

- TRANSCRIPT OF REMARKS -

The Deadly Simplicities of Adolf von Harnack -
Liberal Theology in Germany on the Eve of the Great War
By Rowan Williams, theologian and former Archbishop of Canterbury

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On August 4th 1914, the day on which war was declared between England and Germany, Kaiser Wilhelm the Second assembled the members of the Reichstag for an extraordinary meeting. He spoke briefly but very eloquently on that occasion, essentially about Germany's moral case for going to war. He speaks about the self defence of Germany, about the need to defend 'the place in which God has put us' - a phrase which resonates in many ways with the understanding of what was going on at that time: *Den Platz zu bewahren auf den Gott uns gestellt hat*. He speaks of the need to resist the *unersättliche Nationalismus*, the insatiable nationalism, of Russia and claims that his government has never had anything in mind as the goal except to develop the ethical, spiritual and economic strength of its people.

The speech is a moral case for the war. But it was a moral case which does not seem to have come absolutely naturally to the lips of the Kaiser. We know from other sources just what a level of mental and emotional confusion he was experiencing at the time. But this speech and the speech which he had given a little while before from the balcony of the Royal Palace in Berlin, both set out Germany's God-given role in Europe, the need to defend it against the barbarism especially of the Slavs (and, to a lesser extent, the different kind of barbarism of the French, but that's another story) and it presupposes a particular kind of ethical and religious mindset; that mindset is what I want to try to explore a little with you this evening.

The speech from the throne in the Reichstag was drafted in part by Karl Gustav Adolf von Harnack, at that time the Director of the Royal Library in Berlin, one of the founders of the Kaiser Wilhelm Gesellschaft, a very important academic and cultural network; a man whose distinction as a Church historian and New Testament scholar and philologist was unparalleled not only in Germany but in the whole of Europe. Harnack, recently ennobled, stood, it might be said, for the supreme achievement of German culture, and it wasn't entirely surprising that he should be drafted in to help the Kaiser and the nation at this particular point.

In September 1914 Harnack and some of his theological colleagues issued an appeal to Protestant Christians in Europe, once again underlining the need for peace, the need to avoid misrepresenting Germany, the need for Germany to defend its historic and God-given role; and most famously (or notoriously) of all, in the following month, on October 23rd, Harnack was one of 93 signatories to an open letter to the cultivated world of Europe, the so called *Manifest der Intellektuellen*, the Intellectuals' Manifesto, which attempted to counter reports of German atrocities in Belgium, once again insisting on Germany's right to self-defence, Germany's God-given vocation to defend Europe against Asiatic barbarism, and Germany's constant role as victim in European history over many centuries. The tenor of the document is not unlike other documents dealing with alleged atrocities, mounting the threefold argument that nothing actually happened, that it has been much exaggerated, and that in any case they started it... Nonetheless it is an eloquent, thoughtful, and unrestrainedly forthright document. Its reception was, as you can imagine, not particularly friendly, but that's another story.

In the years that followed many other things happened which tend to happen when open letters and manifestos are published; some of the signatories claimed they had never read it and some of them withdrew their support - including the great physicist Max Planck, who very shortly after the publication of the letter distanced himself from it. And there was a great deal of confusion, as there always is, about what exactly went into the making of the document. But it's very significant that Harnack's name was one of those most instantly noticed by the learned and cultured world throughout Europe as well as by the Christian World within Germany. And, as we'll see later on, it is Harnack's subscription to this letter which alienated a whole generation of younger theologians, and produced some very unexpected and rather dramatic results in the intellectual history of 20th Century Germany. More of that later on.

But now a little more about Harnack himself. His background as a scholar I've already touched on. He was the author of a multi-volume history of Christian dogma (still a classic, although many of its judgements have dated badly); the author of many monographs on aspects of the Greek New Testament and the Early Church, especially a ground breaking work on Marcion, the 2nd Century heretic; and perhaps most significantly for our purposes, the author of a little book called *Das Wesen Des Christentums, The Essence of Christianity*, based on open lectures which were delivered in Berlin in 1899 and 1900: 16 lectures devoted to the defence of Christianity against its 'despisers'. I put it like that because he was quite deliberately echoing the work a hundred years before of Friedrich Schleiermacher in Berlin, who lectured *On Religion to its*

Cultured Despisers. Harnack is quite deliberately reviving a genre, a style, of apologetic and religious discussion in the public sphere, for which the ground was cleared in the previous century.

