SCOTTISH ARCHIVES 2023 Volume 29

George MacLeod, Baron MacLeod of Fuinary: Living Faith and Learning about Class Divisions in the First World War

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This article uses the archival deposit of George MacLeod (1895–1991), a highly influential and controversial Church of Scotland minister, founder of the Iona Community, decorated war hero, author, peace campaigner, social reformer and public intellectual, held at the National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh. MacLeod self-curated and gifted the collection, which includes personal correspondence, items relevant to his founding and leading of the Iona Community (1938), his year as Moderator of the Church of Scotland in 1957, and his later political work as the first peer of the Green Party. This article uses his school diaries, letters home from university, war diaries, battlefield scrapbook, letters to friends and family during his service as an officer in the First World War, and his letters home while training for ministry in Edinburgh and New York. In doing so, it sheds new light on MacLeod's shift from the elite culture of legal studies at Oriel College, Oxford to his post-war decision to train for the ministry at the University of Edinburgh, his later service with Toc H, a Christian organisation that was birthed from the trenches and MacLeod's later ministry dedicated to healing the class divide in the Church of Scotland.

George MacLeod was one of the best known and one of the most controversial ministers in the Church of Scotland in the twentieth century. He is mostly remembered today for founding the Iona Community in 1938, which rebuilt the historic Abbey on the Hebridean island of Iona, traceable to the time of St Columba in the sixth century.[1] The Iona Community project used the task of rebuilding the Abbey to reconnect the working class to the Church of Scotland. It was essentially a programme of class inculturation for new Divinity graduates from the Scottish universities who would be exposed to working-class craftsmen by living in community with them on the island. For ministers who were finishing their training, the two-year programme would include the winters which were spent in pairs working in industrial parishes across Scotland. MacLeod's motivation for this Iona Community project can be traced back to his experiences in the First World War. The war, for him, was a life-changing experience. He relayed on a radio broadcast that on the train returning from the war he had an intense conversion experience. Falling onto his knees in the railway carriage he repented of his selfishness and immorality, including gambling and

[1] See B. Ritchie, *Columba: The Faith of an Island Soldier* (Fearn, 2019).

the use of alcohol and cigarettes, and committed his life to God's service.[2] His biographer, Ronald Ferguson, suggested that this was a case of 'MacLeodian dramatization', yet affirmed that 'something must have happened to push him in the direction of ministry'.[3] George MacLeod was well known as a storyteller and truth-stretcher, and the striking account of his conversion experience may not be completely accurate. Yet understanding the impact of the war on MacLeod is paramount for understanding his later ministry. This article builds on Ferguson's hypothesis that the war was a transformative experience for MacLeod through a detailed exploration of the wartime pieces in the larger National Library of Scotland archival collection from MacLeod, 'Correspondence and Papers of Lord Macleod of Fuinary, 1935–1969' (Acc.9084). The close analysis of MacLeod's relationship with class, faith and Scottish identity reveals a sustained period of transformation during the war that continued and shaped his later ministry.

The article is split into three sections. The first outlines MacLeod's early life until his entrance into the war, highlighting his comfortable privilege, his close family's ambivalence to the working class, and his formative Church of England years. The middle section concentrates on MacLeod's time in service during the First World War, his experiences of dealing with trauma and the immense responsibility of being an officer at the age of twenty-two. The last section follows MacLeod's choices after the war, which saw him move away from what could have been an easily graspable, privileged ministerial life towards working in industrial, working-class parishes through Toc H and independently.

Born on 17 June 1895 to an aristocratic family, George MacLeod had a privileged childhood and adolescence. His father, Sir John Mackintosh MacLeod, was a successful accountant and devoted Conservative Party supporter. He was the Unionist MP for Glasgow Central 1915–18 and Glasgow Kelvingrove 1918–22, before being elected to serve David Lloyd George's coalition government. His mother Edith came from a family of very high social standing, the Fieldens, who owned one of the largest cotton manufacturers in the world.[4] John Fielden, Edith's grandfather, was a Quaker who promoted the 1847 Factories Act, commonly known as the '10 Hour Bill', which reduced the hours children and women could work. Edith's father, Joshua, did not inherit this radical consciousness for social justice and served as Conservative MP from 1868 to 1880 for the Eastern Division of the West Riding of Yorkshire. He had a Gothic house with thirty bedrooms built at Nutfield Priory in Surrey.[5] In a less extravagantly upper-class household, the young George MacLeod grew up at 4 Park Circus Place, Glasgow, in a house staffed by a cook, a maid and a nanny. He attended Edinburgh's Cargilfield Preparatory School for Boys from the age of eight, and Winchester College from the age of fourteen, in 1909.

