Faith, history and Martin Wight: the role of religion in the historical sociology of the English school of International Relations

SCOTT M. THOMAS*

The only method that can finally overcome the irrational and demonic forces of evil that have their fullest expression in Nazi Germany, is that of Calvary and the catacombs.[1]

[T]he level on which a Christian political philosophy has to be worked out is ultimately that, not of the White House and Downing Street, but of the catacombs.[2]

God … is just as much present in remorseless economic trends and in the oscillations of the balance of power as he is in the fall of a sparrow [Matt. 10:29–39]; and we see that he is indeed sovereign in history, that the [peripeties] of the historical process are properly understood as judgements, and that all history is ultimately Sacred history.[3]

Love in its highest manifestation is the richest, most persuasive, loveliest, nicest thing God has to offer … This love which comes of God through Jesus Christ is the only weapon we need … Men who see it will know from whence it comes, and they will give praise to God who can do such great things. They will know also why we are what we are and what are the essentials of Christianity.

Dick Sheppard, *The human parson* (1924).[4]

Martin Wight is considered to be one of the most important theorists of International Relations of the past generation, and is one of the founders of

* A draft of this article was presented at the Fourth Pan-European Conference on International Relations at the University of Kent, 8–10 September, 2001. I would like to thank the following people for their advice with this article: Fr. Serge Heckel (Orthodox), Mother Sarah (Orthodox), the staff at St Martin-in-the-Fields and Haileybury & Imperial Service College Archives, Bishop Rowan Williams, Mrs Lois MacKinnon, Lord Plant, staff at the BBC Written Archives Centre and the LSE Archives, Marjorie Reeves, Mrs Gabriele Wight, Caroline Soper, Andrew Wyatt, Nicholas Rengger, Oliver O'Donovan, David Yost, Vernon Hewitt, and Luke Bretherton.

[1] Application for conscientious objector (CO) status lodged by Martin Wight with the local tribunal, 11 May 1940, Hedley Bull, 'Introduction: Martin Wight and the study of international relations', Martin Wight, *Systems of states* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1977), p. 4.

[2] Letter from Martin Wight to J. H. Oldham, 27 September 1946. Oldham, was one of the main architects of the World Council of Churches. See Keith Clements, *Faith on the frontier: a life of J. H. Oldham* (Edinburgh and Geneva: T & T Clark and WCC Publications 1999).

[3] Martin Wight, 'God in history', a sermon preached in Great St Mary's Church, Cambridge, 4 February 1951 (unpublished MSS, LSE Archive).

[4] Carolyn Scott, *Dick Sheppard: a biography* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1977), pp. 11–12.

what is called the English school of International Relations. This term is used to describe a group of scholars, mainly historians, philosophers, theologians and former diplomatic practitioners, who, in the late 1950s, gathered together to form the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics. Their goal was to investigate fundamental questions of international theory.[5] Wight is primarily responsible for one of the most distinctive features of the English school: the historical sociology of different states-systems showing the importance of world history for the study of international relations.

Because of Wight's influence, and to some extent that of the historian Herbert Butterfield and the theologian and philosopher Donald MacKinnon, the approach of the English school was from the beginning concerned about the role of different religions, cultures and civilizations in international society. Unfortunately, Wight's main contribution to the English school, i.e. his willingness to take religious doctrines, cultures and civilizations seriously by focusing on their role in different historic states-systems, has been marginalized in the English school's research programme even as his comparative approach to states-systems in world history has been widely adopted.

One of the most recent, ambitious, and in many ways path-breaking studies of international systems, has accepted the kind of naturalistic and evolutionary approach to religion Wight deplored because it examined religion as a epi-phenomenon of other social, technological and economic forces in world history.[6] This is unfortunate because even though there is a renewed interest in the English school's approach to culture and identity, it is increasingly apparent it is the kind of questions Wight asked about religion, culture and identity that have become some of the most important ones in the study of international relations. Thus, this article begins to examine the role of religion in Wight's international theory, but this can not be separated from why he considered religion to be an important part of the study of history and of international relations.

Martin Wight was a devout Anglican throughout his life. It is sometimes argued that his deeply held religious beliefs sat uneasily alongside his work on international theory, and that apart from his essential pessimism and opposition to the doctrine of progress there was little direct relationship between his personal religious beliefs and his ideas about international relations.[7] This is not the case, and this article also begins a examination of the way Wight's personal faith—his sense of calling or vocation as a teacher, scholar, and as a Christian

[5] Tim Dunne, *Inventing international society: a history of the English school* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998); B. A. Roberson, ed., *International society and the development of international relations theory* (London: Pinter, 1998).

[6] Barry Buzan and Richard Little, *International systems in world history: remaking the study of International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000). Similarly, in a review of Andrew Linklater's important book, *The transformation of political community* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), Jean Bethke Elshtain criticizes him for ignoring the importance of communities grounded in the main world religions. See Jean Bethke Elshtain, 'Really existing communities', *Review of International Studies* 25: 1, 1999, pp. 141–6.

[7] Dunne, *Inventing international society*, p. 47, and Bull, 'Introduction: Martin Wight and the study of international relations', pp. 11–14.

intellectual—influenced his contribution to the study of international relations.[8] When these aspects of Wight's faith and life are brought together there is both a better sense of continuity between his early life as a Christian pacifist, and his later years as a teacher and scholar of international relations, and a better recognition of what his distinctive approach to religion brought to the study of international relations.

There is often a reticence to examine the personal beliefs, particularly the religious beliefs, of scholars because it can cross uncomfortably the boundaries of private and public life. The reasons why religion makes crossing this boundary uncomfortable should be properly understood.[9] One reason is a personal reticence, which respects the disposition of a person to discuss these matters while they were alive. Martin Wight was most decidedly not the kind of person to disclose his personal religious practices, or understanding of religious matters to others, although he did discuss them among friends, and his defence of a Christian worldview is a matter of public record.[10]

A less persuasive reason is an ideological reticence to discuss the religious beliefs of scholars or public officials because of assumptions about secularization theory, i.e. 'modern' assumptions about the marginal role of religion in personal life, public life, or in society. This kind of reticence may be giving way to a more accurate, 'post-modern' recognition, of the role personal faith has played both in the private life and in the public life of people involved in history and international relations.[11]

Faith and life: finding an alternative intellectual tradition

Martin Wight was born in 1913 and was educated at Hertford College, Oxford where he obtained a first in Modern History on the advice of Herbert Butterfield. He was on the staff of the Royal Institute of International Affairs (Chatham House) from 1936 to 1938, and from 1938 to 1941 he was a schoolmaster at Haileybury, Hertfordshire. From 1941 to 1946 he was on the staff at Nuffield College, Oxford. He was for a short time also the diplomatic and United Nations correspondent for *The Observer* (1946–7) before returning to Chatham House (1946–9). He was appointed a Reader in International Relations at the London School of Economics from 1946 to 1961, where he delivered his famous lectures on International Theory,[12] and then became the first Dean of the School of European Studies at the University of Sussex. He died suddenly in 1972.

[8] The idea that Wight understood his life as one with a personal calling or vocation (rather than just a career) as a teacher, scholar, and as a Christian and a public intellectual with a deep sense of moral and social responsibility, is clear from two remarkable letters from Harry Pitt, a former student of his at Haileybury, to Hedley Bull (2 April 1974, 4 May 1974, LSE Archive).

[9] Martin E. Marty, 'Explaining fundamentalism', *The chronicle of higher education*, 28 October 1992, p. A56.

[10] Letter from Mrs Gabriele Wight to the author, August 2001.

[11] Mary Ann Glendon, *A world made new: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (New York: Random House, 2001); Peter Berger, ed., *The impact of religious conviction on the politics of the twenty-first century* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999).

[12] Martin Wight, *International theory: the three traditions* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991).

Wight was sometimes considered to be 'something of an odd man out both as an historian and as a student of international relations'. At time when 'social scientific' and 'positivistic' methods were increasingly fashionable, particularly in the United States, the main questions that concerned him most were ethical and theological, and he saw the study of history and of international relations as one of the most important ways these kinds of questions could be examined.[13]

Wight was not as isolated a figure as he is sometimes portrayed in the English school. Roger Epp has gone some way in indicating how 'Wight's thought was worked out in the larger, intersecting debates about human history, war and peace, that engaged historians, philosophers, theologians, and others before international relations became the domain of specialists in fragmented universities'.[14] What he has not indicated is the extent to which these debates, and many of the individuals involved in them, were often part of larger social and theological groups and movements going back to the 1930s, which set the stage for the revival of English Christianity during the 1950s, when Wight was most influential as a teacher, scholar and a public, as well as a Christian, intellectual, although this term has to be handled carefully.[15]

This article attempts to show how Wight was knowledgeable about, although not directly a part of, a tradition in Britain of 'Christian thinking' about society and politics going back to the interwar period, one that was deeply concerned about the possibility of war and the future of Western civilization. These thinkers formed a tradition, not as Alasdair MacIntyre, or even Wight himself used this term, but only in the loose sense of forming a community of discourse because they all agreed it was important for Christians and the Christian churches to be engaged with the pressing issues of culture, society, and politics.[16]

This Christian social tradition contributed to an intellectual revival of Christianity during the 1950s. Although it did not bring to an end the convinced

[13] Bull, 'Introduction: Martin Wight and the study of international relations', p. 14.