But to understand what he's doing in those lectures, we need to think just a little about his specific intellectual background. As one of his greatest critics, Karl Barth, pointed out, Harnack in effect looks back to the 18th not just the 19th Century in his scholarly approach to the history of Christian faith. One of the greatest Church Historians of the 18th century, Mosheim, had produced a formidable series of texts about the formation of early Christian doctrine, in which he'd argued very passionately that the problem with early Christian doctrine was its infection by philosophy. The Protestant Reformation is all about purging Christianity from philosophy, so that you don't commit yourself to any doctrinal statements, and you can turn to the inner world, the inner life. Mosheim who, interestingly enough, translated Ralph Cudworth, the 17th Century Cambridge Platonist, was somebody who was both obsessed by and profoundly hostile to Platonism. And his version of the story of the early Church is that of a 'rake's progress' - a Church which fatally flirts with its intellectual and cultural context, and is finally absorbed into that cultural context and ceases to be what it ought to be. Harnack retrieves exactly that story, and his own massive history of dogma is likewise a prolonged 'rake's progress' story. To return to the sources of faith is a matter of purging out that extraneous philosophical and, as he liked to say, 'speculative' dimension from Christian language. And the great lectures of 1899 to 1900 set out to do precisely that. The essence of Christianity, the *Wesen* of Christianity, is something internal; a set of moral dispositions, not a set of doctrines let alone a set of practices. And this is what he sets out to elaborate in the lectures.

The printed version of the lectures, edited from transcripts of his spoken delivery, proved hugely popular- they were still being reprinted in the 1920s (I have here the 25th anniversary edition of the book, proudly announcing on its title page, '70,000th... It sold somewhere in the region of 100,000 copies during its primary reading life, and it was translated into nearly every European language. In his introduction to this 25th anniversary edition, Harnack notes with becoming modesty that it has just appeared in Finnish and Estonian. But he begins these lectures by saying that he is *not* attempting, despite his title, to define the essence of Christianity as a timeless intellectual conceptual framework. He is undertaking a purely and simply historical task. He is after all a historian, not a philosopher. So, what he proposes to do

for us is to tell us what Jesus said, and then to tell us what Jesus must have meant, and then to tell us what we are to do about it.

In a sense, it's apologetic by refusing to be apologetic. It's saying, 'I'm simply going to tell you what actually happened, and you must make up your own minds'. So, he says he's not going to talk about what religion is in general; that has no interest for him, he's going to talk about what particular kind of religiousness the event of Jesus made possible. And once we grasp that very specific historical truth, then we're in a position to make up our minds about Christian faith as we should not otherwise be. It is interesting that in his introduction to the 1925 edition, Harnack says that one of the things that has disturbed him in the intellectual climate of the post-war period is that people are more and more interested in the question 'what is religion in general'; and he says that he himself is still obstinately not interested in that, because he doesn't believe that it has any particular value for the life of the Christian Church. He retains his reserve about what he regards as indefensible generalities, and his commitment to what he regards as the simple question of what Jesus actually said and did. In the title of this talk, I've referred to 'deadly' simplicity; I hope you may see in a while why this is such an ambiguous approach.

So, what did Jesus really teach? He taught the fatherhood of God, the infinite value of the individual soul, and the higher righteousness - those are the three primary building blocks of Harnack's Jesus' Christianity. Christianity is a moral influence in the heart, and when Jesus speaks in the Gospels about the Kingdom of God that is what he means; an inner transformation, dependent on the recognition that God regards you as a son or daughter, dependent on the recognition that the dignity of the individual is the supreme non-negotiable value in the human world, dependent on the idea that righteousness comes from inner transformation rather than either ritualism or moralism. And Harnack very carefully situates himself between those two extremes. Religion can't be about ritualism, it can't be about external activities and the satisfying of external demands; but neither can it be just a system of moral instruction. There has to be (and here Harnack shamelessly steals Nietzsche's clothes) there has to be what he calls a 'transvaluation of values'. We have to learn to see differently. And in the light of our different seeing, our love is shown in service, in unselfishness, in care for the needy and the poor, and in stout resistance to any attempts to draw us back into ritualism or moralism.

