

†Sisters and brothers in Christ, on this day one hundred years ago after four years of European self-flagellation, peace was finally secured, *or so it seemed at the time*. There was a cessation of fire but it was very shaky because the Germans tried subsequently to resume fighting in order to have at least achieved some of the initially ambitious war-aims that had been tabled back in September 1914. --- At that time the German armies on the Western Front had stormed through Belgium and were poised to execute the encirclement of Paris. The much vaunted **Schlieffen Plan** was coming together like clockwork. In Berlin the government had prepared a blue-print called the **September Program** for the re-drawing of the map of Europe from the English Channel in the West to the Ural Mountains in the East, the *Mittleuropa* project. That was done in the fond belief that with the impending collapse of France they would be the undisputed masters of all Europe and as well of the overseas territories of the conquered or intimidated neighbours, the *Mittelafrika Plan*. The Kaiser and his generals and admirals had set out to paint the map of the world Prussian blue, as a famous Swiss historian once remarked. Certainly where there was the red of the British Empire it was now going to be definitely blue for imaginable time. Then there would be peace but, of course, on Prussian-German terms.

Why did the German ruling and educated classes think like that? Well, they were obviously a lot smarter and cultured than anyone else. [Who thinks like that today?] What they called their **Kultur** was infinitely superior to that of the other nations of Europe. In every respect Germans were at the forefront of civilisation with the best scientists, engineers, industrialists, doctors, composers, musicians, painters, philosophers, explorers, ship builders, economists, generals AND theologians. In all these disciplines German professors attracted students from the entire world, even from distant Australia. Why were we fighting them; why couldn't the nations, all heirs to the Enlightenment, live in peace and harmony?

I mentioned "theologians" especially because the German biblical scholars of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century were unquestionably the world leaders who attracted famous students from Britain, North America and the rest of Europe. German research had revolutionised theological scholarship. They were the world's leaders in thinking about the life and times of Jesus of Nazareth, **the Prince of Peace**. How did this square with their leadership in militarism? I mentioned also that Germany was proud of its great Field Marshalls, foremost among whom was Helmut von Moltke. He was greatly revered because he led the Prussian-German armies to resounding victories over the Danes, the Austrians and the French in the three so-called wars of German unification between 1864 and 1870.

Later von Moltke entered the Prussian Upper House when he wrote to a Swiss law professor on the question of peace. In 1880, the Swiss scholar had published a book on international law in which he argued that it was now time for the nations to work together for world peace. Von Moltke responded with a saying that has gone down in history as epitomising the German attitude to war ever since, and I may add that there are even now among German historians and politicians in the new **Alternative für Deutschland** party advocates of this point of view:

Von Moltke responded to the Swiss professor as follows: ***“Eternal peace is a dream – and not even a beautiful one. War is part of God’s world order. Within it unfold the noblest virtues of men, courage and self-abnegation, loyalty to duty and readiness for sacrifice – at the hazard of one’s own life. Without war the world would sink into a quagmire of materialism.”***

Sisters and brothers in Christ this mentality predominated not only among the Prusso-German officer class but also in the upper and middle classes. Only among the working class and a handful of pacifists was there opposition. And among the theologians there was the endorsement of “war theology.” --- What is “war theology” for, you well may ask? --- It is to show that nation’s foreign policy is in accordance with the will of almighty God. --- And how do you establish the will or mind of God, especially when every nation on both sides of the war believed they had God on their side. In the British Empire we fought for “God, King and Country” while the Germans with their motto “Gott mit uns” were equally absolutely sure they were fulfilling the will of God in subjugating all surrounding countries.

The absurdity of this view is only outweighed by the tragedy it causes. If you firmly believe you have God on your side or can assert that you know the mind of God, you can justify all manner of atrocities. So far humanity has not been able to solve this problem. Must we assert again with Helmut von Moltke that eternal peace is an unattainable dream?

Sisters and brothers in Christ the nations now a century later are no better than our predecessors. Why? Because there are too many, mostly Moslem groups, who believe that they know the mind of God which is to exterminate everybody who does not believe as they do. Again a grotesque absurdity. And in the West we have powers which continue to insist on the right to carry out pre-emptive strikes such as ***shock and awe*** to enforce their will on others. Barbarism still prevails. So where is the solution? It is obviously not “war theology”; rather it is in “peace theology” and that means understanding the Gospel admonition to peace to apply here and now. Gratefully, I can name at least one world leader who believes that and implements it in her refugee policy and that is the East German pastor’s daughter Angela Merkel who happens to be the current Chancellor of Germany but will soon step down. The world needs more intelligent, faithful Christian politicians like her. Watch this space! †