[14] Roger Epp, 'Martin Wight: international relations as realm of persuasion', in Francis A. Beer and Robert Hariman, eds, *Post-realism: the rhetorical turn in international relations* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1996), pp. 122–3.

[15] Apparently Wight, on occasion, described himself as a Christian intellectual, and used this kind of language. He wrote an unpublished article entitled 'Jacques Ellul and the predicament of the Christian intellectual' after reading one of Ellul's books *Présence au monde moderne* (MSS, 24 April 1953, LSE Archive). Ellul, was a French, Christian and sociologist at the University of Bordeaux, who wrote many widely regarded books on sociology as well as books on ethics, theology, and commentaries on books of the Bible. See David W. Gill, *The Word of God in the ethics of Jacques Ellul* (Metuchen, N.J and London, 1984).

[16] It is a matter of public record that the same names keep reappearing in Wight's correspondence, at the conferences he spoke at and the ones he attended, and in the footnotes of his published and unpublished writings: Katherine Bliss, Herbert Butterfield, Donald MacKinnon, J. H. Oldham, Christopher Dawson, C. H. Dodd, T. S. Eliot, H. A. Hodges, Reinhold Niebuhr, O.C. Quick, Marjorie Reeves, Arnold Toynbee, R. H. Tawney, A. R. Vidler, and Sir Alfred Zimmern. Most, although not all, of these people were associated with *The Christian News-Letter*, edited by J. H. Oldham, and published for the Council of the Churches on the Christian Faith and the Common Life (London). The first issue appeared on 18 October 1939, less than six weeks after Britain declared war on Germany, and the last in 1948. Marjorie Reeves, ed., *Christian thinking and social order: conviction politics from the 1930s to the present day* (London and New York: Cassell, 1999). During the early 1950s Marjorie Reeves and Martin Wight led a Christianity and History Reading Group in Oxford.

secularism of a great part of the intellectual elite, who took for granted the disappearance of religion as a serious part of life,[17] it did provide a flourishing alternative intellectual and scholarly tradition.[18]

> The odd thing about the 1950s is the cohabiting of these two intellectual in-worlds, the religious and the agnostic, each self-assured, each apparently thriving, each rather sneeringly dismissive of the other. What we need to note here are a number of frontier areas, previously accepted territory of the one world, but whose allegiance was now again open to question.[19]

Some of the most important scholars of Wight's work, such as Bull, Porter and Dunne, have either not identified the people who contributed to this alternative tradition, or they have discounted its importance altogether, and Wight's familiarity with it. The study of history was one of the areas Hastings indicated was again open to question between the religious and agnostic intellectual worlds, and this was helped by the institutional history of theology at British universities (compared to continental universities where systematic theology dominated the study of theology). This meant that many leading theologians in Britain were classicists before they turned to theology. In other words, there was recognition that Christianity was rooted in the ordinary realm of investigation open to the technical student of history.[20]

What Wight's correspondence, book reviews and articles show is how he was engaged with this alternative tradition, and the people involved with it, as he gained in maturity and stature as a researcher at Chatham House, and then as a lecturer at the LSE, even as this tradition became marginalized with the growing confidence of the champions of secularism and liberal modernity. Thus, Wight, Butterfield and MacKinnon, were not odd men out, or marginal thinkers, as they are sometimes portrayed in the English school, but were aware of, and engaged with, the dominant theological trends of the day, and with a Christian

[17] Adrian Hastings argues that what he calls the 'intellectual secularism of the 1950s' can be illustrated with the fiction of Anthony Powell and C. P. Snow, the history of Hugh Trevor-Roper, A. J. P. Taylor, and A. L. Rowse, and the philosophy of A. J. Ayer and Gilbert Ryle. Indeed, Hastings says in the Preface to the first edition of *A history of English Christianity, 1920–1985* (1986), a textbook which has subsequently become a classic in contemporary church history, that he wrote the book to overcome 'the long-standing conspiracy to over-secularize English history, the public character and sources of inspiration of society, to draw a veil of silence over the Church', which he said was evident in A. J. P. Taylor's *English history, 1914–1945* (1967). His book was offered as 'a temperate piece of revisionism'. Hastings, *A history of English Christianity,* pp. 11, 491–504. Many readers will recognize Adrian Hastings as one of the most intelligent and thoughtful theologians of his generation in Britain, a committed Africanist, with a prophetic commitment to social justice, who sadly died as this article was being written. See the obituary by Paul Gifford, 'Adrian Hastings (1929–2001) Radical Catholic theologian who fought colonialism and oppression from Africa to the Balkans', *The Guardian*, 15 June 2001.

[18] C. H. Dodd, Herbert Butterfield, David Knowles, Richard Southern, and a number of other scholars constituted in the postwar years a formidable learned school of history in close touch with continental scholars like the French medievalist, Etienne Gilson, and who combined a commitment to religious faith with the requirements of being a technical historian. See Adrian Hastings, *A history of English Christianity, 1920–1985* (London: Collins, 1986), pp. 491–504.

[19] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, p. 496.

[20] S.W. Sykes, 'Theology through history', in David F. Ford, ed., *The modern theologians: an introduction to Christianity in the twentieth century* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997), pp. 229–51.

social tradition that has almost faded from memory. Recent debates and concerns on religion in British public life, and concerns about the global resurgence of religion, culture, and identity in international relations have contributed to a greater awareness of this Christian social tradition, which was not apparent at the time Wight's posthumous writings were first published, and Hedley Bull and other scholars started to comment on them.[21]

Christian faith and intellectual convictions

Martin Wight's friends and colleagues testify to the strength of his Christian faith, and his belief, as Arnold Toynbee described it, in the creeds of 'orthodox Christianity'.[22] 'His religion was a reflection of his personality, and embraced the whole of his attitude to life'.[23] Wight was 'rock-like' in his fundamental beliefs,[24] but this did not mean he had a simplistic faith; it was, by all accounts, an intellectually demanding one. It was, it would seem, a faith as Anselm had defined theology, a faith seeking understanding. 'His faith', Harry Pitt recalled from his days as a student at Haileybury, 'was itself bolstered by his intellectual convictions'.[25]

Wight was an ardent historian who was steeped in theology as well as in political thought.[26] He took easily to theological reading, and his theological writings indicate that he was aware of the main theological debates of his day. Wight simply did not believe a century or more of critical and historical study of the New Testament had jeopardized the doctrines of orthodox Christianity.[27] He read widely among Christian theologians, philosophers and historians, including Charles Gore, J. H. Newman, Jacques Maritain, N. Berdyaev, Georges Bernanos, Christopher Dawson, Jean Danielou, C. H. Dodd, Jacques Ellul, Oscar Cullman, Vladimir Soloviev and Georges Florovsky, as well as Reinhold Niebuhr and Herbert Butterfield. As it will be explained below, some of these scholars were at the forefront of 'Barthian' theology and the biblical theology movement, and Wight's writings indicate that he shared some of their views. Many of these people, and others mentioned in this article, were concerned about Christian

[21] Raymond Plant, *Politics, theology and history* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Scott M. Thomas, 'The global resurgence of religion and the study of world politics', *Millennium* 24: 2, 1995, pp. 289–99; John L. Esposito and Michael Watson, eds, *Religion and global order* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2000); K. R. Dark, ed., *Religion and international relations* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001).

[22] Letter from Arnold Toynbee to Hedley Bull, 7 February, 1974.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Letter from Harry Pitt to Hedley Bull, 2 April 1974.

[25] Ibid. Harry Pitt (1923–2000) was a former pupil of Wight's at Haileybury, and became a life-long friend. Wight, as a teacher at Haileybury, participated in various debates, including many on foreign affairs, sponsored by the College's student-run Literary and Debating Society, and Harry Pitt was the Hon. Recorder. Pitt became tutor in Modern History at Worcester College, Oxford and, like Wight, did not publish very much during his life. Alan Bullock's comment to one of Pitt's frustrated publishers, 'You don't understand Stuart, Harry's books are his pupils', could be said of Jack Spence, Brian Porter, and an entire generation of IR scholars in Britain who were trained by Wight. *Oxford: journal of the Oxford Society* LII: 2 November 2000, pp. 18–22.

[26] C. W. Manning, Obituary for Martin Wight, *The Times*, 21 July 1972.

