

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Will this War result in a Revival of Sacerdotalism?

A FRIEND has sent me a copy of a local parish magazine in which the Vicar, who is of the extreme school of thought represented by the English Church Union, assures his parishioners that one result of this war will be a large accession of Protestant soldiers to Roman Catholicism, as, after all they have seen on the Continent, they will no longer be content with what he is pleased to call the narrow views of the Protestant outlook, and that they will want a better and a more comprehensive view of religion, and one with more ceremonial. This Vicar then tries to drag in the patriotic spirit, to uphold his partisan views, by making the wild assertion that Germany is the home of Protestantism, and "that this devilish and hellish war is the natural result."

I hope that in this brief epitome of these extraordinary assertions, that I have not done an injustice to the views of this ecclesiastical partisan. I will not mention his name or his parish, as no object can be gained by introducing the personal element. This is not the first time that I have heard this monstrous proposition propounded, for, in some form or other, it has been advanced not only by those to whom the wish is father to the thought, but also by some timid Protestants, who fear that it may be so. After a life-long experience of soldiers, in every part of the British Empire, I should like to say something on the subject in reply to the one, and to reassure the other.

One cannot help feeling, however, that it was a pity for this Vicar to seek to inflame the minds of his parishioners by dragging in questions of this kind at such a time of distress. Surely there are enough problems on hand, raised by this War, without trotting out extreme ecclesiastical party views to add to their number. As the question has, however, been raised, the only thing is to give such an answer as may appeal to reasonable people who are really seeking the truth.

Before making any comment on this extraordinary statement as to the relative merits of Protestants and Roman Catholics, would it not be well first of all to state the actual figures representing the so-called beliefs of our opponents from Germany and Austria?

Even if we take Germany alone, which the Vicar speaks of as exclusively Protestant, we find that, omitting Jews and all minor religious bodies, about 24,000,000 are Roman Catholics and under 40,000,000 are Protestants, so it is obviously unfair to speak of even Germany as Protestant ! In some of the German states such as Bavaria and Baden, the Roman Catholics practically dominate the whole, and, if we include Austria, we find that the Roman Catholic element considerably exceeds the Protestant in the ranks of our enemies, there being about 61,000,000 Roman Catholics to only about 43,000,000 Protestants ! But though we speak of Prussians as Protestants, it would be more accurate to say that they are mainly infidels, as they appear to have lost their first love, and very largely to have thrown over the Word of God for which their ancestors died at the time of Luther.

Surely this Vicar does not credit our British soldiers with sufficient powers of discrimination if he thinks that they will desert the faith of their fathers to join a Church which, in this war, is represented by soldiers of Austria, Bavaria, Baden, etc. Has he not read of the diabolical cruelties that were perpetrated on the English soldiers in the prison at Wittenburg, a place sacred to every Protestant as associated with Luther. This particular hospital has secured an unfortunate notoriety, but it is to be feared that some of the others are but little better, both in Germany and Austria. The awful treatment of some of the Russian prisoners by the Austrians is quite equal to the brutality perpetrated on the prisoners in Wittenburg. Does he seriously think that our brave chivalrous soldiers will ever be attracted by the religion of such countries ? I have known splendid Roman Catholic soldiers, and I can quite understand their blushing with shame to think that these brutal cruelties were perpetrated by men of their faith, and even becoming Protestants. But after my long experience of soldiers I cannot imagine the opposite line of thought or action. Austria, Bavaria and Baden have out-rivalled infidel Prussia in the brutal way they have conducted this war, and they all represent the Roman Catholic Church. Many of us would have rejoiced if only infidel Prussia had been guilty, for then at all events religion could not be associated with this brutal method of conducting war, which must make every soldier blush for his profession.

This Vicar does not display that knowledge of church history

which men of his cloth are supposed to have, when he asserts that "Germany is the home of Protestantism" which has "produced nothing but a devilish and hellish war." I am only a humble representative of a profession that is not credited with much knowledge of ecclesiastical history, but even I know that the fundamental principles of Protestantism were not "made in Germany," but were born in England in the time of Wycliffe, nearly 150 years before the time of the Confession of Augsburg, which was not drawn up till 1530.