At the heart of the lectures, both literally and substantively, the fifth to the seventh of the lectures deal with some very specific questions which Harnack sees coming out of this overall approach. They're questions about the Gospel of Jesus and asceticism, the Gospel of Jesus and the poor, the Gospel and Law in society, the Gospel and culture, the Gospel and the doctrine of Christ, and the Gospel and the creed in general. He's very clear that the teaching of Jesus has social implications; that's to say, you cannot claim to be a follower of Jesus, transformed inwardly into the higher righteousness by Jesus, unless you have a deep personal concern for the wellbeing of the poor. And some of the passages in that particular section of these lectures about our understanding of what is owed to the poor, might at first blush come from the writings of an English Christian Socialist of the late 19th Century - until you read on to discover Harnack's absolutely unambiguous refusal to contemplate any legislative reinforcement of this attitude. There can be no public social *programme* associated with the Gospel, there can only be social attitudes. There can be no corrective legislation; and it's pretty clear that Harnack has here in mind precisely 'Christian Socialism', whether in the England or the Germany of the period.

The Jesus that Harnack envisages is certainly not a Jesus who is uninterested in the social world which he inhabits, not somebody who is above the complexities of human suffering, including economic suffering. But equally, this is a Jesus who is not hostile to what we might now call wealth creation; there is an interesting and eloquent passage in which Harnack spells out very carefully the fact that Jesus, as he sees it, has nothing to say about the processes of the actual acquisition of wealth or the goodness or badness of rich people. The point is always internal. It is the transformation, the transvaluation, of our attitudes. And the goal for all this is what Harnack refers to, in a rather moving little phrase, as the transformation of society into a 'people of brothers'. The presence of the transformed Christian consciousness in society is part of a slow leavening process which will make society itself a more organic and 'familial' reality. More of that in a moment.

Now this of course immediately raises some quite complicated questions about the Christian's attitude to politics and public order. Harnack's background is Lutheran, north German Lutheran, and therefore his Jesus is unambiguously on the side of obedience to lawfully constituted authority. There's a telling phrase in the 6th Lecture, where he quotes another theologian of the period, Wellhausen, on the subject of Jesus' apparent prohibition in the Gospels of taking oaths. Some of you will recall that Tolstoy had some very strong views about

this and took it *au pied de la lettre*. Wellhausen says that nobody with the least grain of sense could believe that Jesus was forbidding you from taking an oath in front of a magistrate; it's perfectly clear that *cannot* be what Jesus meant. So there is at work in Harnack's reading of his Jesus a very clear assumption that there are some things Jesus *cannot* be saying, cannot be meaning, whatever the surface meaning. And so, when Jesus speaks in the Gospel about non-resistance and turning the other cheek, it is, for Harnack, crystal clear that this is a *private* matter. "This is how you behave in your family," he says in effect, "This is how you behave among your friends and your colleagues. Non-resistance, unselfishness, the yielding up of your own position is something you must develop as an individual - because Jesus always and only addresses the individual". This last is one of his most resonant phrases: Jesus always and only addresses the individual.

Harnack suggests that Jesus is so confident in the triumph of law and justice that he never feels the need to consider that justice will need force to back it up. Jesus is so much of a political idealist, you might say, that he never raises the question of whether the commands of government need to be enforced, and what our attitude ought to be to that force. A *violent* state, and Harnack is clear about this, is an offence against justice; but legitimate force, the requirement of obedience to the law in all its aspects, the requirement therefore, also in the words of the 39 Articles, to bear arms at the command of the magistrate, all this must be part of what Jesus would have taken for granted had he thought about it.