[27] 'Encounters of belief', No. 8, BBC Home Service, 24 March 1953, p. 2.

missions, the ecumenical movement, and were 'pan-European' in outlook.[28] It was, perhaps, Wight's wide reading of history and theology, and his friends and colleagues in the ecumenical movement, that reinforced his 'pan-European' perspective, and his understanding of the importance of Christianity for European civilization, European international society, and for European unity.[29]

There was no contradiction between Wight's religious convictions and his passionate love of history. Harry Pitt wrote, in contrast to what some people might want to argue, that Wight's firm faith contributed to both his intellectual freedom and his integrity as a historian and as a scholar of international relations. 'You could argue around almost anything with him', Pitt recalled, 'and he loved exploring new ideas, but if you got on to religion, then you were quickly talking theology: the role of the prophets, the meaning of the incarnation, the resurrection, or whatever.'[30] According to Pitt, Wight 'really was a believer. And it was that, above all, that gave him his integrity—he always talked from a point of reference'.[31]

Wight's early religious faith and his time as an undergraduate at Hertford College, Oxford (1932–5) is not investigated in this article. However, he was at Oxford at a particularly important time in the religious history of England. The year before Wight arrived, William Temple's University Mission took place at St Mary's Church, and it was at that university mission where the revival of Anglicanism during the 1930s first fully surfaced.[32]

Wight was a baptized Anglican from his youth, and according to Pitt, was to some degree attracted to the sacramentalism of Anglo-Catholicism within the Church of England. This refers to the 'catholicity' of the Anglican Church, i.e. to a non-Roman 'catholicism' emphasizing the continuity of links with the early church expressed in the early creeds and 'ecumenical' councils of Christendom. Wight seems to have been familiar with the openness, and distinctive social tradition, which at its best characterized this tradition; but Wight knew, and was concerned enough, to criticize it during the early pacifist period of his life.

Dick Sheppard: from 'Christian pacifism' to *Power politics*

Shortly after graduating from Oxford, when Wight was still in his early twenties, he became a friend of the Revd Dick Sheppard. Although Hedley Bull mentions Sheppard in his account of Wight's life, he does not examine the impact he had

[28] Father Sergei Hackel, a Russian Orthodox priest, and a friend of Martin Wight's when he was a Reader in Russian Studies in the School of European Studies at the University of Sussex, has emphasized to me this 'pan-European' aspect of Wight's reading and thought. See also Martin Wight, 'Christianity in a world perspective', *International Review of Missions*, October 1949, pp. 488–90.

[29] Stephen Neill, it should be pointed out for IR scholars, begins his masterly study of the history of the interpretation of the New Testament with the sentence, 'Britain has always found it difficult to decide whether it is a part of Europe or not'. See Stephen Neill and Tom Wright, *The interpretation of the New Testament, 1861–1986* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 1.

[30] Letter from Harry Pitt to Hedley Bull, 2 April 1974.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, pp. 250–61.

on the young Wight. Sheppard, who had been the charismatic vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, London, was now a canon at St Paul's Cathedral. He had a remarkable influence on Wight's faith and on his commitment to pacifism. Sheppard was at least as important an influence in Wight's life, as Arnold Toynbee subsequently became after Wight started to work at Chatham House where Toynbee was Director of Studies.[33] By the time Wight met Sheppard he had resigned from St Martin's because of ill health (1926) and had been Dean of Canterbury Cathedral (1929). He became canon of St Paul's Cathedral (1931) after another breakdown in his health. Sheppard's experience of St Paul's, and the dilemmas of the institutional church, drove him into deep despair about the condition of the church in Britain.

During Sheppard's time as canon of St Paul's he founded the Peace Pledge Union (PPU), and became the best known spokesman for pacifism in Britain.[34] C. H. Dodd, the New Testament scholar, and the philosopher Donald MacKinnon were two of the PPU's original signatories. Wight got to know Sheppard during the summer of 1936, after his year as a researcher at Nuffield College, Oxford and shortly before his first appointment to Chatham House. This was the time he joined the PPU. It was a time of rising pacifist politics as the international situation became darker by the day. Germany had annexed Austria in March, and Sheppard formed the PPU two months later (May), and that summer (July) the Spanish Civil War began. It was during this heady summer that Wight 'got to know [Sheppard], and [he] learned a great deal from him'. Wight, for a period, managed Sheppard's 'Peace Bookshop', a pacifist propaganda bookstore and meeting hall run as an auxiliary to the PPU, in Ludgate Hill, London.[35] It was also at this time that Wight published his first article, 'Christian pacifism', in *Theology*, the respected journal of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge (SPCK). The article had 'all the brash certainty of a young man',[36] and Mrs Wight has emphasized to many scholars that he did not include it in his list of publications later on.

Wight and Sheppard, by all accounts, had a close but short friendship since Sheppard died at the end of the following year. Wight learned a lot at a deep level from his friendship with Dick Sheppard.[37] Although it may not be possible to determine exactly what Wight gained from him, what is clearer now is the kind of person Sheppard was, and the nature of pacifist politics at the time that Wight was influenced by him. This is not unimportant because it enabled him to write about pacifism in an almost biographical way in *International theory: the three traditions*.

[33] Letter from D. M. MacKinnon to Hedley Bull, 19 April 1974.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Letter from D. M. MacKinnon to Hedley Bull, 9 April 1974; the Peace Bookshop appears to be more than a little shop crammed with books; it consisted of two floors of a Ludgate Hill building. One was used for the display and sale of books, pamphlets, magazines and cartoons; in the other room lunch-hour meetings, discussions and debates were held. R. Ellis Roberts, *H. R. L. Sheppard: life and letters* (London: John Murray, 1942), p. 283.
[36] Letter from Harry Pitt to Hedley Bull, 4 May 1974.
[37] Letter from D. M. MacKinnon to Hedley Bull, 19 April 1974.

Many things drew Martin Wight to Dick Sheppard, and among them was the fact they both were life-long sufferers from asthma.[38] What has to be acknowledged more fully than in Bull's accounts is the surprising impact of Sheppard's life and witness at the time Wight was a young man. The kind of brash certainty, the impatience with religious institutions, and the opposition to imperialism Wight expresses in his article, 'Christian pacifism', is consistent with Sheppard's pacifist witness, and his own frustrations with the institutional church, which he believed misunderstood true Christianity. Dick Sheppard, prior to his public commitment to pacifism, gained a charismatic reputation, first at Oxford House, Bethnal Green, in the East End of London,[39] and then as a famous vicar of St Martin-in-the-Fields, not only for working with young people but for identifying with the poor, the marginalized, and those excluded from society.[40] He did this in a way that stirred the young people he worked with at Oxford House to both a deeper personal faith and a deeper engagement with the social dimensions of the gospel in society and in the world.[41] It was from St Martin's, with Sheppard's daring, and because of his delight in offending the established church, that the BBC broadcast the very first complete religious service from a church.[42]

Donald MacKinnon recalls how Wight, in a passionate and 'remarkable' letter he wrote to him at the time of Sheppard's death, gave an account of his lying in state at St Martin's before being taken to St Paul's Cathedral.[43] Dick Sheppard's funeral was one of the great occasions of English church life during the interwar years, and was comparable to the funeral of King George V (January 1936). It seems, in some ways, reminiscent of the funeral for Diana, Princess of Wales. 'For two days and nights', Wilkinson says, 'a hundred thousand people, including street-cleaners, taxi-drivers, waitresses, charwomen and tramps, queued for sometimes an hour or more to file past the coffin in St Martin's', and crowds continued to line the Embankment and Ludgate Hill as the coffin was taken in procession to St Paul's Cathedral.[44]

[38] Ibid.

[39] In the early 1900s it was the done thing for new graduates of the upper and upper-middle classes, particularly those under the influence of Charles Gore, Arnold Toynbee, and Scott Holland, and the Bishop of London, Arthur Winnington-Ingram, to live for a while in different university settlements in the poor districts of London. Roberts, *H R. L. Sheppard*, pp. 25–33, 34, 44, 53–62.

[40] Alan Wilkinson, *Dissent or conform? War, peace and the English Churches, 1900–1945* (London: SCM Press, 1986), p. 113.

[41] The parish magazine, the *St Martin's Review*, reminded its parishioners that the parish of St Martin's was not an independent and self-sufficient entity, but existed in the diocese; in turn the diocese existed in the province and the province in the catholic Church, and it was the business of the Church to confront and convert the world. How could this be done unless Church people understood the world of thought and action in which they lived? At its height, the average circulation was between 6, 000 and 10, 000 copies a month, meaning, at a low average, about 50, 000 readers a month, making it one of the publications with the largest circulation at the time. Roberts, *H. R. L. Sheppard*, pp. 107–8, Scott, *Dick Sheppard*, pp. 123–8.

[42] Scott, *Dick Sheppard*, pp. 123–39.

[43] Letter from Donald MacKinnon to Hedley Bull, 19 April 1974. I have not been able to locate this letter, and Mrs Lois MacKinnon, after examining her late husband's correspondence, tells me she doubts whether it is still existant.

[44] Wilkinson, *Dissent or conform?*, pp. 117–18.