It is well known that the Queen of England in the time of Wycliffe was a native of Bohemia, and that she sent all his writings over to her countrymen, and these influenced Huss, who died in 1415. Luther, and other Germans in later days, were in their turn influenced by his writings, so that Wycliffe was the human instrument used by God to rescue from the Holy Word those glorious truths which we English Churchmen value so much. It is quite true that England at that time was a priest-ridden country, and that the King, in spite of his wife, supported the sacerdotal party, and suppressed Wycliffe's teaching. Thus Germany, nearly 150 years later, got the credit of being the birthplace of Protestantism, a credit which in reality under God belongs to England, as the Reformation might have taken place nearly 150 years before it did, but for the priests of that retrograde system of religion which this Vicar seriously thinks that our enlightened soldiers will want to reintroduce into England!

This parish magazine not only says that Germany is the home of Protestantism, but that this form of faith "is done for ever, as it has failed to produce anything but a devilish and hellish war." Now, while we may grieve to think that Protestant Germany has degenerated into an infidel country, having long ago given up that Holy Word which Luther and other Germans valued so much, yet we must not rush to the other extreme. This is unquestionably "a devilish and hellish war" in which infidel Prussia, Roman Catholic Bavaria, Baden, and Austria seem to be outvying one another in perpetrating cruelties. Nevertheless we must not lose our heads, nor our honesty, by asserting that Germany never has produced anything else. There is a cartoon in a recent *Punch* (April 19) which makes Martin Luther say to Shakespeare, in speaking of this generation of Germans, "They have made my Witten-

burg—ay, and all Germany—to stink in my nostrils.” Give even the devil his due, and, if we are honest, we are bound to admit that Germany, in spite of her present faults, which seem to be the result of that unhallowed alliance of infidelity, sacerdotalism and militarism, has produced some able men in the past three centuries. Any country might be proud of such names as Luther, Melanchthon, Goethe, Mozart, Mendelssohn, Bach, Heine, Handel, Humboldt, Haydn, Niebuhr, Wagner, Von Ranke, Fichte, and others, representing various departments of learning.

The truth is that Germany has got into her present difficulties by having thrown off her simple evangelical faith in God’s Word and has relied on the arm of militarism, which teaches that “Might is right.” England, on the other hand, in spite of all her faults and shortcomings, is still a Protestant country, and the King, who is the human head of our beloved Church, has, at the time of his Coronation, to declare himself a true Protestant. We Englishmen are proud of the fact that we belong to a Church which is not ashamed to avow itself Protestant, a term which stands for liberty of conscience, freedom and righteousness.

Once Germany also stood for religious and political liberty and freedom, but now, alas, having thrown off God, she appears to have cultivated a dominating and intolerant spirit, which we Protestants have always associated with the Roman Catholic Church, whose teaching this Vicar would like to see introduced into England! Indeed the cruelties of the soldiers of infidel Prussia, allied with Roman Catholic Bavaria, Baden, and Austria, have recalled the diabolical horrors perpetrated by that loyal soldier of the Papal Church, the Duke of Alva, the Spanish Governor of the Netherlands in 1573. Unless I greatly mistake the judgment of our Protestant soldiers, it will appear to them that Germany among nations is repeating the mistake perpetrated by the Roman Catholics among the smaller religious bodies of olden days. Germany wants by brute force to dominate the whole of Europe. Is not this just what the Church of Rome did in the dark Middle Ages among the smaller religious bodies, such as the Huguenots, Waldensians, etc., of olden days? In order to intimidate her opponents Rome exercised the same spirit of “frightfulness” as is now being done by Germany. One has only to read the awful accounts of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew’s Day, and the sufferings of the poor Protestant minorities in

France, Holland, England, Spain, etc., to see how closely the two resemble each other. Surely this Vicar is not giving our brave British soldiers sufficient credit for common sense, if he thinks that at the end of the war, when they return to England, they will want to adopt such a retrograde step? After all the horrors they have seen, and their own suffering, they will surely not wish to reintroduce the spirit of Rome into religion, or the spirit of Germany into their relationship with the nations of other countries. In my humble opinion the evidence is all against this Vicar ever obtaining his wish that the sacerdotal spirit may be revived in our midst.

