts to come to terms with what was in many ways the single most shattering event of the twentieth century, and it makes clear the enormous pressures that the Great War placed upon traditional religion. The task for the churches was to speak of a God who provided hope in a world that seemed to be "unspeakable, Godless, hopeless"⁸ and by analyzing how one church attempted that task, it is hoped to shed some light on the complex and challenging question of the churches' reaction to this quite dreadful war.

The Great War had a significant impact on the Free Presbyterian Church. Its ministers played an active part in the War and in fact there are probably few denominations that could claim such a level of participation—of the 13 out of the 17 Free Presbyterian ministers listed in 1917, 76% were involved in preaching to servicemen based in southern England, while 2 served as official chaplains. This paper will inspect the Free Presbyterian Church and the Great War from four angles: (1) the Church's explanation of the reasons for the War; (2) its support for the British cause; (3) the provision of chaplains; and finally, (4) its opposition to the popular theological innovations that the Great War created. What is clear, and significant, is that the Free Presbyterian response to the War was a reflection of its own complex identity as Church that was both supportive and critical of the British State, and a Church that was national in scope and vision but Highland in reality.⁹ It also reflects the enormous challenges that the Great War posed for traditional understandings of life, death, God, church, and country.

1. The Free Presbyterian Explanation of the War

While it took the major Scottish churches until 1917 to see the War as anything like a divine punishment for a backsliding nation,¹⁰ both the Evangelicals and the Anglo-Catholics in the Church of England arrived at this judgment from the very beginning.¹¹ It was

BRIDGES

a view shared by the Free Presbyterians. In the very first war editorial in the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, its editor James Sinclair said,

Great Britain, along with other nations, will no doubt receive chastisement in this strife . . . Now, it cannot be overlooked that we, as a nation have not been living up in many respects to our high traditions in recent years. The Bible, as the Word of God, has not been respected as it used to be. We have given much place to the spirit and fruits of infidelity. The fear of God has been largely thrown off by people in every rank of society . . . Shall not the Lord take just vengeance for these things?¹²

Sinclair also cited national slights to the “divine perfections and kingly authority of the Son of God,” as well as a loss of purity in worship, increasing Roman Catholic influence, a decline in Sabbath observance, and the rise of disbelief (“the true Gospel . . . is treated by multitudes as a piece of antiquated nonsense”) as reasons for divine anger.¹³ Clearly, the Free Presbyterians were ahead of their major Presbyterian counterparts, the Church of Scotland, and the United Free Church, in seeing the War as well-deserved retribution at its very outset.

It is remarkable that at the same time as the major Scottish Presbyterian churches were talking about the War as the most just there had ever been in human history, and as something that had been entered into to protect liberty and justice,¹⁴ the Free Presbyterians could discuss the War in terms of God’s “just vengeance.” In November 1914, Sinclair observed that “though people in general are disposed to overlook this point of view altogether, no one who truly fears the name of the Lord can pass it by.”¹⁵ The Free Presbyterian attitude to Germany will be discussed in depth below, but it is interesting to note in passing that the Free Presbyterians also saw the War as a punishment upon Britain’s Allies for various national sins. This included, among others, Belgium’s Catholicism and “inhuman

James Lachlan MacLeod

cruelty to the poor natives of the Congo,” France’s “ancient persecution of the Huguenots” and generally her “immorality of life,” and Russia’s “drunkenness.”¹⁶ Britain, however, as a nation that was seen as having been highly favored by God in the past, had done more than most to attract God’s anger. It was a theme to which the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* returned time and again as the War continued. In an article in May 1916 on the text, “Behold I stand at the door and knock,” James Sinclair said,

The Lord Jesus is knocking with a loud and terrible knock at our door by the present awful calamity of war. He is knocking at the door of the Church, the State, the family and the individual, and He is arousing them to consider that it is a dreadful thing to cast out His Word, His authority, His gospel, and Himself, and to admit the wild beasts of Rationalism, Popery, Atheism, and Materialism. Such suicidal conduct calls for judgement, and brings on sore retribution. One cannot take fire into his bosom without being burned, and the ‘wages of sin is death.’¹⁷

The Free Presbyterians clearly saw many national sins as having contributed to the War, with slightly different emphasis depending on who was writing and when. Among the sins that were cited were a “spirit of gross and worldly materialism” that led to the situation where “the god to whom the generality of men bow the knee is the silver and gold which they can amass,” as well as the fact that people desired to “indulge in every form of sport, play, and amusement,” something that would “provoke a Holy God against us to destroy us.”¹⁸ These sins also included young men choosing to play football or attend dances¹⁹ and, remarkably, “insane fads of the feminine world in headgear and dress,” of which “the British people had reached a pitch that called for lessons of self-restraint and self-control.”²⁰ Hats aside, the biggest issues seemed to be national attitudes to the Bible, to the Sabbath, and to Roman Catholicism.