2 R. Ferguson, *George MacLeod: The Founder of the Iona Community* (London, 1990), 53.
3 Ibid.
4 Ibid., 18–19.
5 Ibid.

Winchester College, founded in 1387, moulded young boys of the upper classes into future societal leaders. George was confirmed into the Anglican Church at Winchester, dutifully attended chapel, was passing his studies and tried to avoid sport. In his letters home in 1911 he wrote about how excited he was to see the father of his schoolfriend Edward Keble Talbot enthroned as bishop of Winchester and how his headmaster Hubert Burge would become bishop of Southwark in Talbot's place.[6] His enthusiasm in this correspondence illustrates the extent to which George was shaped by and immersed in Anglo-Catholicism during his time at public school and later at the University of Oxford. Talbot is remembered for coining the term 'diffusive Christianity', by which he meant the faith that characterised the Christendom of British society, rather than the faith embedded or 'embodied' in those who regularly attended church. When bishop of Rochester, Talbot accused one of the churches in his diocese of not relating properly to the working classes and held that the Church had a duty towards those outside of church attendance, a view that was close to that voiced by Thomas Chalmers, Scotland's most influential nineteenth-century evangelical.[7]

The MacLeod family harboured a rich lineage of Church of Scotland ministers, most famously George's grandfather Rev. Dr Norman MacLeod (1812–72), minister of the Barony Church, Glasgow. The family also attended Park Church, Glasgow, of which Rev. Dr Donald MacLeod (1831–1916), George's great-uncle, was the minister. George's school letters reveal that religion was an important part of his early life, but a Church of Scotland Presbyterian identity was absent. During his time studying Law at Oriel College, Oxford, however, we see hints of a Presbyterian distinction coming through. In a letter to his parents, dated 1 February 1914, George commented on 'The Mission' which was aimed towards the undergraduates of Oxford. He outlined that Charles Gore, bishop of Oxford and Edward Talbot, bishop of Winchester, were delivering the sermons that aimed to present 'Christianity as the Church of England understands it'. George explained that it was a great opportunity to hear 'Christianity as a composite whole', alongside being intrigued to find out what Gore 'really thinks' and finally to be exposed to 'what episcopacy really is'. He also explained how the event was primarily intended for communicants of the Church of England but that all were welcome, which he believed was generous.[8]

George MacLeod enlisted for service in the First World War on 19 September 1914. His father was the recruitment officer. George served with the 12th (Service) Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (Princess Louise's) who fought at Salonika (Thessaloniki), Greece. In the August of 1916, suffering from dysentery

6 National Library of Scotland (hereafter NLS), Acc.9084/394, G. MacLeod, School Letters, 11 May 1911. Edward Stuart Talbot served as bishop of Winchester from 1911 to 1923.

7 S. Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain* (Solihull, 2017), 29.

8 NLS, Acc.9084/394, G. MacLeod, Oriel College, Oxford Letters, 1 February 1914.

he was placed on a hospital ship to dock at Malta – from which he eyed up his sister's holiday photographs of the Island of Iona.[9] He was repatriated to Glasgow to recover from the November of 1916. He re-entered the war into the 11th regiment to serve on the Western Front at Ypres where he was made a fully fledged adjutant.[10] On receipt of his promotion, he wrote to his family in his usual lively manner:

> I am glad to tell you that the Adjutant has sent in his resignation and that the C. O. sent a letter off today applying me as his Adjutant. Of course it's going to go through 30 offices yet and be countersigned and sneezed on, and left to dry etc., but it's a more or less sure thing. […] You know as well as I do how bucked I am to get the job […] The fading away of the Salonika job was a bit of a jar – and that to come out to a new and unknown Battalion and find the job vacant within three weeks of arrival was to out it, in my opinion, a God send (being a Britisher I blush to write it – extraordinary nation) and far too good a 22nd birthday present.[11]

George seemingly enjoyed the responsibility and office work that would counter the boredom of waiting. He also commented how 'the Operation Orders for a move here are child's play to the old Salonika game, with its 120 mules, all to be detailed to different jobs. It still makes me hot just thinking of it!'[12] This new administrative environment, however, quickly wore off. Eight days later George wrote:

> whatever you find and wherever you land, the Bde. messenger routs you out, with his beastly documents. It meant continuous office work for the rest of the day. Today we received 'Standing Orders' for the —Army. This comprises 80 pages of 2 column printing […] Heaven knows what we are supposed to do with it! As we certainly can never read it! But that is a common occurrence- The trouble is about 1 in 4 of these things are useful – absolutely essential to know, however many pages it is – and you have to clutch at each till you discover, which basket it should occupy […] I have always a colossal rubbish heap![13]

A week later he wrote to his mother, 'I am glad to tell you "It" came through two days ago and I am now "full fledged". My letters should be addressed Lt. & Adjt.