Behind it is what Harnack states - with more passion than clarity perhaps - at one important point in the argument. There is a complete opposition between the world of spirit and flesh, between the world of ethics and the world of physics, as he puts it; and whether you call it ethics versus physics, or God versus the world, or spirit versus flesh, the same thing is going on. We live in the heart of an irresolvable tension between the demands of the society we live in with its necessary resort to force, and the demand for inner transformation. We cannot dissolve that tension, coming down simply on one side or the other; we cannot be totally uncritical about the state, but neither do we have any right to say that there is a Christian duty to resist the state. Only one thing matters: only one relationship, only one imperative matters, he says, and that is to be God's child, to be a citizen of the kingdom, to live in love.

His passage on the tension, the dualism, that he sees in human life is, as I've hinted, one of the least lucid passages in what is generally a beautifully lucid exposition. It's a point at which -

had he not been so allergic to philosophical speculation – he might perhaps have found a few helpful allies in the intellectual history of the 19th century; but that again is another story. He did not care for Hegel; but his reluctance to venture further into this area helps him to advance a telling criticisms both of ‘political’ churches (he clearly has the Roman Catholic Church in his sights here, mindful of Bismarck’s *Kulturkampf*), and of political parties. Neither of these has real legitimacy; both are *unberufen* – which can be translated simply as ‘unconstitutional’ or ‘unofficial’, but has a stronger resonance in German, where there is just a hint of divine vocation in the word *Beruf*: these are forms of political life that are beyond the normal terms of divine calling. And in this at least, Harnack foreshadows the language which the Kaiser used in his speech from the palace balcony in 1914, in which he declares, in effect, that the era of party conflict is over. The Kaiser presents himself as a representative not of any party or interest in the state but of the state and nation itself; and for the duration of the conflict Germany can and must forget about partisan identity.

The implied background of a patriarchal and organic view of society is something which clearly had a strong draw for Harnack; and again it has its roots in precisely that north German Lutheran tradition out of which he came – a tradition which is entirely serious about the imperatives of both the gospel and the law, and refuses to offer any premature resolution or reconciliation between them. Unsurprisingly Harnack quotes Goethe (you know that at some point he is going to quote Goethe, like every good German intellectual), and the passage he chooses is essentially about tensions that can only be lived through and overcome by the living of them. You don’t rush to the end of the story and you don’t seek for a formula, a speculative philosophical scheme, which can hold this together: you patiently live through the potentially difficult work of being a good citizen in the patriarchal organic state and allowing yourself to be transformed internally. It’s in this context that it’s actually quite hard to recognise Harnack as a *democrat* precisely; Whatever kind of liberal we think he was, political liberalism in the usual sense is not something to be ascribed too quickly to him, and there is, I think, more to be said and more to be explored about exactly what his relationship was to ideas of democracy. This patriarchal sense of a society in which political party conflict, what you might call the life of the agora, or the forum, is really not of very great interest either to the ruler or to the believer, is an area of Harnack’s thought which needs rather more discussion.

Another area worth exploring – but I mention it only briefly, as it would need a very full treatment to do it justice – is Harnack’s relation to Tolstoy; because of course at the time he

was writing these lectures, Tolstoy's work was widely discussed in religious and cultural circles across Europe. At several points in the lectures, Harnack feels the need to turn sideways, as it were, to address Tolstoy and say, "I quite see why you say what you do - but that can't be it." Tolstoy wants a visible, a manifest detachment of the believer and the believing community from the state, its power and its violence. Harnack says to Tolstoy, as it were, "You're absolutely right to see two completely different orders in conflict here; but the conflict is precisely *not* a conflict between two sorts of institution or two sorts of community. It is a conflict within the human will and can only be resolved in the individual's life."