The dark valley of the 1930s[45]

The speculation about the causes of Martin Wight's turn towards pacifism in his youth occurred only after his death.[46] According to MacKinnon, Wight became a pacifist as a result of his disillusionment with the League of Nations. At Oxford he had been a passionate believer in the League as it was later interpreted in Viscount Cecil's *A great experiment* (1941). It was, among other things, the collapse of this hope, as the Abyssinian crisis unfolded with Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia, that apparently drove Wight into pacifism, and this was the time he got to know Dick Sheppard.[47]

Various scholars have tried to understand whether Wight's pacifism was 'doctrinal', the result of certain theological commitments, or more 'political', simply the result of seeing the failure of 'idealist internationalism', i.e. a certain type of international politics based on a desire for peace, and a faith in public opinion, international law, and international institutions.[48] A number of other considerations should be kept in mind when Wight's pacifism is examined. The first one is that his turn towards pacifism was not an isolated, personal event, but should be interpreted as part of the heady political—and religious— context of the 1930s. Wight was not alone in his dilemmas of how to reconcile faith and life, and peace and war. What the debate at Haileybury, 'War and the Christian conscience', which took place a few months after his tribunal as a conscientious objector (CO), makes clear is that what he went through was interpreted as a moment of 'kairos', a moment of grace and opportunity (Luke 19:44), a moment of truth that was both historical and eschatological, which confronted his entire generation; and he, and many Christians like him, clearly understood the choices before them in this way.[49]

At a 'secular' level Wight's faith and life, and the choices he made should be seen as part of the struggles of a entire generation which considered the 1930s to be a fundamental 'spiritual' crisis for liberalism and for Western civilization. As Karl Mannheim pointed out in a famous essay, a generation consists of people of the same age confronted with some powerful historic event. Although not all members of a generation may see the event in the same way, what makes a cohort of people into a generation is their connection to this event and the inevitable choices which confront all of them.[50]

Wight's turn towards pacifism should be seen, at least among thoughtful Christians at the time, as part of a trend in British society during the interwar

[45] Piers Brendon, *The dark valley: a panorama of the 1930s* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2000).
[46] Letter from Gabriele Wight to the author, August 2001.
[47] Letter from D. M. MacKinnon to Hedley Bull, 5 February 1974.
[48] Letter from Brian Porter to Hedley Bull, 22 April 1974; William C. Olson and A. J. R. Groom, *International relations then and now: origins and trends in interpretation* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1991), pp. 42–5, 73–4, 97; Michael Joseph Smith, 'Liberalism and international reform', Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel, eds, *Traditions of international ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 201–24.
[49] 'War and the Christian conscience', *The Haileyburian* (Haileybury, Hertford), 27 July 1940, pp. 203–7.
[50] Karl Mannheim, 'The problem of generations' (1928), *Essays on the sociology of knowledge*, edited by Paul Kecskemeti (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1952), pp. 276–322.

years. At this point Wight's story seems to be a very English one. For Christians in Britain during the 1930s pacifism was a more appealing option than either fascism or communism. 'As the international outlook grew even gloomier the greatest wave of pacifism Britain has experienced spread across the country', and Wight's conversion to pacifism can be interpreted as a part of this wave.[51] Acknowledging this does not diminish the level of 'great moral anguish' (Bull) Wight felt over the failure of the League, nor his belief that the struggle against Nazi Germany was a just one, even though he made what Epp has called a 'vocational' commitment to pacifism, which is examined later in this article. What it does do is properly to place the moral and religious struggles of an intelligent, thoughtful young man in the context of the dark valley of the 1930s.

The 1930s are sometimes remembered, at least in Britain, as the 'Red Decade', a time of the Left Book Club and a public passion for socialism among the middle classes.[52] Another part of the story was an 'edging back into religious faith of a fair section of the intellectual elite in the course of the 1930s'.[53] The agony of the times contributed to the spiritual collapse of 'English left-wing secularism', and this was widely represented by a number of notable conversions to Christianity. For many, the influence of Dick Sheppard, the ethos of the peace movement, and Sheppard's peace pledge became the main channel of religious rediscovery.[54]

The high-profile conversions to Christianity in these years had little ecclesiastical significance, in the sense of swelling the size of weekly congregations, but they had greater religious and cultural significance. They witnessed to the collective breakdown of the 'agnostic consensus of the enlightened, and to the growing sense that a belief in supernatural religion really was an intellectual option for modern man'.[55] The reason was not only the failure of the main secular alternatives—democracy, fascism, and communism—in the 1930s. It was also the result of 'a high and distinctively powerful Christian culture, centering upon a revived theology', which was clearly thriving in England, in France, and among Russian Orthodox exiles in England during the 1930s.[56]

[51] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, p. 330.

[52] Paul Laity, ed., *Left Book Club Anthology* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2001).

[53] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, p. 290.

[54] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, pp. 290–91. It was the English writer and editor, Charles Williams, who published the new edition of the poetry of the Victorian Jesuit, Gerard Manley Hopkins (in 1930), who contributed to the (re)conversion to Christianity of W. H. Auden, the central figure of the literary left in the 1930s. If the idea that the West was in a deep spiritual crisis led some people to embrace socialism or Christianity, it also led a number of others, including E. M. Forster (who at the time Wight considered to be the greatest living English novelist), William Butler Yeats, Aldous Huxley, and Auden's close friend, Christopher Isherwood, to look East as a way of revitalizing the West through an alternative modernity. See Jeffery Paine, *Father India: how encounters with an ancient culture transformed the modern West* (London: HarperCollins Academic, 1998). A part of the interest in the East at this time was, of course, the power of Gandhi's non-violent opposition to British imperialism, and this also contributed to an interest in pacifism, as Wight indicated in his 'Christian pacifism' article.

[55] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, p. 291.

[56] This group, who comprised a broad intellectual and spiritual movement in European Catholicism and Christianity, included Christian dramatists and novelists such as François Mauriac, Paul Claudel and Georges Bernanos; philosophers such as Jacques Maritain, Etienne Gilson and Emmanuel Mounier; theologians such as Yves Congar, as well as Russian Orthodox exiles such as Nikolai Berdyaev and

Neither the accounts other scholars have given of Wight's pacifism, sensitive as many of them are, nor Hedley Bull's account of Wight's remarkable influence on students at Haileybury (1938–1941) acknowledge these cultural trends in England at this time. The way Martin Wight taught history at Haileybury,[57] and his later published, and unpublished, writings indicate how knowledgeable he was about the ideas, books, and personalities associated with this revival of Christianity. It may be that the deep roots of his remarkably strong Christian faith, which bore such fruit while he was at the LSE, go back at least as far as the soil of this very English revival of Christianity during the 1930s.

Martin Wight and Dick Sheppard's pacifism

The second consideration that needs to be explained is Wight's turn towards pacifism as an Anglican rather than as a Christian in the Nonconformist or Free Church tradition. This is an area in which Sheppard, as an Anglican, may have influenced him, and this may provide part of the answer to the 'doctrinal–political' conundrum about his conversion to pacifism.

Pacifism hardly existed in England before the First World War outside the restricted circles of the Quakers. The pacifism that emerged with the First World War was very much, with the lay Anglican exceptions of Sheppard's later associates, Maude Royden and George Landsbury, a Quaker and Nonconformist affair.[58] In the aftermath of the First World War almost everyone in Britain was committed to the cause of peace, and the likelihood of another war almost receded into the realms of absurdity. The term 'pacifism' has been coined to describe what is called 'idealist internationalism' in international relations. It is the deep desire for peace, and the pragmatic commitment to peace by all reasonable people, who regarded the prevention of war as an overriding political

---

Dmitri Merejworski. See Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, pp. 291–2. These writers, many of whom were part of the 'French Catholic renaissance', were being translated into English and published by the English Catholic publisher Sheed & Ward and others in the 1930s. Since the mid-1990s many of their works have been republished as a series, 'Ressourcement, retrieval and renewal in Catholic thought', by William B. Eerdmans, a leading American evangelical publishing company. This is indicative of the growing dialogue between Catholics and evangelicals in the United States as part of what may be a general intellectual and religious renewal in the country. See Alan Wolfe, 'The opening of the evangelical mind', *Atlantic Monthly,* October 2000, pp. 55–76.