BRIDGES

Almost inevitably, critical attitudes to the bible were seen to stem from “German rationalism.”

In order to understand the Free Presbyterian perspective, so different from the major Scottish Presbyterian churches, it is necessary to consider their history. In some ways a disastrous visitation like World War One was exactly what the Free Presbyterians expected, as they had been issuing Jeremiads about national apostasy and backsliding since their denomination began. In particular, they had been complaining about a decline in Sabbatarianism, a declining belief in the Bible, and the rising power of the Roman Catholic Church for decades. Indeed, these were all issues for them even before they became a separate denomination in 1893. All of these they would have seen as being just causes of potential divine punishment. The *Free Presbyterian Magazine* of August 1896 stated that, “As sure as He is a jealous God, He will visit this land in judgement unless the Sabbath shall be righteously observed,”²¹ and the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* of August 1899 observed that “. . . The Lord will vindicate His law, which is holy, just, and good. He will do so by temporal and eternal judgements.”²² A particularly gloomy editorial in January 1901 looked forward to the new century (like most contemporary observers, the Free Presbyterians viewed the century as beginning in 1901):

What men have sown in the nineteenth century, they or their successors will reap in the twentieth. . . . And we fear there is too much reason to conclude that a plentiful crop of evil fruit waits to be gathered in during the new age . . . to say the least, the present signs of the times are not encouraging.²³

Consequently, when a cataclysm like the Great War struck, it is hardly surprising that they would see it in this context. Indeed it is probably not going too far to say that it would have been impossible for them not to see it that way. The Church’s founding father, Donald

James Lachlan MacLeod

Macfarlane, had seen the Russo-Japanese War 10 years before as a divine punishment on Russia “for their past cruelty to the Jews and many others”²⁴ and since the *Free Presbyterian Magazine* had been warning about the nation’s sins and their consequences since its first edition in 1896, the Free Presbyterian line on the Great War was to be expected.

But the Free Presbyterians were ahead of the major denominations in another sense as well. As S. J. Brown has pointed out, it took until 1917 for the Church of Scotland and the United Free Church to call for national repentance in response to the War.²⁵ The Free Presbyterians petitioned the government for a national fast-day as early as October 1914, within weeks of the War starting. The petition included the following words:

The Presbytery . . . feel bound to direct attention to the solemn fact that war is at all times a terrible scourge, the outbreak of which constitutes a call to searching of heart and ways, self-humiliation, and confession of sins before God, as well as presents an occasion for prayer for divine help and deliverance. The Presbytery would therefor humbly but earnestly petition the Government to ask His Majesty the King to appoint a National Day of Humiliation and Prayer, if so be that the Most High in His mercy, would bring to a speedy end the present strife and bloodshed in a manner that would be for His own glory and the highest good of this nation and the other nations involved.²⁶

Jay Brown has observed that by the time of World War One, “ideas of national sin and corporate repentance had become alien to Scottish Presbyterians”;²⁷ this is almost definitely true of the Church of Scotland and the United Presbyterians on whom his article is based, but it is emphatically not the case with the Free Presbyterians. Indeed, for the Free Presbyterians, even a national day of “Prayer and

BRIDGES

Thanksgiving in connection with the War” such as had appeared by 1917, was not enough. The Free Presbyterians by then were pointing out that mere prayer was not enough and that “these exercises should consist of Fasting and Humiliation as well as Prayer and Thanksgiving.”²⁸ Whatever the national response, though, they had appointed their own “Day of Humiliation and Prayer,” or “fast-day” in February 1915.²⁹ The Free Presbyterians had a very strong sense of identity with Biblical Israel, and Israel’s history of being chosen by God, followed by a cycle of national sin, divine judgement, and finally national repentance, was something that seemed very relevant during the years of World War One. As Neil Cameron, minister of St Jude’s Glasgow, put it,