I hope that some of this provides a little background to why and how, in August 1914, Harnack found himself drafting speeches for the Kaiser of the kind that he did draft, and supporting the Manifesto of the Intellectuals. He is not - let us be clear - an uncritical German nationalist, let alone an apologist for racial superiority. The point is not that there is something mystically superior about being German (though there are one or two passages where he sails a little near the wind on that); it is more that here is a legitimate state, the German Reich, which history has endowed with very particular intellectual and spiritual gifts, which has a particular vocation within Europe, and which has an obligation therefore to defend its cultural heritage and to resist all those non-European forces which seek to undermine it. I shall come back in a moment to some of the more ambivalent elements in that; but it is important to take absolutely seriously the fact that Harnack is not a forerunner of the Third Reich in any intelligible sense whatever.

What then has he got to say about actual Christian churches and actual Christian practice? The last cluster of lectures in the series deal in sequence with varieties of Christianity through the ages and at the present day. And, once again, we learn a great deal about what Harnack thought of faith in society from looking at what he says about specific churches and their practices.

Catholicism is clearly a major problem, as it was a major political problem in the Germany of his day (and even more so, the Germany of his earlier years); but he is a fair minded man, and he grants that one of the great things that Catholicism has done is to resist what he calls *Staatsomnipotenz*, the all-powerfulness of the state. Catholicism at least says there is some area of human life which the state does not control. The mistake, as with Tolstoy, is to say that the division between what the state does and doesn't control can, so to speak, be

externally marked. The Catholic Church ought to be saying that what the state doesn't control is the inner life, the conscience; but what it ends up saying is that what the state doesn't control is this institution called the Catholic Church - and that is precisely how not to approach the question in Harnack's world. The counter- power of the Catholic Church is not the power of the free conscience, with all that that implies about the dignity of the individual, but the power of a pseudo-state, a 'political Church'. Nonetheless, Catholicism does at least have a principle of resistance to complete totalitarianism (as we would call it) and, in that respect, it's preferable to Eastern Orthodoxy; but it still makes a sort of category mistake.

What about Eastern Orthodoxy? Harnack actually knew more about Eastern Orthodoxy than probably any German scholar of his generation. He actually learned Russian in order to read monographs on some of the early Christian writers he'd included in his history of dogma. The only reputable scholarly work of that time on the great Maximus the Confessor, the eighth century Byzantine theologian, was by a Russian scholar called Epifanovich and Harnack dutifully learned Russian and read this work. He had visited Russia and been impressed by what he saw of peasant piety. He had enough sympathy with Tolstoy to feel, as the Count did, that there was something very remarkable, very moving and very 'evangelical' in the broadest sense about many aspects of peasant life in Russia, but this didn't, in his view, have very much to do with the Orthodox Church as such because, he asserts, Eastern Orthodoxy is "natural religion" - by which he doesn't mean the religion that comes naturally to human beings so much as a *religion of nature*. Orthodoxy is about processes in the world, about material stuff and material transformation - light beaming from the transfigured faces of the saints, kissing relics and smearing yourself with oil; and you can imagine what Harnack thought of all that. This is a religion of the world we know, and, he claims if you removed all mention of Jesus Christ from Eastern Orthodoxy, you wouldn't notice the difference. I said that he knew more about Eastern Orthodoxy than almost anybody else in Western Europe at the time; so this is indirectly a rather depressing reflection of the general level of knowledge of Eastern Orthodoxy; but I digress. But this critique of "natural religion" does help us to see why in his doctrinal histories Harnack is very sceptical and indeed hostile about a certain style of doctrinal speculation, particularly associated with the Greek world from, say, 300 to 800, in which there is much focus on how the *natures* of the divine and the human are brought together in the person of Christ or in the sacraments of the Church: for Harnack, because this is about natures, it's not about morality.

What about Protestantism? Well, says Harnack, it is universally agreed that Protestantism is in a very bad state. It's theologically underequipped, it's communally weak, and it's politically compromised. Significantly, in spite of his Lutheran heritage, Harnack did *not* approve of state churches: he was very deeply unconvinced about the possibility or probity of any kind of political backing for any religious body. So the fact that in 1899/1900 the reality of the state church was the way in which most Germans would experience Protestant Christianity was, for Harnack, a grievous embarrassment; and yet he says, in spite of all this that it remains true that the Protestant faith has allowed millions of Germans (note the emphasis) have access to "spiritual" religion - that is to say, a religion free from ritual and dogma and hierarchy. It may be, in a rather compromised and unhelpful way, allied to the forms of the state church; nonetheless it is *spiritual* in a sense which Catholicism and Orthodoxy cannot be, and so is eminently worth investing in.

