

# The Book and the Sword: The Bible in the Legacy and Memory of the Great War

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## Krastu Banev: The Biblical Theology of War in Eastern Orthodoxy during the Balkan Wars and WW1

### **Abstract**

The political changes which followed the collapse of communist dictatorships in the countries of the former Eastern bloc have opened the way for the gradual introduction of Orthodox military chaplaincy. This in turn has facilitated new research on the role played by Orthodox military chaplains in WW1. Building on the work of scholars who have researched the various national military and ecclesiastical archives (in the Balkan countries and in Russia), the present paper examines the relevance of the Bible in the lives of Orthodox soldiers and their leaders across the spectrum of Orthodox participation in the Balkan Wars and WW1. The questions that govern the investigation concern the use of biblical material in the prayers and ceremonies appointed for different occasions in the life of soldiers (swearing of the military oath, blessing of military banners and weapons, setting up of army chapels, prayer services before combat, military funerals and remembrance of soldiers fallen in battle). These liturgical materials are seen as reflecting the spiritual and cultural resources made available to soldiers to allow them to search for meaning and for ways of articulating their war experience. Examining these texts with a comparative approach will enable, as I will argue, the establishment of structural parallels in the different national Orthodox contexts. The different elements here include the proclamation of a *de facto* if not *de jure* just war for the defence the fatherland, as approved and blessed by God to fight a barbaric and inhuman enemy until a final total victory. What these parallels in the religiously coloured rhetoric of war reveal is a mechanism for justifying participation in the military as well as for violence against non-combatant civilians and prisoners of war. Yet, in this context of total war there were some voices who would deplore the bloodshed also in biblical terms – as the fratricide of Adam’s children. Most notable here is the Russian monk Silouan who, after serving in the Russian imperial army, joined the community of St Panteleimon on Mt Athos and lived there during the Franco-Russian occupation of the peninsula in WW1. His glorification as a saint of the Orthodox church by the Ecumenical patriarchate of Constantinople (in 1988) reveals a certain ambivalence in the attitude of the Orthodox churches to their respective heroes from the Great War none of whom has as yet been canonised simply for their military valour.

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[Tom Bromwell: Build A New World: Realising the Millennium of Stanley Spencer's Resurrection paintings](#)

**Abstract**

The religious belief informing Stanley Spencer’s (1891-1959) paintings has been widely recognised, to the extent that it is something of a cliché to refer to Spencer as ‘visionary’. The artist’s highly subjective artwork combined his idiosyncratic Christian philosophy with his imaginative interpretive ability and the experiences that were familiar to him. The Berkshire village of Cookham - where Spencer was born and remained a resident for much of his life - had a profound effect, and represented a ‘Heaven on Earth’.

Yet from this apparently parochial disposition, Spencer’s most notable paintings indicate the biggest themes: religion, death, and love. The most significant engagement Spencer made in his paintings with religious subjects was with the Christian conception of the eschaton – of which the most prominent examples are his *Resurrection* paintings. These were produced in earnest throughout his career, and matured as a subject after his return from service in the First World War.

The significance of the *Resurrection* subject has never been given full expression. His monumental early *Resurrection* paintings from the 1920s clearly visualise the Last Day, illustrating life returning to the deceased. However subsequent examples frequently deviated into highly sexual artworks over the subsequent decade, with apparently little relation to the earlier works. This unconventional treatment contributed to an increasingly hostile reception to his later works – one that has yet to be overcome - and has problematized the reading of the religious content in his *Resurrection* paintings. Art

historical scholarship has accordingly focused on Spencer's biography and the sexual character of his artworks, with the theological dimension having largely been marginalised. This paper argues that the *Resurrection* subject, as conceptualised by Spencer, is a symbolic event rather than an allusion, and that it became the principal means for Spencer to articulate his desire for renewal and reconciliation after the tribulation of the Great War. By reconciling the *Resurrection* paintings and restoring the religious content, it is possible to revise the critical perspective rooted in the artist's apparent eccentricities, and unveil a distinct theological vision: Spencer's *Resurrection* paintings constitute a manifesto for realising the millennium.

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[Ronald E. Clements: A Prophet in Wartime. Reading Jeremiah in 1917](#)

### **Abstract**

Biblical scholarship in the nineteenth century embraced a fundamental shift in interpreting the message of the great prophets. The attempt to reconstruct accounts of 'The Life and Times' of each of the major prophets replaced the presentation of an extensive sequence of prophecies proclaiming the messianic hope which established the primary bond linking the Old with the New Testament. The emphasis on the revelation of God through individual prophets provided a demanding series of historical reconstructions relating individual prophecies to events and presenting the 'prophetic experience' as evidence of divine action comparable to the religious experience of persons in the modern world. Of all the prophets to whom books are ascribed the most distinctly individual is the prophet Jeremiah who was alienated from his fellow citizens in ancient Jerusalem and, in a critical time when his city was under siege, advocated surrender to the Babylonian enemy and suffered as a consequence.