The great bulk of the English officers and soldiers with whom I have spoken on the subject appear to be unanimous in acquitting the Saxons of cruelty, and these are mainly, though not quite entirely, Protestants. As a matter of fact the British and the Saxons, though opposed to each other as enemies, are the only true Protestants engaged in this war, for the Prussians, though not all infidels, are at all events dominated by them. From what I can gather the Protestants are the ones who have the cleanest hands, and are fighting like chivalrous gentlemen, and yet this Vicar hopes that "Protestantism is done for ever!" It will be a bad day for the progress not only of Europe, but of this world, if such should be the result of the war, but personally I have no fear on that score.

Our brave British soldiers have, on the one hand, behaved so nobly, and, on the other, the Pope has behaved in such a time-serving way, by refusing to denounce the brutal cruelties inflicted on Belgium, lest he should offend his Roman Catholic allies. The Pope has very sorely tried the faith of devout Roman Catholics both in France and in Belgium by the time-serving attitude that he has adopted. My prayer and hope is that one result of this war will be that the priest-ridden nations of the world will tend to throw off their superstitions, and learn to value that simple evangelical faith which has done so much to make England great. Our soldiers will have observed that the priest-ridden countries, like Austria, Bavaria, and Baden can be as brutally cruel as a nation like Prussia, which is dominated by infidelity. They will also see that it is possible for a Protestant nation like their own to stand for religious and political liberty, and freedom of conscience, without becoming Godless and infidel like Prussia. Having seen the awful suffering and horrors caused by the unhallowed alliance of infidelity, sacerdotalism, and

militarism, they will return to their native land, I hope, convinced that a nation cannot do without God any more than an individual. Their minds will be expanded by all they have seen, and they will be more resolved than ever that England shall stand in the future for God and righteousness. Also that they will hand on to future generations a grander, nobler, and a purer faith, based more entirely on the teaching of Christ, as revealed in that sacred volume which their enemies the Prussians have thrown over.

In spite of all the faults of Germany, now that she is dominated by infidelity and militarism, we Englishmen cannot forget her noble past history. Like ourselves, she has been in the forefront during the past three centuries, contending for religious liberty and freedom of thought. Now, alas, she is under a very dark cloud and has fallen from her high position, having been the cause of this war, with all its madness, its badness, and its sadness, as described by one of our own soldiers. "But with God all things are possible." We too might have fallen, and our hands are not altogether clean, although our loving Father has kept us from sinking to the low level of our opponents. Instead of magnifying the defects of our enemies, ought we not humbly to pray for them that they may yet be restored, and become our allies in all that is noble and good? There are still left in Germany many earnest devoted kind-hearted men and women of God, though they are dominated and misled by others, not to say crushed down by the iron heel of a despotic military caste. We see splendid faculties of organization, and gifts of far-sightedness in their commercial life, as well as in their army and navy. Let us obey our Saviour's command to pray for our enemies, and ask God that these splendid magnificent gifts, which now, alas, are being prostituted to the service of the Evil One, may yet be used in the service of God. What magnificent allies they might make in the foreign mission field, helping to win the heathen for Christ. Also what a splendid work may lie before them, when this cursed militarism and infidelity is crushed, in helping us at home to wage war with the awful problems of poverty, by suggesting new ideas to enable us to cope with the evils that lie before us. The young lives of our brave soldiers and sailors will not have been sacrificed in vain if we can win over these, who are now our enemies, to become our allies in fighting for all that is noble and good and for all that which makes life worth living.

SETON CHURCHILL, LT.-COL.