And in the 16th and last lecture he does touch very briefly on the question of the German genius: is Protestantism a particularly German creation? He doesn't want to commit himself on that - there was, after all, a man called John Calvin. But how interesting that Calvin has never made any impact on the German soul. It has only taken durable root among the English, the Scots and the Dutch; and he seems to assume that no self-respecting German could really take it seriously in the light of that...But Luther is a supreme example of the German genius. He is quintessentially a German, a fluent, persuasive, rhetorically enthusiastic and confident German, who uses the language in a new way, who reshapes the imagination of a whole people and, as Harnack observes in another gratuitous sideswipe at neighbours to the east, no Slav has ever done anything like that.

So his ideal church, it seems, is the local gathering of morally serious individuals, not backed by legislation, minimally sacramental (there is almost nothing in this book about the life of the sacraments) minimally institutional (there may be pastors but there are certainly not bishops); a community in which love is cultivated, individual charity is encouraged and moral perspective is deepened as regards both your personal and your public duties.

The enormous popularity of Harnack's lectures, not only before but after the War, shows what a chord he struck in the German religious imagination (and not only the German); but the problems of his position are not too difficult to tease out. Perhaps we can put it most simply by saying that there's no sense in Harnack of *conflicting identities*. There may be in your

spiritual self, your spiritual will, an awareness of the tension between different sorts of imperatives, but essentially your identity is that of the citizen of the benign patriarchal state to which you owe loyalty, in whose name you make oaths and may serve in the army. That there should be an identity as, let's say, a member of the community of the baptised, an identity which might set you apart in some way from the state, is not a perspective that can easily be found; there's not even very much sense in Harnack of tension between, let's say, the obligations, the identities and the loyalties which go with family life and the state. In good patriarchal tradition, this is a state where the life of the family and the organic community is always in harmony with the life of the wider political unit; or, to put it in terms which Hegel would well have understood, there is no Creon and Antigone problem on the horizon here.

So the freedom of conscience which is so important for Harnack remains something which never legitimises resistance at the external level. It will legitimate mental reservation, semi-detachment, private scepticism, but not a pushing back against the state; because if what we are working for is a *Volk von Brüdern*, a people of brothers, then you cannot pull away from the common task with the costs and the compromises that entails. Harnack would have been rather surprised to be told this but there are aspects of his thought which are quite remarkably in tune with 17th century Anglicanism, with, say, Lancelot Andrewes preaching as he did on Whitsunday in 1615 about the evils of Catholicism as a system employing the world's tactics of political violence - a pseudo-state once again: violence and public coercion are what's wrong with Catholicism in Andrewes' eyes (the violence and coercion of Jacobean England are the responsibility of the state in his eyes). And they chime too with the views of later 17th and 18th century Anglicans when they try to define the much misunderstood phrase "passive obedience": we owe the state "passive obedience" in the sense not that we necessarily do what the state orders, but that if we decide not to cooperate with the state, we must accept without protest what the state then does to us. You recognise the right of the state to punish you, even if you assert your own right not *actively* to cooperative - hence, *passive* obedience.

Harnack's misfortune is to be speaking at the beginning of a century in which the ethical standing of the state is about to become more urgent and controversial than ever. Can political authority, existing political authority, actually be criticised or resisted in loyalty to civil society? Can our actual loyalty to civil society, to the ensemble of all the specific moral communities to which we belong, provide a ground for actively resisting a state which is indeed asserting *Staatsomnipotenz*, the right of the state in every sphere of life? One of the older

Harnack's pupils was a young man called Dietrich Bonhoeffer who found his own answer to that question in a way very much at odds with what Harnack had assumed; but Bonhoeffer would have said if pressed that this was precisely what he was seeking to define - a loyalty to civil society that was not immediately and exhaustively coterminous with loyalty to the existing political settlement. Bonhoeffer was one of Harnack's favourite students, and Harnack was deeply dismayed when Bonhoeffer began to drift away under the malign influence of people like Karl Barth. But Bonhoeffer - who of course outlived Harnack - saw what Harnack was perhaps beginning to see at the end of his life but never had the opportunity to confront fully: the hypertrophism of the state which appears in the Third Reich.