Our God is a jealous God. He punished the Church in Old Testament times for forsaking Him, and how do we expect to escape punishment also? He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. What was sin two thousand six hundred years ago, is sin still.³⁰

2. The Free Presbyterian Support of Britain

If the Free Presbyterian position were initially exceptional when it provided an explanation for the War, the First Presbyterians were far from unique in their support for the War. While it is true that the Free Presbyterian Church was very critical of the national sins that had brought the War upon Great Britain, it would be far from the truth to say that the Church was unsupportive of the War or Britain’s role in it. In fact, the Free Presbyterians seemed to be very sure that Britain was more than justified in its position. Again this position makes sense from an historical perspective; the Free Presbyterian Church considered itself from the start to be a national church, and it wholeheartedly stood for the Establishment principle. Space was taken up to spell out this position in a six-page article in only the second issue of *The Free Presbyterian Magazine* in June 1896.³¹ Although willing to be extremely critical of national sins that ranged

James Lachlan MacLeod

from Sabbath-breaking to overly elaborate hats, that did not mean that the Free Presbyterians were not firmly behind the British cause. While prepared to criticize Britain, they were certain that the British cause was a just one and they were firmly convinced that the First World War was “the dreadful fruits of . . . the cold, proud, cruel Prussian militarism which dominates that country today.”³² In this respect, the Free Presbyterian position differs little from that of most of the Church of England and most English nonconformists.³³ And ironically, it is a mirror image of the position of many German Christians, too.³⁴

In Sinclair’s first War editorial, the reasons for the outbreak of the War were spelled out in fairly orthodox fashion, with Britain’s entry being explained in terms of the alliance system in general, and the alliance with France in particular. Interestingly, a “correction” was inserted the following month that called this explanation a mistake and instead insisted that,

the real occasion [of the War] was German’s violation of a Treaty with this country, France and Belgium, not to make Belgium a battle-ground in the event of any war arising between the other countries. . . . Germany, in the most wanton and dishonourable manner, deliberately broke the Treaty and invaded Belgian territories. . . . Great Britain could not look on and do nothing in such circumstances. Every principle of justice, honour, and mercy,³⁵ called for action.

By October, the Free Presbyterian position was emphatically in line with many other British publications in throwing up its hands in horror at German atrocities in Belgium—“who would have thought that the men of a Christian, Protestant, highly-educated nation could have been guilty of such dreadful wickedness?”³⁶ Perhaps the editor had been stealing secret glances at *Punch*, which in August 1914 commented that “the revelation of the black soul of Germany is the

BRIDGES

greatest and most hideous surprise of this month of months.”³⁷ By the November edition of the *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, the Free Presbyterians were expressing outrage. “Germany,” they declared, “has been the secret but deliberate instigator of the War.” The article continued,

Influenced by an unholy lust for dominion, her representatives did not hesitate to take advantage of the Austrian crisis with Servia, [*sic*] and refusing to confer as to peace with Britain and France, they deliberately called for War . . . sending an army to invade France through the country of Belgium, contrary to the express terms of a treaty. . . . The German chancellor contemptuously described the written and signed treaty as ‘a scrap of paper.’ Could anything more clearly show the perfidious disposition that animated the Kaiser and his counsellors? Such falsehood and treachery . . . present us with iniquity of the blackest dye, which cannot go unpunished.³⁸

Whatever the Free Presbyterians thought about Britain’s own sinfulness, there was no doubt in their minds that Germany’s culpability in starting the War was total. Indeed, Free Presbyterian comments about British sinfulness need to be seen in this context; while not dodging the fact that Britain had, to a certain extent, brought this immense divine judgement on herself, the Free Presbyterians proceeded to paint Britain in a very positive light when compared to Germany. Again, comparisons could be made to the Biblical Israel, which, while remaining God’s chosen nation, saw its sinfulness frequently punished by nations even more sinful than they.³⁹ The idea of Britain as a chosen people, setting a shining example to the outside world, was spelled out even more clearly later in the same editorial:

The representatives of our country are by no means perfect, but in this particular business they are acting the just, honourable, and Christian part, and their names in this connection will go down with honour to posterity.