[9] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Ellen, 14 August 1916. The link with Iona appears also when MacLeod was serving in France, when 'in the middle of a Bosche trench where a message came from Bde a mile away to go to all units. Guess what it is. You Never Will. It was a list of all the David MacBrayne Steamer Sailings, during the winter months, and showed me exactly how I could get from Gigha to Portree. […] Of course it meant for men going on leave, organisation marvellous but absolutely overdone.' NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Family, 25 October 1917.

[10] NLS, Acc.9084/40/4, First order front line for Operation Ypres, 15 July 1917. The 11th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders were part of 45th Infantry Brigade. The attack opened on 31 July 1917.

[11] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Family, 28 July 1917.

[12] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 20 June 1917.

[13] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Family, 28 June 1917.

G. F. MacLeod – not that I care a hang, but it is correct.'[14] The laissez-faire attitude to this new rank, however, was exposed as false in the very same letter where he had a 'bust up' with his Commanding Officer who prevented George going into town for dinner. He 'decided to strike' and reminded the C.O. that he had worked every evening for six weeks despite being promoted to adjutant, and while he was 'happy to be wounded' he was not happy to 'work myself off the rails'.[15] The C.O. agreed with George's complaints and provided him with an assistant.

His division was merged with the 8th regiment on 24 June 1917 and saw George further promoted to the rank of adjutant and captain. He was awarded the Military Cross in the August of 1917 at Ypres when his Commanding Officer and 330 of 400 men did not return[16] and the Croix de Guerre in 1918 in the Battle of the Soissonnais and of the Ourcq, including the attack from Villemontoire and Buzancy, where the 15th Scottish Division joined the 17th French Division.[17]

The pacifism for which MacLeod would later be well known is absent in many of his letters, especially to his father:

> Our little show ended in 3 M.C's and 30 prisoners, and the whole thing was only planned two days before. So we are all very bucked, and the men are as cheery as Sandboys, and all out for Bosche blood, which is right, as the prayer book (Christian) says.[18]

His father had 'special permission' to visit the front line at Ypres, with which he was impressed. John MacLeod also encouraged munition workers in Glasgow to up their speed to 'rain hell on the Germans'.[19] Also an elder at Park Church, where his brother was minister, George's aligning of faith and the war to justify the violence would not have been unusual to his father's ears. However, by 1918 the situation at home in Scotland was more complicated, with the numerous casualties, vivid war depictions and economic unrest unsettling the previously confident stances of the Scottish churches and its ministers.[20] George, hearing

14 NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 8 July 1917.

15 Ibid.

16 Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 41.

17 When telling the news of his Croix de Guerre to his father, MacLeod humbly wrote 'heavens knows why' he deserved it: NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Father, 10 August 1918. A letter from H. L. Reed to Sir John MacLeod enclosing an account by Lieut. René Puaux, French Army, on the erection of a memorial to the fallen of the 15th Scottish Division is kept at NLS, Acc.9084/38. C. Baker, '15th (Scottish) Division', The Long, Long Trail, https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/order-of-battle-of-divisions/15th-scottish-division/.

18 NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Father, 24 April 1918.

19 Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 33–4.

20 See S. Brown, '"A Solemn Purification by Fire": Responses to the Great War in the Scottish Presbyterian Churches, 1914–19', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 45:1 (1994), 82–104, 100–2.

about the situation at home from his Unionist father MP wrote from France, 'Father: I hope this brings the people of Britain to their senses, including the Amalgamated Societies of Cowards. Lloyd George's speech was great!'[21] The last year of the war was MacLeod's most certain in his fervour and duty as a soldier of the British Empire. His most vivid celebrations of military warfare, however, came in the March and April of 1918: 'Bosche had TERRIFIC casualties',[22] and while recovering in the 'cellars' he wrote to his family, 'Bosche casualties were AWFUL. I will tell you about it someday. You can imagine it was a great day for me.'[23]

As hinted at above, the Great War, in Scotland, was a religiously justified war. Stewart Brown commented how the War created a new sense of co-operation and unity at home that bolstered the social gospel efforts of the Scottish churches.[24] Norman Maclean, with whom George MacLeod would serve his assistantship in St Cuthbert's, wrote about how his parish was 'overflowing' in 1914.[25] This religiosity also entered the battlefield, when Charles L. Warr, a son of the manse from the Western Highlands, serving in the 1/9 (9th) Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders (which departed for the Western Front in February 1915), published a volume of stories dealing with the war after being injured in early 1916. The book was extremely popular, going through ten editions and included multiple divine manifestations such as 'The Unseen Host', as described here by Stewart Brown:

> A British unit is defending a strategically vital section of trench against a German attack. Wave after wave of German troops swarm forward, their bodies piling up on the barbed wire, until the British machine gun jams. As the attackers are about to over-run the position, an 'unseen host' of angels, led by the archangel Michael, comes to the aid of the British survivors. The Germans alone can see the agents of divine vengeance and are frozen with terror; those who are not shot by the British defenders turn and flee.[26]

Divine intervention also featured in George MacLeod's letters. To comfort the mother of his fallen Commanding Officer he wrote,

> All are doubting. But, if it were not for the glorious glimpses [which are] so absolutely certain that one can stand it easily. God is collecting round him a most wonderful Army, for some great purpose, and when one thinks of all the splendid men who have gone over, one can't get away from the glorious possibilities despite all the human misgivings and despair.[27]

[21] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Father, 27 March 1918.
[22] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Ellen, 30 March 1918.
[23] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Family, 3 April 1918.
[24] Brown, 'Solemn Purification by Fire', 86.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Ibid., 88–9.
[27] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mrs Mitchell, 16 April 1918.

Religious justifications for the war were common in the first two years, but following huge losses of life and conscription from the January of 1916 (and for married men in the May), doubts were becoming more prevalent. Charles Warr's second volume of stories, published in the October of 1916 included no divine illustrations.[28] From the April of 1917 the horrors of the trenches, rather than creating 'respect' for the moral teachings or authority of the churches, produced what was described by Professor David Cairns and his committee on 'The Army and Religion' as 'trench fatalism', a religiosity based upon the timing of one's end.[29] This atmosphere eclipsed MacLeod who revealed in a letter to his mother in July 1917:

> I have heard it said that a man comes out of this war with a very real religion or no religion at all […] personally, I think any man who sees this war, must come out with a very real religion or cut his throat! I can't see how it's bearable to the 'no religion at all class.'
>
> Is it that 50% of the British Nation have ceased to think – it almost seems so. What people say about 'the British are alright, but their religion is so deep, that you can't see it' is hopelessly overdone. It's impossible. If it's there then it's somebody's job, to bring it out. Religion isn't there for oneself, its there for others.[30]

Evidently MacLeod was not satisfied with what Michael Snape describes as 'diffusive Christianity', which showed itself in the urban working class through the 'phenomenal popularity of hymn singing',[31] occasional prayer, and the willingness to attend services run by the YMCA or the padres (army chaplains).[32] Snape's research discusses how the chaplains found that the religious education of men who served during the First World War was generally poor. This was found both in those who attended public schools, where religiosity would become a monotonous routine, and in those who had gone to council schools, where intellectual rigour was deemed to be missing.[33] Hymn singing especially invoked a sense of nostalgia for men serving in the war, bringing back fond memories of Sunday School or school assemblies. Singing also enabled them to express emotions that were meant to be suppressed in the toxic masculine culture of war.[34] Religious objects also held not only sentimental associations, but the power of hope. Bibles, for instance, were respected and circulated, and understood

28 Brown, 'Solemn Purification by Fire', 93–4.

29 D. Cairns, *The Army and Religion: An Enquiry and its Bearing upon the Religious Life of the Nation* (London, 1919), 238–56.

30 NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 25 July 1917.

31 M. Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London, 2007), 53.

32 M. Snape, *The Redcoat and Religion: The Forgotten History of the British Soldier from the Age of Marlborough to the Eve of the First World War* (London, 2005), 177.

33 Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 22–8.

34 S. C. Williams, *Religious Belief and Popular Culture in Southwark, c.1880–1939* (Oxford, 1999), 148–54.

as amulets that could bring luck.[35] MacLeod's claim that religion 'is there for others' is a direct criticism of trench fatalism or religious sentimentality. George MacLeod was a pragmatist. He enjoyed planning, leading and organising. Christianity was something that should inspire action and movement rather than subdue someone into complacency.

He wrote explicitly to his family, detailing the events with which he struggled. A scrapbook of the war produced by MacLeod, entitled 'Some Episodes in the Life of An Officer in Kitchener's Army', expounds on their mission to Salonika (Thessaloniki) and details how MacLeod 'lost [his] heart' when seeing its cathedral, statues and parliament. After an explosion targeted the city, leaving it 'covered with human remains', the army doctor was concerned with 'the state of [George's] insides', referring not only to the operation performed where five bullets were extracted, but also the mental trauma MacLeod experienced.[36] The creative exploit of the scrapbook, replacing MacLeod's usual prolific style of writing diaries, might be demonstrative of his inability to verbally communicate or process the mental anguish of this mission. His usual humour, however, came across with his descriptions of how leaving the trenches and all their 'home comforts', including 'animals', to travel was tricky, how the 'postal arrangements' in Greece 'left nothing to be desired', and how playing golf 'surrounded by hills on both sides' was a highlight.[37] The night before he was due to begin Operation Ypres, for which he was awarded the Military Cross he wrote,

> Mother. Again this is not a letter. It is just to say Cheeriho. I cant quite remember when I wrote last, but we have been going strong ever since. I look forward to a bit of rest when this show is over – it's been some week, or ten days.