This unpatriotic behaviour contrasts with the strongly nationalistic-patriotic outlook of the Hebrew Bible's historical and prophetic writings. During the First World War a comparable situation emerged in respect of eligible male citizens who refused military service and

were challenged, and frequently humiliated and punished, as a result. This antipathy was further strengthened after January 1916 when military service was made compulsory for all males aged between 18 and 41. The provision for exemption on grounds of conscience was harshly administered and those whose appeals for exemption were upheld became very unpopular with the general public. Two leading commentators on the biblical prophetic writings, A.S. Peake and Sir George Adam Smith disagreed over the relevance of Jeremiah's message to the contemporary situation. Smith felt strongly on this point and used his role as Moderator of the Scottish Free Church to publicise his view. The issue at the centre of the disagreement concerned the claim that an isolated and unpopular individual such as Jeremiah (and Conscientious Objectors) may nonetheless speak a prophetic truth which is unheeded by his hearers caught up in a wave of patriotic enthusiasm.

The claim that a truly prophetic message from God may be unpopular and may challenge contemporary beliefs echoes strongly in the prophecies ascribed to Jeremiah in the book that carries his name. This theme is explored very extensively in the exposition of that book published by John Skinner in 1922 with the title *Prophecy and Religion*. It portrays the prophet as a lonely, persecuted and grief-stricken individual. This book was based on lectures given in Edinburgh in 1920 when controversy about the necessity and wisdom of the war of 1914-18 was keenly felt and hostility to Conscientious Objectors was still paramount. Skinner was greatly influenced by his theologian colleague John Oman and the prevalent Scottish philosophy of personal idealism. When Skinner's views about the literary origin of the book were later rejected by R.P. Carroll this broad theological perspective was ignored. Skinner and Oman were not alone in opposing the war and extensive opposition was expressed to the way Old Testament themes were applied in support of it. Other Old Testament scholars, namely Adam C. Welch, Henry Wheeler Robinson and H.H. Rowley sought to redirect biblical theology to take fuller account of their wartime experience and to oppose popular patriotic-nationalist interpretations.

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[James Crossley: Rudolf Rocker, Yiddish Anarchism and the Fate of the Radical Bible: The Impact of World War I](#)

### **Abstract**

Prior to the outbreak of WWI, Yiddish anarchism was thriving in the East End of London in its so-called 'Golden Age'. Its most prominent figure was the 'Anarchist Rabbi', Rudolf Rocker (1873-1958), who also happened to be gentile, German and godless. Nevertheless, a distinctive contribution to the construction of the Bible and biblical language as politically radical was made by Rocker and his associates, often unconsciously and even in contradiction to their more overt views on religion. The momentum of this movement and Rocker's activism in London was brought to an abrupt halt at the outbreak of WWI, with Rocker incarcerated for being a German who was not supportive of the British (Rocker, in fact, was opposed to the War itself, as well as any form of nationalism).. This paper will analyse the ways in which Rocker remembered the Radical Bible in light of WWI and the ways in which his take on this interpretative intersected with his understandings of nationalism and the nation state in light of WWI. It will focus further on the fate of Rocker's Bible and how the significant amount of space given to WWI in his autobiographical account of the East End functions as a memorial for a past—and implicitly an understanding of the Bible—in danger of being forgotten. There will also be some discussion of how his views he represented became dispersed in English political discourse and an explanation of the ideological reasons for why this once popular figure was to soon be forgotten.

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[Paul Dafydd Jones: 'This Dark Road': Karl Barth's Sermons at the Outset of the Great War](#)