James Lachlan MacLeod

Personally we regard Great Britain as the representative of Christ, the righteous, the Prince of Peace, and Germany as the representative of Satan, the unholy prince of darkness, in the present Armageddon.⁴⁰

Free Presbyterians, of course, did their share of serving and suffering, and that meant that in many respects the Free Presbyterian response was unavoidable; given the scale of the suffering being endured by the people of their congregations, and by their families, friends, and neighbors. And given their traditional tone of loyal if critical support for the “powers that be,” it is inconceivable that the Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland could have taken up a position that opposed the War. The Free Presbyterians, so unlike the other churches in Britain in so many important ways, were in this respect just like almost everyone else, and their clarity of vision was fatally affected by the blinkers of what Arlie Hoover has called “Christian nationalism.” Instead of critically assessing the War and its origins and seeing it as a power struggle between hungry empires -none of which bore much relation to the ‘Prince of Peace’—the Free Presbyterians were merely one more voice trumpeting a distorted and irrational xenophobic nationalism, where the British represented Jesus, the Prince of Peace, and the Germans Satan, the Prince of Darkness.

While this is something that should be noted, it is not for the purpose of condemning the Free Presbyterian ministers who wrote and preached about the War; it is simply to make clear that they were saying exactly what almost every other Christian was saying, both in Britain and in Germany. In this context, they were part of a much bigger picture, part of a continuum that stretched from the Danube and the Rhine to the Forth and the Clyde. In fact, in many respects, they were part of a continuum that stretched through time from the first time that religion and warfare intermingled. A “covenanted nation,” officially Protestant to the core, was fighting for what seemed to be its very survival against a powerful and self-confident opponent.

BRIDGES

Looking at the situation from this perspective, the Free Presbyterian response is entirely predictable. The Free Presbyterian ministers supported the British prosecution of the First World War because it was utterly impossible and indeed unimaginable for them to do anything else.

3. The Free Presbyterian Provision of Chaplains⁴¹

While numerically tiny in comparison to the contributions of, for example, the Church of Scotland or the United Free Church of Scotland, the Free Presbyterian chaplaincy effort deserves more attention than it has been given.⁴² The chaplaincy effort was a fascinating exercise, and two of its facets are worth mentioning here.

Firstly, it was an effort that heavily concentrated on highland servicemen—while their chaplains of course preached to all those who would listen, their efforts were unmistakably targeted at highland, Gaelic-speaking soldiers and sailors. They practiced a kind of Celtic “apartheid” which reveals that despite their claims to being a national church, the Free Presbyterians were firmly rooted in a highland Gaelic identity. The pressures of the Great War simply emphasized that. From the very beginning, the mission was “to supply these dear fellow-highlanders with gospel services in their mother tongue.”⁴³ Indeed, in February 1915 when Portsmouth became “depleted of our men and other Highlanders,” the Free Presbyterian services there were suspended.⁴⁴ Almost all of the unofficial chaplains of the Free Presbyterian Church emphasized the degree to which highland soldiers and sailors expressed their appreciation of being preached to in Gaelic. One of the chaplains twice encountered highlanders who could speak no language except Gaelic. The fact that the British army, fighting for the British state, had in its ranks British soldiers who could neither speak nor understand English is a truly remarkable symbol of the complex questions about national identity that the Great War stimulated.

James Lachlan MacLeod

Secondly, despite the notoriously divisive and conflict-ridden nature of highland Presbyterianism, with some small communities containing several different Presbyterian denominations all of which were relatively similar in terms of orthodoxy and worship, the Free Presbyterian chaplaincy effort in the Great War displayed some important characteristics of ecumenism. Rev J.R. MacKay, for example, wrote in his report in May 1915 that

There is nothing properly denominational, in the sense of sectarian, about the Mission, but by means of it the Free Presbyterian Church has an opportunity in the present crisis of contributing its own little share of service to the national cause. And all Highlanders of every denomination have thanked us for the interest shown towards the nation's Forces.⁴⁵

Rev Murdo Morrison made it clear that the task entrusted to him by the Church was to preach in Gaelic to men “representative of the various denominations in the Highlands and Islands.”⁴⁶ The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland was one of the most detached of all Scottish denominations, so even the small ecumenical characteristics exhibited during their Great War chaplaincy are quite significant, and indeed the Church decided to discontinue its contribution as a provider of official chaplains as a result of these very characteristics. It is also significant that the Free Presbyterian Church split at the end of the First World War—four of the ministers who had been most active in the chaplaincy effort made the “ecumenical” move to join the Free Church. The possibility of a connection between their role as chaplains from 1914-1918 and their secession in 1918 and 1920 is certainly worth raising.