Although masked by his cheerfulness, his family was evidently on his mind.[38]

This is not to say that MacLeod disliked the more relaxed elements of Christianity on the battlefield. He shared with his mother a joke that a Tommy (slang for common soldier) wrote from Palestine, '"Dear Barbara, I am now in Palestine where Christ was born, and I wish to Christ I was in Wigan, where I was born." Yours, Bert.'[39] He also wrote of the 'good concerts' from the YMCA.[40] It was common for men from the Church of Scotland and the English Free Churches to join the massive efforts of the YMCA, which benefited from an influx of membership after the war.[41] David Cairns, for example, who would

35 Snape, *God and the British Soldier*, 33.

36 NLS, Acc.9084/36, G. MacLeod, 'Some Episodes in the Life of an Officer in Kitchener's Army', 12 June 1916.

37 Ibid.

38 NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 30 July 1917. Shortly after, on 3 August, he wrote, 'out again ROT after taking off boots'.

39 NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 28 May 1918.

40 Ibid.

41 See Snape's introduction in (ed.) M. Snape, *The Back Parts of War: The YMCA Memoirs and Letters of Barclay Baron, 1915 to 1919* (Woodbridge, 2009), 11.

be so important for MacLeod in later life as one of the first Trustees of the Iona Community, served with the YMCA during the war. This came about partly through his previous connections in Aberdeen but also because of his admiration for John Mott, who was the General Secretary of the International Committee of the YMCA from 1915.[42] George, however, was attracted to the work of Talbot House, which he signed up to in Ypres.[43]

Rev. Philip 'Tubby' Clayton opened Talbot House in December 1915 in Poperinghe, situated near the front line of Flanders Field.[44] It provided a touch of home comfort for the men serving, with hot food, carpets, camaraderie and a quiet chapel in the Upper Room.[45] Clayton recorded that the war was the least popular discussion topic in the house.[46] It is remembered that in the space of Talbot House the formalities and hierarchies of the army were irrelevant. The chapel became an important part of the house, a place of 'peace' created from the culmination of hopeful prayers.[47] Talbot House extended into a movement after the war, called Toc H (the army signalling abbreviation for Talbot House), after it became apparent that the men returning home missed both the fellowship and the broad denominational welcome they had found at Toc H in Belgium.[48]

Linda Parker reflects that 'in a very real sense, Clayton believed that the suffering of the war could be redeemed by the Toc H movement, not least in its breaking down of class barriers'.[49] The sense of equality between men, despite the rigid hierarchy of the army, presented itself in George's decision not to be present at the wedding of his sister Ellen to Norman (an army friend). He explained he could not possibly attend when he had been refusing men leave

42 M. Finlayson, 'Intellectual Biography of David Smith Cairns (1862–1946)' (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2015), 159–60.

43 NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Ellen, 12 August 1917; NLS, Acc.9084/421, G. MacLeod, Letter from Sherington Camp, October 1914.

44 J. Rice and K. Prideaux-Brune, *Out of a Hop Loft: Seventy-Five Years of Toc H* (London, 1990), 5. Despite over 200,000 women working in uniform during the First World War, the founding purpose of Talbot House was officially for the soldiers, and therefore just 'men'. It was named after Lieut. Gilbert Talbot, son of Bishop E. S. Talbot, who was killed in the war. He was another Winchester College pupil, who left in 1910 (also for Oxford), and hence would have been known to MacLeod as the brother of his friend Edward and a prominent Winchester pupil. See Winchester College, 'Talbot, Gilbert Walter Lyttelton', https://www.winchestercollegeatwar.com/RollofHonour.aspx?RecID=456&TableName=ta_wwifactfile.

45 Rice and Prideaux-Brune, *Out of a Hop Loft*, 6–9.

46 P. B. Clayton, *Plain Tales from Flanders* (London, 1929), 7.

47 Rice and Prideaux-Brune, *Out of a Hop Loft*, 8–10. The chapel and services were Anglican in rite but welcomed all denominations.

48 A. Robinson, 'The Royal Army Chaplains' Department and the Legacy of the First World War', in (ed.) M. Snape and E. Madigan, *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Oxford, 2013), 199–211, 200.