This paper reflects on sermons written and delivered by Karl Barth in Safenwil, Switzerland, between August and December 1914. Although Barth was soon critical of his sermons' focus on the Great War – in the 1930s, he thought that his preoccupation with “relevance” had

diverted attention away from the crucial task of exegesis – this paper argues that his preaching commends a rich and intriguing theological perspective. Barth is perched on the border of two worlds: on the one side, a brand of *Kulturprotestantismus*, much indebted to Wilhelm Herrmann and Swiss religious socialism; on the other, an emergent but under-determined dialectical theology, the potential of which will be realized in Barth's commentaries on *Romans* and his work in the 1920s and 1930s. As this curious and unstable location is crossed with the shock of the Great War, Barth is able to advance three claims of particular note. First, he treats the war as a disclosure of divine judgment against sin: a crushing indictment of the entire social, cultural, political, and theological project that comprises Europe in general, and bourgeois Christian life in particular. This judgment is a result of divine disengagement from the particulars of history: a function of God's "letting be," which allows for human sin to become its own punishment, which in turn clears space for new forms of Christian life. Second, Barth pairs God's permissive and judgmental letting be with a *human* form of letting be, which epitomizes the apt Christian response to God's judgment and God's sovereign governance of history. This letting be is a posture marked by "neutrality": a political term, central to Switzerland's political imaginary, that Barth repurposes and puts to use in the sphere of Christian life. Third and finally, Barth commends a Herrmann-ian view of the Kingdom, with the "life" of Jesus being a clear counterpoint to the death and destruction of war. But with a dialectical twist: Barth qualifies this account of the Kingdom with an eschatology, thereby destabilizing his theological perspective, and suggesting that the confidence of German Protestant "liberalism" must become a casualty of the Great War.

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[Jan Willem van Henten: Commemorating Soldiers Fallen in World War 1 as Martyrs](#)

#### **Abstract**

Arthur Winnington Ingram, bishop of London and chaplain of the London Rifle Brigade and the London Royal Naval Volunteers during World War 1 is very explicit in a speech in 1914 for the bereaved families of fallen soldiers by characterizing the victims as martyrs and linking them to Stephen, the proto-martyr of the Church (Acts 7): "You have lost your boys,

but what are they? Martyrs—martyrs as really as St Stephen was a martyr ...” This paper will explore the commemoration of soldiers who fell during the Great War as martyrs, indirectly or explicitly, as in Winnington Ingram’s speech. It will focus on the incorporation of biblical passages - reinterpreted through the lens of martyrdom - in such commemorations. The paper will offer a few case studies of these commemorations, including a stained glass window and a table with names of the fallen at the All Saints Church at Huntingdon (Cambridgeshire) and a small chapel and a mosaic at the German military cemeteries at Hooglede and Menen (Belgium).

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## Susannah Heschel: The Biblical Prophets in First World War German Scholarship

### **Abstract**

My paper will examine the role played by the biblical prophets in German scholarship during and just after WWI. The questions I am asking pertain to both New Testament scholarship and German-Jewish thought. In the debates by New Testament scholars over the relationship between Jesus and the Judaism of his day, I will examine the ways in which the prophets were transformed from their 19C role as mediating figures to their highly subordinate role with the rise of the History of Religions School. I will then turn to the invocation of the prophets during and after WWI by German-Jewish thinkers who reflect a debate over the role of Jews in relation to statehood. That debate involved Zionists who drew on the prophets to argue either for a cultural or political Zionism; Jewish thinkers who insisted on Jews as members of the German state; and Jewish thinkers who offered an entirely new way of understanding prophecy. My argument will be shaped by several external factors, including the understanding of prophecy developed by German scholars of Islam; the role of anti-Semitism in academic scholarship; and the impact of German nationalism and imperialism on both Christian and Jewish scholarship in Germany.

## Paul Michael Kurtz and Suzanne Marchand: Rudolf Otto, the Great War, and the Death of Theological Historicism

### **Abstract**

This paper explores the demise of historicism as a dominant force in theology through the lens of Rudolf Otto, examining the role the Great War placed in the process. In view of his own early struggle to defend his orthodox faith against liberal theology, it surveys his larger apologetic program of defending "religion" itself against the challenges posed by modernity, from materialist critique through historicism, which he undertook by seeking to establish a religious *a priori* and to escape the impasse of philological theology. Although Otto's program was considered quite – at times far too – progressive within the theological establishment at the turn of the 20th century, by the time the war concluded it suddenly seemed *passé*, a quaint undertaking unfit for modern times. But if his 1917 *Das Heilige* saw ambivalent reception at best within German intellectual circles, it achieved a massive,

almost instant international success beyond the academy. Rather than alter the direction of his program, the war evidently drove Otto himself to draw out the logical conclusions of his own mutation of liberal theology, on the one hand, extending his work to renewal of religious experience in Germany, to cultivation of interreligious dialogue, and to efforts in universal ethics, and it prepared the soil upon which the seeds of his project fell, on the other. In this way, the makings of Otto's conceptions before the war suddenly fit the *Zeitgeist* of the postwar period.