It would, however, be a gross distortion to discuss the Free Presbyterian chaplaincy effort without making reference to what was clearly its most important motivation—evangelism. The Revd Murdo Morrison's 1915 comment is typical:

BRIDGES

We feel we can confess it as our honest conviction that with no other end or motive are we guided in the conduct of this Mission to the Forces that that of seeking their spiritual wellbeing for time and eternity. Everything else pales into insignificance in comparison with the one thing needful. 'What shall it profit a man though he gain the whole world and lose his own soul; or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?'⁴⁷

The Free Presbyterians were convinced of the fact that the men to whom they preached at military bases like Ripon and Chatham and Portsmouth were going to be facing death and that for some of them this might be their last opportunity to hear a Christian sermon. Their chaplaincy effort was a reflection of the Church's belief that those who died without undergoing a conversion experience would go to Hell and that the best way to try to ensure their salvation was to preach to them, pray for them, and read the Bible with them. J. R. Mackay spoke of the need to turn soldiers and sailors' minds "to the things that really matter."⁴⁸ In the final analysis, the Free Presbyterian chaplaincy endeavor was not just the product of loyalty to the British Crown, nor was it just a reflection of a strongly held though often understated sense of highland identity. Nor was it just motivated by a desire to "do the right thing" and be seen to do it. Instead, it was motivated by the instinct that motivated most of the actions of these ministers, indeed the instinct that had motivated them to become ministers in the first place. This was the instinct to preach what they believed to be God's word to those who needed it, in the hope that it would lead to their eternal salvation.

Overall, the Free Presbyterian contribution to the War as chaplains was another example of the complex nature of the denomination's identity. While wanting to support the British state in the war effort, they remained constantly aware of their Highland identity and their responsibility for Highland servicemen. And while wanting to do as much as they could, that commitment was not to be

James Lachlan MacLeod

to the detriment of a keenly felt sense of liturgical purity. Ecumenism was ultimately considered to be an unacceptable price for chaplaincy. In this, as in many other areas of the Christian church's reaction to the Great War, responding to "the mighty hand of God" was a complicated and divisive issue.

4. The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland and Theological Innovation⁴⁹

It is clear that the First World War, so novel in its scope, scale, and form, pressured British Christians also to behave in novel ways. Old practices and old certainties seemed simply inadequate in the face of the unprecedented. By the end of the conflict, many traditional beliefs had been questioned, and many traditional practices had been changed. Street shrines appeared and prayers for the dead became more popular. As has been seen, some old denominational differences began to dissolve. Some Protestants began to advocate the existence of an intermediate state between heaven and hell and many people, in England more so than in Scotland, turned to various forms of spiritualism in reaction to their loss. And there developed a widely shared set of views that dying in battle for your country was not just noble, but was in some way a religious sacrifice that earned salvation.⁵⁰ The message that came from numerous sermons, obituaries, cemeteries, memorials, and poems unambiguously emphasized the sacrificial and redemptive nature of death in the Great War, and the eternal reward that was believed to await those who had died; a process that we might refer to as "the canonisation of common people."⁵¹ While all of this is entirely understandable in the circumstances, the Free Presbyterians unshirkingly rejected all such theological adjustments.