49 L. Parker, '"Shell-Shocked Prophets": Anglican Army Chaplains and Post-war Reform in the Church of England', in (ed.) Snape and Madigan, *The Clergy in Khaki*, 183–97, 196.

while their mothers were dying.[50] It is interesting that MacLeod found Toc H so influential, and this reveals much about his allegiance to the Anglican social theology that he had encountered at Winchester. MacLeod's choice of Toc H rather than the YMCA therefore was not on theological or social justice grounds. It seems probable that MacLeod felt more at home in a top-down organisation, run by public school men who had a heart for the working class rather than in a context like the YMCA which was much larger and therefore much more diverse.

While an officer, George appreciated the opportunity to converse theologically and politically with men of diverse class and denominational backgrounds.[51] He was, however, frustrated with the sentimentality or fatalism present in the popular faith of the trenches. MacLeod preferred to see divine justification and reason for the war.

The war most likely enabled MacLeod's first close contact with working-class men. His tone in the letters to his family display how George observed and noticed the mannerisms of the working class, understanding himself to be displaced from them. Harry Lauder, the Scottish singer and comedian put on a concert for the 11th Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, and George commented to his sister, 'Its most extraordinary the influence the fellow has on the Scotch Tommies. They sat for two hours waiting for him, and stood up and cheered him, as he arrived, as if he was the King.'[52] Lauder was joined by the Rev. Mr Adam, from Falkirk and Mr James Hogge, the Liberal MP for Edinburgh, 'the Pensions man' as described by MacLeod. He recorded how

> Hogge also spoke, and told 'the Boys' to vote against the Government after the War, if they didn't get all the Pensions they wanted. He said 'When you have finished fighting the Germans, come back and fight the Government', which was a pretty statement. Of course, it went down their throats and they cheered – and the Government can d— well blame themselves for giving the fellow a pass.

David Lloyd George struggled to keep the Liberals on board with the coalition – most of which stayed loyal to H. H. Asquith. MacLeod therefore still seemed supportive of his father and his Unionist pledge, but did not blame the working-class soldiers for supporting the Liberals, only the government for their failures.

His distance from his working-class comrades, however, did not dismiss his gratitude for them. In a letter to his sister he outlined,

[50] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Ellen, 8 December 1918; NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 8 July 1917, 'meeting Norman in two nights time – nearer the Bosche than any two MacLeods have been before'.

[51] He wrote home about conversations with Roman Catholic chaplains: NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Ellen, 12 August 1917.

[52] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Ellen, 18 June 1917. Lauder gave a concert the previous evening which was attended by five thousand men, some walking for four miles to attend.

> Ellen, don't think I did anything wonderful, or past endurance, because at the time its quite extraordinary how commonplace the whole thing is. But what I do want you to realise is what these men did; They couldn't get a change of clothes when they came in; They never got that one cup of coca on the second day; They carried rounds of ammunition, rations for _ days; and a big tool. They had a rifle to carry, and there were as cheery – every one of them – and good tempered at the end, as if they were coming out of a second house at the Pavilion. They are an absolute marvel, and if they crock up in their brain, and happen to go away before the battle is finished, you know what happens to them […] Yes, yes it has got to happen, its necessary for discipline – that is quite true –

George evidently noticed the dedication and work of the average soldier and cared for their well-being. George suffered with his own mental health later in life, in 1933 after his ministry in Govan, and possibly also after the incident mentioned earlier when he was injured serving in Greece during the war. The doctor there being 'scared of the state of my insides' would be a sophisticated, early understanding of mental illness.[53] Although repatriated suffering from dysentery, perhaps George realised how the mental healing he benefited from when recovering at home was not readily available to all.

He also tried to understand the struggles of the average soldier. In the same letter he shared,

> but I read the other day in the papers that Countess Markiewitz and her friends, who a year ago were found guilty as TRAITORS to their Country, were released and had a public welcome in Dublin – Ellen that is the sort of thing that is sickening people out here, and I CANNOT see how anyone can answer it […] But that is why a lot of people here are fed up to the teeth, with the government – please send last three pages to Father.[54]

The irony of those scarred by the 'Great War' being put to death for escaping, and the Countess at the head of the 1916 Easter Rising being released, was evident to George, perhaps sympathising more with the men than the government's appeasement attempts with Ireland.

George was quick to comment on political events at home, and communicate the feelings of the working classes whom he was beginning to understand. His mother had an 'exhibition in Thrift' which George commented 'sounds fascinating, though I hear that the people are rather obstreperous – Mother, close it! That's not what is wanted – the sooner these people climb down the better, and the more there will be, that is worth fighting for.' Ronald Ferguson explains that Edith MacLeod was involved in the meetings of the Patriotic Food League that urged people to be economical with their food. There was much objection to upper-class ladies telling people from the West End how to spend

[53] NLS, Acc.9084/36, G. MacLeod, 'Some Episodes in the Life of an Officer in Kitchener's Army', 12 June 1916.