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[Tim Langille: Remembering the Maccabees: Jewish Soldiers, the Bible, and Maccabean Heroism during WWI](#)

### **Abstract**

This paper looks at biblical imagery invoked by Jews who fought on behalf of Britain and Germany during World War I (WWI). The image of the 'muscle Jew,' which emerged in nineteenth century Zionist thought, informed the identity of British Jewish soldiers during

WWI. The 'muscle Jew' interfaced with Anglo-Jewish patriotism in the twentieth century. Stories and figures from Jewish antiquity shaped the images of the 'muscle Jew' as British military Jews keyed into the collective memories of Joshua, David, and the Maccabees. For instance, Henry Patterson, the commander of the Zionist Mule Corps (ZMC), described the ZMC as follows: "the first purely Jewish unit to go into battle since the days of the Maccabees, when the Jews fought so heroically for their freedom against the legions of Rome." Moreover, Patterson memorialized the military prowess of Jews: "The soul-stirring on the battlefield of such heroes as Judas Maccabeus, Bar Kochba, and many other can never be forgotten." Here, one can observe the constellation of ancient and historical Jewish heroism, bravery, and patriotism.

German Jews also viewed themselves as the intersection of German courage and ancient Jewish heroism. In the process, Jewish journalists drew on biblical imagery to boost the morale of German-Jewish soldiers. For instance, an Austrian Jewish newspaper declared on Rosh Hashanah 1914 that WWI was a 'holy war' for Jews as it evoked the imagery of the *Akedah*: just as Abraham was called on to sacrifice his son Isaac, Austrian Jews should sacrifice their sons to the war effort. More central to the paper, German-Jewish soldiers described themselves as modern Maccabees. A eulogy for a Berlin rabbi who died in battle stated that "German courage and Maccabean heroism came together in his worldview." With collective memories of the Hebrew Bible and Maccabees, an interesting dynamic developed during WWI: Jewish soldiers on opposite sides of the conflict drew upon similar imagery regarding heroes and heroism. The references to the Maccabees defined and constructed the framework within which Jewish soldiers found inspiration and approached individual battles and the war effort.

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## Hilary Marlow: 'The Anguish of the Earth': Nature and Warfare in the Bible and WWI texts

### Abstract

Warfare and armed conflict inflict collateral damage not only on human populations and settlements but also on ecosystems and wildlife habitats, whether directly (e.g. scorched earth policy, chemical spraying) or indirectly (e.g. long-term pollution of land and water, deforestation). Such effects of war are graphically documented in the art and literature they generate, as the writings of the poets of the First World War demonstrate. But the impact of war on the land and its non-human inhabitants is also part of the Old Testament's record of the story of Israel. Prophets such as Jeremiah and Hosea lament the destruction of the land in this way and raise significant ethical and theological questions that still have resonance today. These include notions of causation and agency, the significance given to human populations, and the value of non-human nature. This paper will focus on the impact of warfare on the land in a specific Old Testament prophetic text, Jer 4:5-29. It will then bring this into dialogue with selected WWI poems, in order to explore further the relationship between warfare, ecology and theology.

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## Valérie Nicolet: WWI read as Salvation History: How France fits in God's Plan at the close of WWI

### Abstract

At the close of WWI, protestant intellectuals in France are reflecting on the challenges that the country and the Church are facing: how can one justify war when the Christian message is about peace and love for one's enemies? How does the reality of Christian people fighting

each other affect the truth of Christianity? How can peace with Germany be established, and relationships with German Christians be pursued? Because France was exalted during the war as the sole protector (with the allies) of freedom and human rights, this will influence the peace process also. Protestant pastors and theologians are re-reading the war and now the peace process as salvation history, with France having a unique role in contributing to the establishment of a new kingdom of God. For Wilfred Monod in particular, international collaboration through the *Société des Nations* and through ecumenism should bring the kingdom of God on earth. This paper will analyse the various ways in which the Bible, or Bible rhetorics, is used to usher what many protestant thinkers perceive as a new aeon. The Bible functions primarily as the provider of an apocalyptic scenario that allows to read the secular history of WWI as holy history, but it also offers proof texts to explain why one should not simply forgive Germany in the peace process, and to challenge radical pacifism. Finally, the paper will comment on a work of fiction, inspired by history and heavily marked by biblical narrative, André Chamson's *Roux le bandit*. This novel contrasts with the ways the Bible is used by most protestant intellectuals when it presents a character inspired by the prophets and who deserts to avoid breaking the commandment against killing.

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[Ian Randall: The Bible and the Fellowship of Reconciliation: from 1914 to the 1930s](#)

### **Abstract**

The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FoR), which was formed at a conference in Cambridge in 1914, became the largest Christian pacifist organisation in Britain. In this paper I look at the use of the Bible within FoR over time: in its early publications from 1915 onwards; in relation to conscientious objectors who came before military tribunals; in the years after the end of World War I and on into the 1930s.