While the Free Presbyterians tried hard to comfort the bereaved, there was never any deviation from the strictest and most conservative scriptural interpretations. As firm Westminster

BRIDGES

Confession of Faith Calvinists, the Free Presbyterian response to the doctrine that death in battle brought salvation was both predictable and unequivocal. Of that position, one of their ministers, James Sinclair, said, “we have no hesitation in affirming that a more unsound or dangerous opinion than the above cannot be entertained. It is entirely inconsistent with, and subversive of, the most vital principles of Christianity.”⁵² They acknowledged the virtue and honour of dying for one’s country, as they had to, but they were unambiguous in stating their position that, “There is no entrance into heaven except through the ‘strait gate.’ All the fine heroism of the battlefield, while it thrills our blood, is not to blind our eyes to the great announcement made by the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘Verily verily I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.’”⁵³ Let there be no doubt as to the meaning of this phrase—the Free Presbyterians unquestionably believed that soldiers who not undergone a religious conversion experience (being “born again”) would go to Hell if they died in their present “unprepared” spiritual condition. Their only hope lay with Christ, as the Free Presbyterian minister Donald Macfarlane made clear: “The death of Christ and not the death of the sinner is the only ground for salvation.”⁵⁴

On prayers for the dead, they were equally clear. While well aware of the popular pressures that drove some Scottish ministers to advocate praying for the dead—they knew as well as anyone else who was living through the war that “the hearts of many in the present terrible time are yearning after their dead”—they went on to state that the “new theology” of such ministers was guided not by an infallible God but by “the heart of poor, blind, fallen humanity.”⁵⁵ From the very beginning of the War, the Free Presbyterians had difficulties with public prayer about the War that crossed the boundaries into praying for the “faithful departed.”⁵⁶ The Free Presbyterians criticized memorial services not just because these were often occasions when they believed the theology of salvation through death in battle was proclaimed, but also because they often introduced prayers for the

James Lachlan MacLeod

dead. The 1915 memorial service at St Paul's Cathedral for the executed nurse Edith Cavell was one example cited.⁵⁷

While they believed with certainty that the British cause was a just one and one that involved fighting for the cause of Christ, the Free Presbyterians were not afraid to take a completely different position from most other churchmen in their response to the War. For the Free Presbyterians to say that a soldier or sailor who had died for his country might very well have gone to Hell was neither a comfortable nor easy nor popular thing to say. Clearly, this did not deter them. In some ways, the very rigidity of their Scripture-focused Calvinism made this a relatively simple exercise. Their denomination had been born in 1893—with, it should be said, considerable suffering—out of a battle to defend traditional interpretations of and attitudes to the Bible and the Westminster Confession of Faith. They believed that the Bible and the Confession taught that some people were saved and others were damned. Dying in battle, however honorable, however heroic, however “sacrificial,” was not going to change a soldier's or a sailor's eternal destination. It was the internal logic and consistency of the Free Presbyterian position, perhaps, that made it possible for them to be comfortable with what were, on the surface, uncomfortable positions.

Conclusion

The First World War challenged old assumptions in numerous ways as the sheer scale of the dying frequently rendered traditional responses mute. For churches, however, shell-shocked as they might have been by the carnage, muteness was simply not an option and so they had to speak. They had to speak—with both words and actions—not only to those who were fighting and dying, but also to the survivors and to the bereaved that they left behind. Getting this speech right was probably an impossible task and its complexity is illustrated by the problems and contradictions of the Free Presbyterian experience. In the attempts of the Free Presbyterian Church to wrestle with the enormous challenges of the Great War, we see in microcosm the problems that all people of faith faced in the second decade of the twentieth century. Facing what the writer John Galsworthy called a “monstrous calamity and evil,”⁵⁸ Free Presbyterian responses were far from epic. But by studying the concentrated response of a small group of conservative Christians to issues such as unprecedented mass death, the place of British nationalism in Scottish society at a time of war, the role of chaplains, the value of ecumenism, and the proper forms of remembrance, we can perhaps begin to glimpse the enormity of the challenge that this monstrous war posed for all people of faith.

James Lachlan MacLeod

ENDNOTES

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BRIDGES

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15. J. S. Sinclair, "Moral and Religious Aspects of the War," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(7) (November 1914), 247.
16. J. S. Sinclair, "Moral and Religious Aspects of the War," 247. Again, there are echoes of all this on the English ecclesiastical scene. See Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, 83-84.
17. J. Sinclair, " 'Behold I Stand at the Door and Knock'," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 21(1) (May 1916), 3.
18. M. Morrison, Sermon preached on Isaiah 26.20, *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(7) (November 1914), 254.
19. D. Macfarlane, Sermon Preached on Jonah 1.7, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(12) (April 1915), 454.
20. "Some Changes the European War has made," *The Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(6) (October 1914), 239.
21. A. Mackenzie, "The Sabbath Day," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 1(4) (August 1896), 145.