[57] Harry Pitt recalls that as a student at Haileybury, 'The search for the antichrist [in different periods of history] once occupied us for a long time: also, to see whether the 'mark of the beast' [Rev. 12–13] was Peter the Great, or Napoleon, or the medieval emperors' … [Dmitri] Merejworski's [1865–1941] novels, and the writings of [Vladimir] Soloviev [1853–1900] influenced Martin Wight strongly for a while, and he retained his interest in the antichrist'. Letter from Harry Pitt to Hedley Bull, 2 April 1974. Merejworski's famous trilogy, 'Christ and antichrist', included themes common to Wight's writings on the antichrist, *The death of the Gods: Julian the Apostate* (1895), *The Gods resurrected: Leonardo da Vinci* (1901), and *Antichrist: Peter and Alexis* (1905). Hedley Bull, Brian Porter and other scholars, by linking the doctrine of antichrist to Wight's pessimism, and 'providentialist' theory of history, have missed Wight's understanding of this doctrine, developed in lengthy unpublished manuscripts, as part of a political and cultural criticism of Western modernity. They can be compared to similar themes in Oliver O'Donovan, *The desire of the nations: rediscovering the roots of political theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[58] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, p. 300.

objective. War was considered to be an irrational, inhumane way of solving international disputes. Political efforts focused on arbitration, collective security and the League of Nations, and were rooted in the liberal belief in a latent harmony of interests among nations that could come about through international institutions.[59]

'Pacifism', in contrast, was considered to be a moral, absolutist position, and a perfectionist faith, among those who believed that war was always morally wrong. Christian pacifists refused to participate in war even though they recognized it was, perhaps, impossible to translate their position into a practical, political programme to prevent, limit, or end war. It was this 'absolutist pacifism' which gained more coherent form when Sheppard's Peace Pledge Union was formed.[60]

What scholars have not considered as part of the 'doctrinal–political' conundrum over Wight's pacifism is how Sheppard's PPU was trying to hold together two quite different pacifist constituencies, that fell out with each other once the reality of Nazism became apparent, and war finally started. The PPU's first constituency was the type of pacifism Wight examined in *International theory*. It was the older pacifist tradition of personal conscientious objection, found among Quakers and other Nonconformist churches. It was in some sense 'apolitical', and sectarian in tendency since its participants refused to take part in war whatever the circumstances, and whatever the consequences, because being faithful to the (peaceful) witness (or 'testimony', as the Quakers would say) of Christ's life was more important than being successful in preventing war. This pacifist tradition, of course, was incompatible with an Anglicanism that formed the established church.[61]

The PPU's second constituency was the more recent pacifist tradition, with Anglicans like Sheppard, Royden, and Charles Raven, and it actually *did* attempt to prevent war by political means. Its participants did really want 'to stop the next bloody war' (Sheppard), and so they, unlike the earlier pacifists, wanted to find, and had to convince themselves they could find, an effective, realistic political alternative to rearmament. It can be argued that Sheppard's attempt to find an effective pacifist statecraft was just as incompatible with an Anglicanism which formed the state church, since the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion in the Book of Common Prayer, summarizing the Anglican doctrine, commit Anglicans to the just war tradition. However, Sheppard's attempt at pacifist statecraft could not find an effective alternative to rearmament because of Germany's growing militarism. When they could not do this, and the facts on the ground contradicted them (e.g. the invasions of Czechoslovakia and Poland), support collapsed.[62]

[59] Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).
[60] Martin says the PPU formed a kind of analogue to the Left Book Club since there was to some extent an overlapping membership between the two organizations even though they had very different ideas on the conditions necessary for peace. David A. Martin, *Pacifism: an historical and sociological study* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965), p. 142.
[61] Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, pp. 330–6.
[62] Mark Gilbert, 'Pacifist attitudes to Nazi Germany, 1936–45', *Journal of Contemporary History* 27: 3, July 1992, pp. 493–509.

These different approaches to pacifism imply different ecclesiologies, i.e. different understandings of the church in the world. What Wight adopted in his youth was a 'vocational' commitment to pacifism, i.e. a private commitment to pacifism, akin to the medieval monastic notion which accepted that all Christians could not, or ought not, to live up to the gospel's counsels of perfection.[63] This allowed him, as a baptized Anglican, to remain as a pacifist within the established church; he did not adopt a position of 'testimony', which was the position of the historic 'peace churches', which claimed a distinctive peace witness in the Nonconformist tradition.

Power politics

Wight was in contact with J. H. Oldham on the role of the church in the nuclear age at the time he wrote *Power politics* for Chatham House.[64] Oldham wrote to him for advice on a draft of a pamphlet to be published by the SCM and the British Council of Churches (BCC) on how the churches should respond to the nuclear age, which Wight later reviewed for *International Affairs*. Wight's review, published a few months later, praised the way the pamphlet examined the church's response to atomic weapons by placing the issue squarely in the context of ecclesiology—the relationship between the church and modern civilization, which was a major concern of a number of Christian scholars during this time, including Barth, Brunner, Dawson, and, of course, Butterfield and Niebuhr. This was a position Wight continued to set out at later conferences sponsored by the Student Christian Movement (SCM), the Ecumenical Institute, and the World Student Christian Federation.[65]

Wight's criticism of the Quaker reply to the BCC's report is similar to the one later he expressed in *International theory*. He noted that it enunciated 'moral

[63] Epp, 'Martin Wight: International relations as realm of persuasion', pp. 121–142.

[64] J. H. Oldham, who had been secretary to the World Missionary Conference at Edinburgh (1910), then of the International Missionary Council, set up in the aftermath of the conference, and who was editor of its journal, the *International Review of Missions*, asked Wight to contribute occasional book reviews. Wight also wrote for *The Ecumenical Review* published by the World Council of Churches after it was formed. See Martin Wight, *Power politics*, 'Looking Forward', Pamphlet No. 8, Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1946. He later expanded this pamphlet into a book-length manuscript, which was published after his death, Martin Wight, *Power politics,* edited by Hedley Bull and Carsten Holbraad (London: Penguin, 1979).

[65] Wight published an article based on an address to a conference of Christian politicians at the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, Switzerland, 'The Church, Russia, and the West', *The Ecumenical Review* 1: 1, 1948, pp. 25–45. The following summer (28 July–5 August 1949), before he took up his position at the LSE, Wight attended another Ecumenical Institute-World Student Christian Federation Conference, this time on a Christian understanding of history and civilization. The week before this (11–21 July, 1949) he spoke at a Swanwick SCM Conference on a Christian view of history and civilization, along with Alasdair MacIntyre, Georges Florovsky, J. H. Oldham, and Alec Vidler (LSE Archive). In an email (28 June, 2001) Alasdair MacIntyre told the author this was the only contact he had with Martin Wight. Butterfield wanted to invite MacIntyre to join the British Committee on the Theory of International Politics, but there was some concern this would turn the group into an ethical discussion group rather than a group that discussed ethics in the context of international politics. Letter from Herbert Butterfield to Martin Wight, 5 May 1961, LSE Archive.

principles without facing their political consequences', but Wight concluded with a reasoned, but impatient, claim that the strength of both church reports was their recognition, '[T]he time is fast approaching when the church will no longer be able to propound dilemmas in place of exercising its prophetic function'.[66]

Wight, in his personal letter to Oldham on the draft report, indicated what he meant by the prophetic function of the church, and it is quoted at the beginning of this article. In this letter Wight situated the church's response to nuclear weapons within what he called the 'greater question', the Christian attitude towards the 'inherent' East–West conflict. Wight's disposition to interpret international politics in terms of 'repetition and recurrence' is evident with his question: how should the East–West conflict be characterized? Should the conflict be interpreted as a return to the polarization between France and the Habsburgs, the schism between Eastern and Western Christendom, or the crusades between Christendom and the Ottoman Empire? He wondered if there was another, possibly darker, metaphor that was more appropriate? He thought there was, and he had used it a decade earlier.

Thus, at the same time Wight wrote *Power politics* he returned to aspects of his early theology found in his application for the CO tribunal, which he had used to formulate his theological support for pacifism: corporate sin, and the spiritual apostasy of the secular political powers, but this time referring to the superpowers rather than to Nazi Germany:

> Is the church today in a position analogous to that in which it found itself when the Vandals were at the gates of Hippo, and St Augustine was writing the De Civitate? Or is it rather in a position analogous to that from which St John on Patmos saw his vision of the divine purpose in history transcending the pagan and apostate civilisation into which he had been born? Are these appalling judgements of war and atomic energy which hang over us an expression of the fact that for these years past we have been faced once more with the problem of antichrist in history, and we have been blind to it?[67]

Wight is often characterized as a political realist because of what he wrote in *Power politics*, and because of his soteriology, i.e. his understanding of sin and salvation, and 'providentialist' theory of history. In fact, it is contended, this is 'where his two worlds of religion and politics collide'.[68] There is no collision. Wight's soteriology needs to be balanced with his ecclesiology. Realists, at least those in international relations, it might be argued, are more often found in the corridors of power than on the streets, or in the catacombs beneath them. Wight, as a historian (and not as a theologian), has used the language of a particular historical discourse, the persecuted early church in the *pagan* Roman

[66] 'The era of atomic power', and 'The era of atomic power: a Quaker reply' (1946), *International Affairs* 23: 4, October 1947, pp. 568–9.
[67] Letter from Martin Wight to J. H. Oldham, 27 September 1946.
[68] Dunne, *Inventing international society*, pp. 52–3.

Empire, to say something about ecclesiology, the ultimate role of the church, the mode of life of those people 'called out' (the meaning of *ecclesia*) as a distinctive community amidst the world of power politics.[69] They find themselves not in the corridors of political power, but as a minority, maybe even a persecuted minority, amid the world of the pagan, apostate superpowers that dominated world politics during the Cold War. The debate in the English school over Wight's political realism has ignored the fact that his political theology combined a strong cultural and political criticism of Western modernity with a prophetic role for the church in the world.