I examine the pacifist response expressed in various FoR publications. The papers delivered in Cambridge, published as *Christ and Peace*, edited by Joan Mary Fry, a leading Quaker, show FoR engagement with the Bible. The New Testament was 'for ever bidding us to do for others what God has done for us'. The writers believed, however, that the Church was falling far short. One contributor, Maude Royden, observed that we 'read the Sermon on the Mount aloud in our churches, to remind us of the vision we have to strive after'. But,

she concluded, the church accepted the nation's reliance not on love, but on torpedoes and machine guns.

When conscription was introduced, tribunals had to listen to the objections of those who believed that war was contrary to the New Testament. I use material from the tribunals to explore how these encounters played out. I also explore who COs were supported by FoR, through activists such as Muriel Lester.

After the war concluded, pacifists sought to make their views more widely known. They were able to influence areas of church thinking, so that major documents such as that produced by the Commission on War of the 1924 Conference on Christian Politics, Economics and Citizenship (COPEC) gave a significant place to the pacifist position. I look at the contribution to thinking about pacifism and the Bible of writers such as Charles Raven, Regius Professor of Divinity in Cambridge.

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[David Shepherd: 'Blessed are the Peacemakers': the deployment of Jesus in American and German cinema during and after WWI](#)

## **Abstract**

While the advent of the Great War in Europe dramatically curtailed and re-oriented film production in Europe and sounded the death knell for the prestige previously enjoyed in America by European studios like Pathé Frères, the American industry took full advantage by continuing to produce large-scale productions, some of which sought to reflect and shape public sentiment regarding the war in Europe and American responses to it. Given the prominence of the life and passion of the Christ in the genesis and evolution of the cinema, it is not surprising that several of these productions deploy the figure of Jesus in seeking to articulate their own particular vision of a 'Christian' response to the war which was engulfing Europe and threatening to entangle America. This study considers several of these films including Ince's *Civilization* (1915-16) and Griffith's *Intolerance* (1916), a film produced by Griffith in part as a spectacular riposte to those who were critical of his earlier

blockbusting but highly controversial *Birth of a Nation* (1915)—of interest in its own right for its deployment of Christ imagery. These will be considered against the backdrop of the evolution of the social gospel in the Progressive Era with some attention also paid to the impact of the war on the depiction of Jesus in German cinema in the early Twenties.

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[Daniel Smith-Christopher: The Bible Read Red: Biblical Allusions in Weimar Socialist Rhetoric](#)

### **Abstract**

One of the most fascinating debates in the Weimar Republic years (1919-1933) involves the intricacies of debate within left-wing intellectual circles. Immediately following the war, a substantial German pacifist movement began with leaders such as Kurt Hiller, and others who eventually gathered around famous journals such as *Die Weltbühne*. Many of these socialist and pacifist intellectuals were Jewish, but there were also others (e.g. Vitus Heller, Catholic) who associated with explicitly faith-related, left-wing socialist and anti-war movements. While direct Biblical analysis is extremely rare, Biblical motifs, figures, and notions were frequently part of the rhetoric. In this essay, I will focus on a selection of writings from Hiller and also Gustav Landauer (associate of Martin Buber, a pacifist who was murdered in the suppression of the Munich Rebellion) to consider their uses of Biblical figures and notions as an aspect of their defenses of socialism and pacifism. Particularly interesting here is Hiller's forceful defense of what he called "Linkspazifismus" (1920 essay), an activist form of pacifism that vehemently denied a withdrawn position vis-à-vis political engagement - and his references to Jesus as part of his arguments. How do these arguments differ from late 20th Century Christian defenses of nonviolence in a prominently Biblical-based thesis such as John Howard Yoder?

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## Alana Vincent: Ecclesiasticus, War Graves, and the “secularization” of British Values

### Abstract

The First World War marked an important point in the long transition of Britain’s self-understanding from an empire to a single nation at the centre of a less tangible and considerably denser web of cultural and political influence. This transformation in civic imagination was reified in the design of the Imperial War Graves cemeteries, which attempted to both reflect the values of the Empire, but also to be inclusive of all the soldiers who had fought for that Empire, regardless of national origin or religious affiliation. The resulting design, which utilises a cross as its focal point and a quotation from the intertestamental apocrypha as its interpretative key, anticipates the secularised Christian “values” discourse that has come to define Commonwealth identity. This paper will attend particularly to the use of Biblical allusion in the development of this values-based identity discourse.

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