Does the Church exist not only to cultivate inner dispositions but to ground or educate civil society and the possibilities of resistance through its own social practice? This is again a question which Harnack consistently wants to avoid - or indeed disallow. You could say that he does not see the moral tensions in political life as tensions about different kinds of belonging or, as I said earlier, different kinds of identity; and yet that is one of the ways in which, very typically, the political/ethical problems of the 20th century actually work themselves out; and they are issues still with us, if you think of the continuing and very complex discussion about what it is for a Muslim to inhabit diverse kinds of belonging within a single citizenship.

I mentioned once or twice the reaction of Karl Barth to Harnack. Barth, possibly the greatest Protestant theologian of 20th century (if not ever), had begun his ministry very much in Harnack's shadow and in Harnack's debt, like almost every other theologically educated person in Germany; but it is Barth himself who most vividly describes the experience of seeing Harnack's name in the list of subscribers to the Manifesto of the Intellectuals, a moment at which Barth says his entire intellectual and spiritual world dissolved. He believed that the events of 1914 were catastrophic, that the role of the Kaiser and the German government was malign, that there was a need for public debate and public criticism - not the organic and patriarchal solidarity to which Harnack and the Kaiser appealed. And so Barth began to rethink the foundations of his theology systematically, with the results - in the shape of millions of eloquent and exhilarating words - familiar possibly to some in the room as the *Church Dogmatics*. Bonhoeffer represents a somewhat more subtle, more exploratory reaction to Harnack; and yet the same issues are there. By the end of the 1920s, the political climate in Germany was moving inexorably in a direction which Harnack in fact found as uncongenial, as did Barth and Bonhoeffer. The difference was simply that Barth and Bonhoeffer believed they

had to look elsewhere for resources to meet this new and toxic Germany which was coming into being.

It is not that well known that Harnack was one of those who drafted the constitution of the Weimar Republic. He attempted in the post war period to do rather more than his lectures actually licensed him to do - that is, to move more actively into the public and political sphere and attempt to shape something like a pluralist and democratic society. To his eternal credit, he battled against the rising tide of anti-Semitism in Germany. Yet when he died in 1930, it's hard not to think that he must have looked at his political life's work as profoundly under threat at that moment. And to understand something of what was going on in that heightened overheated intellectual and spiritual environment of late summer 1914, to understand some of the confusions and the lacunae in public discourse, public thinking, it helps, I believe, to look back at the achievement of this extraordinary and, in the light of later events, tragic figure who believed with total sincerity that it was indeed possible to define Christianity once and for all in a way that restricted it to the transformation of individuals, took it out of the risky public arena of conflict, debate and policy formation and preserved it safe for those whom Hegel would have called "beautiful souls".

Harnack is a giant among European intellectuals. That he is a flawed giant is perhaps to say no more than we would have to say about most intellectual giants in European history. But if we want to see something of the moral force, the moral perspective which animated those who wanted in the late summer of 1914 to defend the morality of Germany's response Harnack is no bad place to start. The lectures on the "Essence of Christianity" remain wonderful reading: they are vivid, often personal, pictorially clear, delivered in a wonderfully elegant conversational German which is a delight to read, and is not quite captured by the English translations. They reflect a man who believed with all his heart that it was right for a theologian to be a public intellectual - but that the way in which a theologian was most appropriately a public intellectual was by the careful demarcation of what the public and the private were about, and privileging the private. It is not an ignoble task or vision. That it did not work and now fails to persuade in the light of the 20th century (not least the 20th century in Germany) is not exactly Harnack's fault; but he leaves us with some profoundly interesting questions, not only about 100 years ago, but about Britain and Europe today.

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