[54] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Ellen, 12 August 1917.

their earnings.[55] George continued, 'It makes one positively sick to hear it – Oh we are going to have Some Fun, after the War – People discuss Revolutions here!'[56] The revolutions that provided some hope for the soldiers fighting had to be balanced by George's concern for his upper-class family living in Glasgow during the Red Clydeside unrest.

When discussing with his father his return from the battlefield and his future plans George commented,

> At the age of 23, with degrees to get, and a desire to have all my present Vim to 'hit up' the Church of Scotland with, I don't think there is any time to be lost. I had intended to go up to Oxford to finish off, and then Glasgow. Oriel's letter has rather turned that up.[57]

All students who served in the war were given a BA to make room for the new cohort at Oxford. During his time with his family in Glasgow after the war, George decided to take up the two years requirement of study (reduced from three years) to become a minister in the Church of Scotland from 1919 to 1921 at the University of Edinburgh.

Fresh out of Edinburgh Divinity training, George's next step was a postgraduate year at Union Theological Seminary, New York. In a letter to his mother in October 1921 he outlined how he was excited with the courses on preaching, public worship, religious experience and New Testament study.[58] Unlike Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who studied there a few years later in 1930 at the age of twenty-four,[59] MacLeod, aged twenty-six at the time, evaded interaction with the black community in Harlem and restricted his socialising to upper-class contacts. George seemed unimpressed with the academic content of the courses, tending to go into more detail with his mother than his father, to whom he would boast about knowing more than certain professors and how he disagreed with them. He also wrote to his sister Ellen that he had, 'no desire to stay permanently.

[55] Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 43.

[56] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 20 June 1917. We can assume the dashes are meant to show a quotation.

[57] NLS, Acc.9084/37, G. MacLeod, Letter to Father, 15 January 1919.

[58] NLS, Acc.9084/396, G. MacLeod, Letter to Mother, 8 October 1921.

[59] See (ed.) C. J. Green, D. Bonhoeffer, *Barcelona, Berlin, New York: 1928–1931, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Works*, X (Pennsylvania, 2008) and K. Clements, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ecumenical Quest* (Geneva, 2015). Despite his own lack of involvement, George retrospectively recorded that the East Harlem Experiment, which he states received inspiration from the Iona Community, was the most important Protestant experiment in America: G. MacLeod, 'What Do You Think of American Religion?', *The Coracle*, 28 (March 1956), 9–26, 23. He visited this experiment in the winter of 1954–55 during his time as Harry Emerson Fosdick Visiting Professor at Union Theological Seminary: A. Forsyth, *Mission by the People: Re-Discovering the Dynamic Missiology of Tom Allan and His Scottish Contemporaries* (Eugene, 2017), 168.

If this is God's country, then I prefer to be an atheist.'[60] George, however, did have one life-changing experience during his year at Union Theological Seminary. Here, he met Tubby Clayton, who was on a preaching tour. The encounter was so successful that Clayton enlisted George as Toc H's secretary in New York for his remaining time there and MacLeod even accompanied Clayton on some of his trips to promote the organisation.[61] After completing his year in New York, George ventured to Canada for some international experience for six months before returning to Scotland.

George found success on return to Scotland. His aristocratic roots helped him to gain an impressive assistant position at Edinburgh's famous St Giles Cathedral.[62] During the mid-1920s St Giles served some of the city's poorest people who were living in very overcrowded housing conditions. Ronald Ferguson recounted the involvement George had with destitute young people and local families while in post here.[63] This was not necessarily the motivation of the whole Church of Scotland at the time. The Moderator of 1925 was John White, who in his Moderator's Address announced that, 'we are not called upon to elaborate any scheme of social economics or politics … [we] should refrain from the technical side of economics, which is a science for experts, in which the church has no authority'.[64] MacLeod disagreed with White's view and, inspired by Clayton, continued to serve the Toc H movement, working as a Padre while serving in St Giles with a particular mission to young men, influencing his parish work through a voluntary organisation. On 21 September 1924, George was ordained as a minister in the Church of Scotland and, unusually, took up a full-time appointment as a Toc H padre in Glasgow.[65] In an article written for *The Compass: The National Welfare Magazine*, MacLeod described himself as a 'padre to shipbuilders' from the hub of Douglas Street Glasgow and explained

60 NLS, Acc.9084/396, Letter to Ellen, 15 August 1921.

61 S. Smith, 'Everyman's Club?', *One Hundred Years of Toc H: A Collection of Essays*, http://tochcentenary.com/2016/11/16/everymans-club/.

62 Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 60–2.

63 Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 56–7.