Loss and gain

The extent to which Martin Wight moved away from pacifism in his maturity may not be entirely clear, even though C. W. Manning, one of his colleagues at the LSE, believes he had already done so by the time he wrote *Power politics*.[70] Wight's first article, 'Christian pacifism', was a forthright defence of pacifism by a brash, intelligent, young man, with a certainty of faith, and an impatience with the institutional church. What is surprising is that it still contains many of the theological and political beliefs and principles found in his later writing. Wight still believed pacifism was an important but neglected part of the study of international relations. Therefore, while most of the scholarly study has emphasized what he 'lost', what he left behind—his pacifism—this article concludes by examining what he 'gained' from his early religious and political commitments that remained with him for the rest of his life.

Opposition to imperialism and the theory of colonial encounter

Altogether too much time has been devoted to examining Wight's early commitment to pacifism, and not enough time to his early opposition to imperialism. After all, this was the young Wight, whose rooms at Haileybury, only a few years later, were dominated by portraits of Lenin and T. E. Lawrence. This early fascination with revolutionary figures continued with his later study of Calvinist, Jacobin and other forms of revolutionary doctrine, and his development of the 'Revolutionist tradition' in international theory.[71] The young, impatient Wight who so strongly defended the ethic of 'absolute pacifism' he found in the Sermon on the Mount denounced the British in India at the same time. In 'Christian pacifism' he wrote:

[69] Oliver O'Donovan, 'The political thought of the Book of Revelation', *Tyndale Bulletin* 37, 1986, pp. 61–94.
[70] Letter from C. W. Manning to Hedley Bull, 5 February 1974.
[71] Wight, 'International doctrines', *Power politics*, Appendix II, pp. 302–5; Wight, *International theory*, pp. 8–12, *passim*.

It is a sin to kill a man, but it is no less a sin to keep him alive in the British prisons in India, the concentration camps in Russia, the ghetto of Germany, or in the perpetual misery of unemployment.[72]

Wight wrote this article at a time when rebellion by Islamic warriors in the North-West Frontier was making headlines in Britain in the run up to the Waziri Campaign (1936–7). Italian and German propagandists used the frontier war as a way to blacken Britain's reputation, and to excuse the crimes of their own governments. The Bishop of Bombay took exception to the young Wight's assertions about British prisons in India. Wight, in response, showed himself to be a radical Anglican opposed to the imperial core within Anglicanism. He did not argue that all 'reformatory detention' was unchristian (although he clearly thought so), but he argued that 'the jails in India bear no relation to reformatory detention, still less to Christianity'; and in a direct attack on British society as well as on British colonialism, he wrote, 'They suggest a society which differs in degree but not in kind from Hitler's Germany'.[73] At the end of his letter he went even further:

From the Bishop's letter I understand that he has no misgivings about the position of the British in India; for my part, I must regard it as an iniquity … I find the causes of imprisonment in India as unchristian as the conditions of the prisons … I see nothing Christian in imprisoning men for the crime of seeking their freedom, and I do not think that the British regime in India, either for its real purpose of exploitation or for the conditions of misery and poverty which it engenders, is worth defending.[74]

Although Wight may have moved away from pacifism, his opposition to colonialism and imperialism remained a part of his political theology, even if his tone changed. The young Wight blasted the concept of a 'national church' in spite of the apologetics of Anglican ecclesiology. He called Anglicanism's non-Roman catholicity (he called it a 'primitive catholicity'), a 'religious facade' which made the national church subservient to the state and to British imperial interests. This, he said, only gave credence to the Marxist claim that Christianity was 'nothing but the ideology of the middle-class order of society'.[75] Wight's opposition to imperialism, and his impatience with the institutional church, appears to have been similar to that of Sheppard.[76] Anglicans today are critical of what was once the imperial core of Anglicanism, but the governing of the British Raj was as much a product of Benthamite utilitarianism as it was an

[72] Martin Wight, 'Christian pacifism', *Theology* 33: 193, July 1936, p. 20.
[73] Martin Wight, 'Miscellanea Correspondence, Christian pacifism', *Theology* 33: 198, December 1936, p. 367.
[74] Wight, 'Miscellanea', p. 368.
[75] Wight, 'Christian pacifism', p. 18.
[76] The PPU's policy, and that of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, was not only based on a religious objection to war as such, but also on a vigorous anti-imperialism. 'It was argued that righteous indignation could not be justified unless the imperialist powers, and Britain in particular, agreed to a redistribution of the world's resources'. Martin, *Pacifism*, pp. 119–20.

alliance between church and state.[77] What 'Christian pacifism' shows is Wight's early disdain for identifying Christianity with British culture and Western civilization. He deplored the moral arrogance of the West, and later in life he seems to have expected the decline of the West.[78]

This has some bearing on the change that Wight developed a 'Eurocentric' analysis of international theory. He returned to some of the themes from 'Christian pacifism' in his forthright defence of Arnold Toynbee's Reith Lectures, 'The World and the West', when Toynbee was accused of betraying 'Christian civilisation' by a prominent Catholic critic of the time who had helped Franco come to power in Spain.[79] The way he compared British colonialism to Hitler's conquest of Europe was developed further in his innovative lectures on 'The theory of mankind' in *International theory*. While it is true that Wight had mastered the Western traditions of thought, it was perhaps partly because of his early opposition to imperialism that he included in some of his works analysis of how European powers interacted with the non-Western world, and he did this at a time when the study of international relations in the West was dominated by the Cold War.

Wight's analysis has made it easier to bring colonialism, the politics of developing countries, and North–South relations into international theory.[80] More recent scholars in the English school have explored how the West's interaction with non-Western cultures, particularly in relation to Islam, played an important role in forming the identity of Europe and European international society.[81] Although this is contested, it still could be an important point of departure for studying Europe's relations with the Islamic world today.[82] Wight's approach to international theory has also been used to devise theories of colonial encounter in international relations, which might be applied to the study of slavery, Christian missions, religious change and social transformation.[83]

What should be clear are the political and theological origins of Wight's early opposition to imperialism, the influence of Dick Sheppard, and his commitment to the study of the non-Western world. What the next sections of this article help to show is how his Christian faith, the fact Wight had a 'view from somewhere', and his passionate love of history made him even more interested

[77] Thomas R. Metcalf, *Ideologies of the Raj* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
[78] Martin Wight, 'The decline of the West: third edition' (MSS, LSE Archive, undated).
[79] Martin Wight, 'Written in Anger', *The Observer*, 18 April, 1954, p. 7. This is a review of Douglas Jerrold, *The lie about the West* (London: Dent, 1954). When the Spanish Civil War broke out it seems it was Jerrold who played a key role in arranging for a British airplane to pick up General Franco and fly him to Morocco to lead the rebellion. Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, p. 325.
[80] Roger Epp, 'The English school at the frontiers of international relations', *Review of International Studies* 24: 4, December 1998, pp. 47–63.
[81] Iver B. Neumann and Jennifer M. Welsh, 'The other in European self-definition: an addendum to the literature on international society', *Review of International Studies* 17, 1991, pp. 327–48.
[82] Paul Rich, 'European identify and the myth of Islam: a reassessment', *Review of International Studies* 25, 1999, pp. 435–51.
[83] Tim Dunne, 'Colonial encounters in international relations: reading Wight, writing Australia', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 51: 3, 1997, pp. 309–23.

in, and more appreciative of, the role of other religions, cultures and civilizations in international society.

History, incarnation, and social theory

Bull, Porter and Nicholson identify Wight's 'realist' reservations, or 'pessimism' about moral idealism in international relations with his Christian faith and 'providentialist' philosophy of history.[84] It is important to recognize that Wight's perspective is based on his understanding of some of the main theological debates of his day, 'Barthian' theology, and the biblical theology movement, which were reactions against the kind of Hegelian, progressive, liberal optimism he denounced in his first article.

In 'Christian pacifism' Wight rejected what he called the 'ecclesiastical Hegelianism' of the time.[85] During British imperialism most Anglicans believed in an alliance between empire and mission, which implied that English Christianity was bound up with moral and social progress, the progressive movement of God, steadily enlarging all that was good in the world. In the 1930s, Anglicanism still interpreted British institutions and British imperialism in this way. The early Wight, of course, was making a political point by drawing a theological distinction: in his language he is reacting to the fact that Hegelian influences still lingered on in Anglican theology.