James Lachlan MacLeod

22. "A Loud Voice," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 4(4) (August 1899), 159.
23. "The New Century," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 5(9) (January 1901), 321.
24. D. Beaton (ed), *Memoir, Diary and Remains of the Rev. Donald Macfarlane, Dingwall* (Inverness: Northern Counties, 1929), 100.
25. Brown, "Solemn Purification," 98.
26. "Petition for a National Fast-Day," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(7) (November 1914), 276.
27. Brown, "Solemn Purification," 99.
28. "Petition to the King re Ordinary Week-day of Humiliation with Thanksgiving," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 22(9) (January 1918), 326.
29. "Church Notes," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(10) (February 1915), 407.
30. N. Cameron, "Observations on the War," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(7) (November 1914), 265.
31. A. Mackenzie, "The Establishment Principle," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 11(2) (June 1896), 56-62.
32. "Germany: Its Theology and its Militarism," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(6) (October 1914), 205-206.
33. C. E. Bailey, "The British Protestant Theologians in the First World War: Germanophobia Unleashed," *Harvard Theological Review*, 77 (2) (1984): 211; Marrin, *The Last Crusade*, 74-81.
34. Hoover, *God, Germany, and Britain*, 51-63.

BRIDGES

35. "A Correction *re* Article on 'The War,' " *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(6) (October 1914), 221. This position was also spelled out by the prominent Free Presbyterian minister Neil Cameron in "Observations on the War," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(7) (November 1914), 264-265.
36. "Germany: Its Theology and its Militarism," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(6) (October 1914), 205.
37. *Mr. Punch's History of the Great War* (London: Cassell and Co., 1919), 2.
38. J. S. Sinclair, "Moral and Religious Aspects of the War," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(7) (November 1914), 245.
39. See, for example, 2 Chronicles 33.11-17.
40. J. S. Sinclair, "Moral and Religious Aspects of the War," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(7) (November 1914), 246.
41. This subject has been covered in much more depth, and some of the following is closely drawn from that work. See J. L. MacLeod, "Its own little share of service to the national cause." The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland's Chaplains in the First World War," *Northern Scotland*, 21 (2001).
42. A. MacPherson (ed.), *History of the Free Presbyterian Church (1893-1970)* (Inverness: FP Publications, 1974), 120.
43. "Mission to the forces during the war. An appeal for help," *Free Presbyterian Magazine (FPM)* 19(7) (November 1914), 275.
44. "Mission to the forces in England," *FPM* 19(10) (Feb 1915), 406.
45. MacKay, "Account of mission to forces in England," *FPM* 20(1) (May 1915), 19.
46. M. Morrison, "Account of mission to forces in England," *FPM* 20(7) (November 1915), 261.
47. *Ibid.* Quote from Mark viii. 36.

James Lachlan MacLeod

48. Mackay, "Account of mission to naval men in England," *FPM* 22(11) (March 1918), 376.
49. For more detail on this, see J.L. MacLeod, "'Greater Love Hath No Man Than This': Scotland's Conflicting Religious Responses to Death in the Great War," *Scottish Historical Review*, 81(1) Issue 211 (April 2002).
50. According to George L Mosse, "The basic design of the English [*sic*] war cemetery brought to life the link between the fallen and Christian sacrifice . . .". G. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers. Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 84.
51. A. King, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain. The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance* (Oxford: Berg, 1988), 173.
52. "'Greater Love hath no Man than this,'" *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 21(6) (October 1916), 201.
53. "False Sentiment Opening Wide the Gates of Heaven," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(6) (October 1914), 240.
54. D. Macfarlane, Sermon on Rev. 3: 20, *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 21(7) (November, 1916), 248.
55. *Ibid.*, 400.
56. "Prayers for the Dead in the Established Churches," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 19(10) (April, 1915), 404-405.
57. "Memorial Services," *Free Presbyterian Magazine*, 20(8) (December 1915), 318-319.
58. Quoted in S. Koven, "Remembering and Dismemberment: Crippled Children, Wounded Soldiers, and the Great War in Great Britain," *American Historical Review* 99(4) (October 1994): 1167.