64 J. White, 'Moderator's Address', *The Scotsman*, 29 May 1925. MacLeod was a friend and admirer of White, despite the latter's political Conservatism and his racist campaign directed against Irish migrants in Scotland from 1922: S. J. Brown, '"Outside the Covenant": The Scottish Presbyterian Churches and Irish Immigration, 1922–1938', *The Innes Review*, 42:1 (Spring, 1991), 19–45. The connection between the two men may have related to White's socially engaged urban ministry or his exemplary military service as chaplain with the Cameronians (Scottish Rifles) regiment on the Western Front. MacLeod's later Iona Community was intended at first to train ministers for White's church extension campaign in the 1930s.

65 This full-time post with Toc H had to go through as a resolution in the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1924: 'The Church of Scotland and Toc H', *Toc H Journal*, 2:6 (6 June 1924), 144–5. The author's thanks to Steven Smith for access to early Toc H journals.

that the commonality found during the war between men of different classes produced 'essentially Christian conditions' in a context of conflict which was a complete contradiction to Christianity. Displaying the pacifism for which he would later be well known, MacLeod connected the themes of community, social justice and religion, explaining that the Toc H houses must be 'definitively Christian (though perhaps not conventionally Christian) if their real object was to be obtained'.[66] MacLeod believed that the task of rebuilding Christian fellowship was best accomplished outside the remit of the parish. In a letter to his father he expressed that Toc H was 'the only movement that I can see that is actually doing anything big for the wandering boy in the city'.[67]

His official employment with Toc H came to an end in 1926, when he left at the age of thirty to become collegiate minister at St Cuthbert's in Edinburgh's West End with Norman Maclean who served as a chaplain on the Western Front. The reason for his departure was that Toc H had clarified its ecumenical principles leaving it up to the decision of the minister offering the eucharist whether they felt able to invite Christians from other denominations or not. For George, this was unacceptable, for his vision of Toc H was one that transcended class and denominational boundaries, and this decision allowed Anglicans to separate themselves from the unified fellowship.[68] His friendship with Clayton remained, enabling later links between Toc H and the Iona Community.[69] Clayton later speculated that the pressure from George's father to find a 'real' parish job may have also made his exit easier to bear.[70]

This article has developed and built upon Ronald Ferguson's hypothesis that the First World War was a formative experience that pushed MacLeod towards ministry to the working classes of Scotland. Rather than the concentration solely being on MacLeod's story of a sudden, powerful conversion experience, through sustained work with the relevant archives, this article has demonstrated how instead, MacLeod relied on his faith and was exposed to his class privilege while serving as an officer with the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders. This article has highlighted the archive's value for an understanding not only of MacLeod's life, but of the turbulent social and religious situation in Scotland during and immediately after the Great War. This conclusion, that the class-inclusive community that formed during the war impacted George over the whole period of his service, fits with his later theology in Govan Parish Church and his Iona Community which emphasised the incarnation and the importance

66 G. MacLeod, 'What is Toc H: The Story of a Light', *The Compass: The National Welfare Magazine*, 3:11 (April, 1925), in NLS, Acc.9084/129, Newspaper Cuttings. Brackets original.

67 Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 62.

68 'Toc H in Scotland', *Toc H Journal*, 4:3 (March, 1926), 106–7.

69 Their friendship had a shaky start. MacLeod accused Tubby of not having a backbone, but later the men invited each other to give lectures and supported each other's work: letter from MacLeod to Clayton, August 1939, as quoted in Smith, 'Everyman's Club?'.

70 Ferguson, *George MacLeod*, 76.

of the church reaching all levels of society.[71] Yet a tension between MacLeod's privileged rootedness and dedication towards those less fortunate remained evident in his later ministry. His choice, for example, to serve with Toc H after the war, whose leadership was dominated by an Anglican and upper-class flavour, showed him reach out to the working class from an organisation in which he had a comfortable grounding. His later ministry in Govan Parish Church pushed him out of this secure model and his legacy of caring and wanting justice for working-class communities in Scotland was later continued in the Iona Community which he founded in 1938.[72] MacLeod always struggled to fully immerse himself in the culture of the working class, but a sustained exploration of his experience in the trenches revealed that it was the people with whom he served that were the catalyst for commencing his ministerial path and his dedication to not taking an easy route but instead to find novel ways to support those overlooked by the church.

[71] See S. M. Blythe, 'George Calling: A Rhetorical Analysis of Four Broadcast Sermons Preached by the Rev. George F. MacLeod from Govan in 1934', *Religions*, 13:5 (2022), https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/13/5/420/htm.

[72] See G. MacLeod, *Govan Calling: Sermons and Addresses Broadcast and Otherwise* (London, 1934) for MacLeod's thinking during his ministry at Govan, and R. T. Morton, *The Iona Community: Personal Impressions of the Early Years* (Edinburgh, 1977), for a good introduction to the Iona Community.