In contrast, Wight believed the particularity of the historical incarnation was about the movement of God towards man, and not about the Hegelian or idealist absoluteness of spirit in the movement of God through history. Karl Barth's theology, and the biblical theology movement, were reactions to these influences, and emphasized that the kingdom of God meant the breaking-in of divine righteousness in a particular history (that of the Jews) so that moral idealism itself was now under the judgement of God. This called into question not only certain tenets of idealism in Anglican theology, but also the half-conscious, progressivist assumptions of Western modernity.[86]

The incarnation was at the heart of Wight's later theological disagreements with Arnold Toynbee, who was Director of Studies at Chatham House when Wight was a researcher there. Wight disagreed with Toynbee's Hegelian account of religion in the *Study of history* as the embodiment of love, and the basis of world society, because it did not sufficiently acknowledge the doctrine of the incarnation and its meaning for history. In other words, Wight disagreed with Toynbee because he saw the latter's conception of Christianity as both

[84] Hedley Bull, 'Introduction', in Martin Wight, *Systems of states*, pp. 1–20; Brian Porter, 'Patterns of thought and practice: Martin Wight's international theory', Michael Donelan, ed., *The reason of states* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1978), pp. 64–74; Michael Nicholson, 'The enigma of Martin Wight', *Review of International Studies* 7, 1981, pp. 15–22.

[85] Wight, 'Christian pacifism', pp. 18–19.

[86] Michael Ramsey, *From Gore to Temple: the development of Anglican theology between Lux Mundi and the Second World War, 1889–1939* (London: Longman, 1960).

theologically *and* historically deficient.[87] It should be remembered that the way theology developed in British universities, and the belief in Christianity as a historical religion, meant for Wight that it was open to investigation by the technical historian.

Wight's argument, with his emphasis on the unity of the biblical revelation and the distinctiveness of the biblical worldview (i.e. Hebraic rather than Hellenic), indicate how familiar he was with the scholarly results of the main theological movements of the time. Although Wight's indebtedness to Butterfield and Niebuhr is widely acknowledged, he also refers to the New Testament scholars, C. H. Dodd and Oscar Cullmann, key figures in the biblical theology movement, so there were a variety of influences on his theology.[88]

> The central declaration of Christianity is not that God *is* something, but that God *has done* something; it is Hebraic first and Hellenic second; its uniqueness is primarily historico-theological, and only consequentially theologico-philosophical. God *has done* something *in history*; He has acted *in history* to show the meaning of history.[89]

As a technical historian Wight did not substitute priori theological assumptions for the study of religion in history. He did reject, however, what he called a 'solecism' or blunder of method—the a priori naturalistic assumptions secular modernism used to study religion in social theory, and this was something he was slightly worried about in Christopher Dawson's Gifford Lectures.[90]

One of Wight's main contributions is considered to be his historical sociology of states-systems.[91] It is important to recognize that the kind of questions he asked about states-systems emerged from a perspective that took religion and culture seriously in international relations in a way that Buzan and Little's recent study of international systems in world history does not appear to do. Why is this the case? At this point Wight's basic theological orientation cannot be separated from the way he studied international relations. Wight's writings on theology interrogate the secular and progressivist assumptions of Western modernity, and as a historian one aspect of this was his recognition that 'religion'

[87] Elie Kedourie, 'Religion and politics: Arnold Toynbee and Martin Wight', *British Journal of International Studies* 5: 2, 1979, pp. 6–14.

[88] Gerhard Hasel, *New Testament theology: basic issues in the current debate* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans, 1978).

[89] Martin Wight, 'The Crux for an historian brought up in the Christian tradition', in Arnold J. Toynbee, *A study of history*, vol. VII, Annex A (III) (a), p. 737. It is not necessary to demonstrate that Wight's theological understanding is indebted to C. H. Dodd's *The Apostolic preaching and its development* (1936) to recognize the influence of this theology on his outlook. The crucial importance of Dodd's book, and of the biblical theology movement, was on what Wight emphasized. The 'central declaration of Christianity', i.e. the proclamation of the earliest followers of Jesus, was not the fatherhood of God and the infinite value of every person (theological liberalism), but a declaration of the mighty acts of God, 'This has God *done*', Dodd says; and, following on from this, 'Therefore, this must *you* do', a statement about the nature of Christian vocation and commitment, something Wight strongly accepted. Neill, *The interpretation of the New Testament,* pp. 272–3.

[90] 'Martin Wight, The Gifford Lectures', *Dublin Review*, second quarter, 1950, pp. 108–110. Christopher Dawson was editor of the *Dublin Review*.

[91] Dunne, *Inventing international society*, p. 47.

was a fundamental—and not a derivative—category to the understanding of culture, society, and civilization.[92]

Wight agreed with Dawson, as well as with Butterfield, that 'high ideals' could not be separated—or constructed—apart from their 'social roots'. It was at the level of 'soil and society' that religion 'works', and religion was most powerful where it was least recorded and most difficult to observe, among the masses and in the practices and traditions of ordinary people.[93] Because Wight took religious ideas seriously, and not as a derivative factor of other social forces, he was concerned about, and explicitly studied more directly, the role of religious doctrines on ideas about war and peace, the impact of religious doctrine on national churches and national consciousness, the evolution of diplomatic practices in the states-systems of different civilizations, and the role of a common culture in different state-systems in history.

This is why Wight studied the idea of 'holy war' or jihad among political communities. He was concerned about 'the other' in international relations, i.e. those outside a particular international system, and whether they were subject to different rules of war than those within international society. Wight asked, 'have all states-systems entertained some notion of Holy War in their external relations? Or is it a product of the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition?'[94] He did not think the evidence was clear. Given the global resurgence of religion, and the rise of ethno-national conflicts and terrorism, often with religious dimensions, Wight's question is an increasingly important one. Recent scholars have reformulated it as a question about the relationship between monotheism, religion and war, particularly focusing on Christianity and Islam.[95]

Another question Wight asked because he took religious ideas seriously was related to the problem of holy war. This was a distinction he made between types of states-systems, which may also become more important in the future because of globalization. Wight distinguished between international systems with

[92] Wight argues, 'The historian's fundamental beliefs about politics and man are necessarily implicit in his discussion of what he calls the historical facts, and these beliefs give colour and texture to his picture of history', and 'the best historical writing is that which is impregnated with the deepest reflections of the culture within which it is written'. Martin Wight, 'What makes a good historian?', *The Listener*, 17 February 1955, pp. 283–4. Asad argues that it is difficult to take religion and culture seriously if social theory constructs a conception of 'religion' based on assumptions of secular modernity whose purpose is to explain religion away as a epiphenomenon of other social, technological or economic forces. See Talal Asad, *Geneologies of religion: discipline and reasons of power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).

[93] Adrian Hastings, in his Wiles Lectures, examines the impact of these relationships as part of his criticism of 'modernist' theories of nationalism (e.g. Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner). See Adrian Hastings, *The construction of nationhood: ethnicity, religion, and nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997). Duffy, in contrast to scholarly fascination with wild and weird beliefs in the Middle Ages, has shown the remarkable rituals and practices that constituted the orthodox piety of ordinary English believers on the eve of the 'English Reformation'. Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars: traditional religion in England, 1400–1580* (London: Yale University Press, 1992).

[94] Wight, *Systems of states*, pp. 34–5.

[95] Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the mind of God: the global rise of religious violence* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); David Martin, *Does Christianity cause war?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Regina M. Schwartz, *The curse of Cain: the violent legacy of monotheism* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

a common culture, and what he called those 'secondary states-systems' that were characterized by cultural pluralism, which he thought indicated that they should not be classified as states-systems at all. What concerned him about these states-systems was the lack 'of a common ethos or ideology', and the limited extention of what he called the 'chivalric practices and feudal assumptions' of Latin Christendom to Byzantium and Islam (Abbasid Caliphate).[96]

Although Buzan and Little acknowledge one of the important contributions of the English school is the emphasis it places on cultural ideas in different historic states-systems, these questions about war and religion, and the formation of practices and religious traditions in international relations, are unfortunately ignored within the English school's current research programme.[97] There is very little exploration of the actual role of religious ideas in the analysis Buzan and Little give of different historic international systems, since religion is defined as a 'social tool', and is relegated to the role of one of many aspects of 'interaction capacity' in international systems.[98]

Although Wight's theology made him sensitive to or even critical of certain aspects of social theory, it was as a historian and not as a social theorist that he examined the role of religion in international relations. It can be argued, however, that the next step has been taken by more recent 'radical orthodox' theologians, building on the criticisms of both post-positivist and post-modernist theory, and this has wider implications for how religion is studied in international relations.

The English school has similarities with radical orthodoxy's interpretivist orientation toward social reality.[99] Both would acknowledge the distinction Hollis and Smith make between (objectively) explaining events and (subjectively) or interpretively understanding human actions.[100] What some English school scholars may not acknowledge is what radical orthodoxy argues are the implications of this interpretivist approach for the study of religion in social theory. Social theorists, who in the past tried to relativize religion by explaining it away in terms of some other 'natural' reality (which is what Wight objected to), are themselves insufficiently self-critical, or aware of their own quasi-theological assumptions which no 'rationality' can justify.[101]

[96] Wight, *Systems of states*, pp. 26–34.
[97] Buzan and Little, *International systems in world history,* pp. 28–30.
[98] Ibid., pp. 203–9. Just how much Buzan and Little have missed by not taking religious ideas seriously in international relations is evident in Daniel Philpott's path-breaking *Revolutions in sovereignty: how ideas shaped modern international relations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001). Philpott, in an approach which is similar to Wight's study of international doctrines, challenges both neo-realist and materialist interpretations of international relations by showing the central role of ideas, particularly religious ideas, in shaping the nature of revolutions in the international system. He shows that while shifts in military, economic and other forms of material power may be important, only ideas can explain how the world came to be organized as a system of sovereign states. See also Daniel Philott, 'The religious roots of modern international relations', *World Politics* 52: 1, January 2000, pp. 206–45.
[99] Dunne, *Inventing the English school*, pp. 1–21.
[100] Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and understanding international relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991).
[101] John Milbank, *Theology and social theory: beyond secular reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

Social theory does not provide a non-ideological space, a 'view from nowhere' (Nagel), from which to study the world, or from which competing paradigms can be compared. If reality is only available to us as *interpreted* reality, then it comes to us structured and narrated by our fundamental stories. The most significant of these has been the story of enlightenment and progress told by secular or liberal modernity, although fewer people seem to be as convinced today of this story as they were in Wight's day.[102]

Thus, if religion is a fundamental category, as Wight thought it was, this means one cannot get behind it to a more fundamental category, such as the 'social', or the 'economic', and those who claim to do so end up turning social theory into an alternative theology, although of a secular kind. What social theory has become is the substitution of one *mythos* of salvation for another.[103] This is why Wight's particular understanding of religion and culture, based on his own theological orientation, was so important for the English school's early accounts of the historical sociology of different states-systems, and which appears to be lost in the English school's more recent research programme.

The contention that social theory no longer provides a neutral, rational, or universal account of society or history is accepted by many scholars working within the English school's interpretivist orientation.[104] What they may disagree with is radical orthodoxy's claim that this means liberal modernity cannot be refuted, but it may be 'out-narrated' by a deeper, more coherent, and intelligible account of the culture of modernity. What remains to be investigated in international relations is whether Wight's account of religious ideas, movements, and practices provides the basic materials in the English school for this kind of alternative narration of the global resurgence of religion in international politics. Developing a more social conception of religion, rooted in the practices of different religious traditions, and re-telling the story of the expansion of international society in a way which acknowledges the suppression (through colonialism and imperialism) of the indigenous practices of non-Western states-systems as part of their incorporation into a global (but Western) international society may be one way of proceeding.[105]

The analysis of this section has now come full circle. Radical orthodoxy's account of theology and social theory, as Ronald Preston, one of the most important social theologians in Britain since the Second World War, has said, is

[102] Richard Devetak, 'The project of modernity and international relations theory', *Millennium* 24: 1, 1995, pp. 27–51.

[103] William T. Cavanaugh, 'The City: beyond secular parodies', in John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward, eds, *Radical orthodoxy* (London: Routledge, 1999), p. 190. See also Wight, *International theory*, p. 105: 'Whereas the Rationalist denies the ultimacy of politics and finality of human institutions, the Revolutionist condemns the existing system of power by a standard external to that system of power but drawn from within the political category. He resembles the Realist in finding the ultimate meaning within the realm of politics; indeed he divinizes the political category: it is politics which prescribe human goals, the right of moral judgement and duty of action.'

[104] Steve Smith, Ken Booth, and Marysia Zalewski, eds, *International theory: positivism and beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

[105] Scott M. Thomas, 'Taking religious and cultural pluralism seriously: the global resurgence of religion and the transformation of international society', *Millennium* 29: 3, 2000, pp. 815–41.

the most significant account of what the 'Christendom' group of thinkers were saying in the 1930s, and Martin Wight regularly read their works.[106]

'Inverted revolutionism'—providing a space for pacifism

Although it is often contended that Wight moved away from pacifism, he still maintained that it 'is an important, fascinating, and academically neglected part' of the study of international relations'.[107] The discipline may be moving beyond the 'inter-paradigm debate' (among realism, liberalism, and Marxism), but Wight's observation, made during the Cold War, is, surprisingly, still a valid one, given the role of peaceful protest in the collapse of communism, the debate over military intervention in the Balkans, or the prominence of Aung San Suu Kyi's non-violent protest in Burma. What is not often remarked on is the unique intellectual space Wight provided for pacifism within the main perspectives of international theory.

Wight described pacifism as an 'inverted' form of revolutionism. It was 'inverted' because it repudiated the use of power, and denied that politics could be made the instrument of justice; and, it was 'revolutionist' because it saw this repudiation of power as a principle of universal validity.[108] One could argue with the way Wight went on to characterize the pacifist tradition. The witness of the radical 'peace' churches, for example, claim to be neither pietistic nor sectarian, and their understanding of practical discipleship demands a non-violence of spirit and action which embraces the world as well as the church.[109]

What is important is the way Wight links theological and philosophical debates about the use of force, non-resistance, non-violence, and war and peace to the foundational assumptions of the main traditions of international theory. Wight has provided—what remains a fairly unexplored—intellectual space for pacifism by bringing it in from the margins to a place where its adherents can more thoroughly engage with the traditions of international theory. At the level of pedagogy, how many undergraduates expect to come across the ideas of Gandhi, Tolstoy, Jesus, or even the Anabaptists as part of the normal study of international relations?

Wight's criticism of pacifism in *International theory* appears to be a dialogue with his earlier convictions. The argument in 'Christian pacifism' was based on the incarnation and on the perfectionist ethic of the Sermon on the Mount, which left no room for a double standard between private life and public obligations. Wight disagreed with Toynbee because the latter's belief in love

[106] *Christendom* was the journal of a rather Anglo-Catholic 'Christian sociology' group, and included N. Berdyaev, Jacques Maritain, T. S. Eliot, Christopher Dawson and Donald MacKinnon. The point was not that this group shared a common programme but a common mood and theological direction. Hastings, *A history of English Christianity*, p. 295.

[107] Wight, *International theory*, p. 108.

[108] Ibid., pp. 108–110.

[109] Stanley Hauerwas, Chris K. Huebner, Harry J. Huebner and Mark Thiessen Nation, eds, *The wisdom of the cross: essays in honor of John Howard Yoder* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999).

was an insufficient account of the message of Christianity. Now in *International theory* he appeared to disagree with Dick Sheppard, and argued that it was not possible to base foreign policy on love—on the Sermon on the Mount.

When Elie Kedourie examined why Toynbee's belief in a God conceived exclusively of love was inadequate, he could just as easily have been talking about the pacifism of Dick Sheppard. Sheppard's gospel was that God had revealed himself in Jesus as vulnerable love, and war was contrary to the whole spirit of Christ's life and message. Jesus was more likely to be found sweeping the streets of London than issuing edicts from a cathedral.[110]

Martin Wight came to accept what Niebuhr had recognized, that relations between individuals—the Sermon on the Mount—could not be an adequate model for relations between groups or for international politics, something Sheppard believed all his life. Pacifism for the early Niebuhr, as for the early Wight, expressed a revulsion against war, and, like his friend Dick Sheppard, a basic theological conviction that the essence of the gospel's perfectionism was sacrificial love, which shows itself in the non-resistance of Jesus. Given Wight's surprising support for the study of pacifism in *International theory*, it may be the case that he, like Niebuhr, continued to pay tribute to a pacifism which witnessed to this ideal of sacrificial and non-coercive love, but he, again like Niebuhr, came to repudiate moral self-righteousness, particularly that of the West, and one which abdicated moral responsibility for the use of power in world politics.[111]

Kedourie found the heart of the problem, which, it can be argued, summarized Wight's problem with pacifism in *International theory*. It might even be interpreted as Wight's own judgement on his early life, and a criticism of Dick Sheppard's pacifism.[112]

> To preach mere love is to be simply impatient and dismissive of our world, the world which is lighted by the light of common day, is to lose the desire and perhaps the ability to cope with, and understand politics—which is not and cannot be love.[113]

Wight, in the certainty of youth, may well have expressed the simplicity of the dove, but unlike Dick Sheppard, he came to recognize 'the church was [also] enjoined to cultivate the wisdom of the serpent' (Matt: 10: 16).[114] On this distinction turned the difference between having high ideals or foolish expectations in international politics. He recognized the elusive character of political principles, the intractability of most political situations, and the fact that moral quandary is an inherent part of statecraft. Martin Wight did not think international politics could escape the human condition.

[110] Wilkinson, *Dissent or conform?*, pp. 112–36, Ellis, *H. R. L. Sheppard*, pp. 334–50.
[111] Larry Rasmussen, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr: theologian of public life* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), p. 236.
[112] See David S. Yost, 'Political philosophy and the theory of international relations', *International Affairs* 70: 2, April 1994, pp. 263–90.
[113] Kedourie, 'Religion and politics: Arnold Toynbee and Martin Wight', p. 13.
[114] Wight, 'The Church, Russia, and the West', p. 33.