

# T. Edmund Harvey, politician of conscience

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*[Paper for seminar at Institute of Historical Research; target number of words: 5,500]*

T. Edmund Harvey (1875–1955) is a distinctive but neglected figure in the political history of the first half of the twentieth century. He was a Quaker (a member of the Religious Society of Friends), a pacifist and an author of over eighty books and articles on social and religious topics. He was the Liberal MP for West Leeds 1910–18, for Dewsbury 1923–24 and an independent MP 1937–45. This means he was one of only 17 MPs to have sat in Parliament in both world wars, putting him among such greats as Lloyd George and Winston Churchill. He was also, I argue, a politician of conscience and this paper examines what it means to say this. The phrase ‘politician of conscience’ occurs in the literature of British political and cultural history for the decades either side of 1900 and is connected with the Victorian liberal thinker T.H.Green. I argue Harvey warrants the moniker by dint of a long involvement in the issue of conscientious objection which arose from a deeply held and well articulated set of beliefs.

My paper is in five sections as follows:

1. Firstly, I discuss what is meant by conscience and the politics of conscience, and put the term in the context of late Victorian liberalism.
2. Secondly, I look at how the term ‘politician of conscience’ has been used in a couple of instances but, I argue, superficially.
3. Thirdly, I show that Harvey’s upbringing in a minority religious community predisposed him towards an approach to politics which was based on a set of convictions which included pacifism.
4. Fourthly I will turn to the main part of my paper and nub of my argument, which is that Harvey can properly be regarded as a politician of conscience because of his conduct and achievements in the First World War. He committed overt acts of conscience himself. In addition, and in a wider sense more importantly, he helped craft a practicable system of exemption from military conscription for conscientious objectors, a system which was re-introduced in 1939 so that during his time in Parliament in the Second World War he reprised his role as a promoter and protector of the rights of conscience.
5. Fifthly, I describe the well worked-out set of principles, or a moral theology, which underlay his policy and practice on conscientious objection.
6. Sixthly and finally, I draw the threads of my case together.

## 1.

The term 'a politician of conscience' occupies an awkward place in the historiography. It comes from Stefan Collini's work on the moral sensibilities and cultural assumptions that were at the heart of political debate in Victorian and early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>1</sup> Taking his work, Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler have pointed to how politicians of conscience of the first half of the twentieth century were the heirs of the Victorian public moralists, but they provide little analysis of how such politicians may be distinguished from what one might call their unconscientious contemporaries.<sup>2</sup> One of the reasons for this reluctance may be that the term 'politician of conscience' seems a way of valuing a figure of whom the researcher approves over their cynical or opportunistic compeers. Conversely and subversively, the term can be used ironically to denote a self-righteous prig such as, John Bew tells us, was Attlee's opinion of Gladstone.<sup>3</sup> A further danger is that the scholar is seen as making value-judgements about historical figures on the basis of their religious faith or lack of it, the point being that if conscience is the voice of God as it is understood in popular Christianity then atheists cannot have a conscience and so cannot be politicians of conscience. Additionally, denoting someone as a politician of conscience involves delving into their interior lives in ways that may be difficult for the evidence-based scholar. Yet the question of the designation of a politician of conscience should not be avoided. Firstly, there is the implicit challenge posed by Pedersen and Mandler. Secondly, as Ian Packer has shown with Harvey's brother-in-law, Arnold Stephenson Rowntree, the activities of politicians of Harvey's generation cannot be understood without reference to the wider context of their lives especially their religion.<sup>4</sup> An example of a study of an individual's religious and political psychology is Julia Stapleton's work on Charles Masterman (1873–1927) as a brilliant but eccentric Anglican and friend of G. K. Chesterton who was strong for disestablishment as well as for social justice.<sup>5</sup> Masterman makes for an interesting comparison with Harvey, who was his PPS 1913–14, although space prevents me pursuing this in the present paper.

So the question of what it is to be a politician of conscience is a valid one. But what of defining conscience and the politics of conscience? To have a conscience involves being mindful of the moral quality of what one has done or intends to do. This can be broken down further in three ways. Firstly, conscience can signify those moral convictions or principles to which persons cleave most firmly and by which they judge themselves. Secondly, the notion may cover the mental faculty by which people come to know moral truths and apply them. Thirdly, conscience involves the self-examination of the morality of one's own desires and actions.<sup>6</sup> Conscience takes on a political dimension most obviously when appeals to conscience and freedom of conscience are deployed to claim and justify an objection to an activity that one is being required to perform, typically military

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<sup>1</sup> Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850–1930*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 383.

<sup>2</sup> Susan Pedersen and Peter Mandler, editors. *After the Victorians: Private Conscience and Public Duty in Modern Britain. Essays in Memory of John Clive* (New York: Routledge. 1994). See also: Stefan Collini, *Public Moralists: Political Thought and Intellectual Life in Britain 1850–1930*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 383.

<sup>3</sup> John Bew, *Citizen Clem: a biography of Attlee* (London riverrun, 2016) p.24

<sup>4</sup> Ian Packer (ed.), *The Letters of Arnold Stephenson Rowntree to Mary Katherine Rowntree, 1910-1918* (Cambridge University Press for the Royal Historical Society, 2002); publisher's note

<sup>5</sup> Julia Stapleton, 'The New Liberal Vision of C. F. G. Masterman: religion, politics and literature in early twentieth-century Britain.' *Modern Intellectual History* (2017) pp 1–31.

<sup>6</sup> Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy p.167

service.<sup>7</sup> However, another and more sophisticated understanding of politics and conscience may be found in Melvin Richter's book, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age*.<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hill Green (1836–82) was an Oxford academic whose influential brand of welfarist, statist liberalism entailed the notion of citizenship not as a mere legal status but as an awareness of the moral ends of life as embodied in the structures of the state and liberal Protestantism.<sup>9</sup> Richter observed that no word recurs more often in the work of Green and his followers than citizenship, and that Green was an important author of what has been called the gospel of citizenship.<sup>10</sup> Green saw the Christian citizen as an active, self-realising being and the civic state as ethical, enabling and educative.<sup>11</sup> Green was influential less for his academic writings, which are couched in the language of the philosophical idealism of the time, as for his example of civic service. In Harvey there is a traceable line of influence from Green via Samuel Barnett (1844–1913). Barnett was one of Green's acolytes as a student and was later the founding warden of Toynbee Hall who in 1906 chose Harvey as his successor. So to sum up, I am arguing for two types of the politics of conscience, which are firstly the overt act of conscience, typically the refusal of a military requirement, and secondly a sustained commitment to a cause underpinned by a deeply held conviction, which is typically but not necessarily a religious conviction.

## 2.

Having introduced the term 'a politics of conscience' and the senses in which it may be applied, I now examine how the term has been used in the literature, taking biographical studies of two figures contemporary with Harvey. The first is the Anglican cleric, Edward Lee Hicks (1843–1919), who ended his days as Bishop of Lincoln. 'The Politics of Conscience' is the title of a chapter in the study of Hicks by Graham Neville.<sup>12</sup> Hicks as a Liberal was on the radical wing of the party and accordingly was at odds with clergymen who were Conservative out of principle or because at the parish level the preponderance of the landed interest ensured the dominance of Tory convictions. Hicks' politics of conscience did not extend to witnessing against war, which he supported in August 1914.<sup>13</sup> Neville's study of Hicks is a reminder of the party-political divisions within the established

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<sup>7</sup> Giubilini, Alberto, "Conscience", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2016/entries/conscience/>>.]

<sup>8</sup> Melvin Richter, *The Politics of Conscience: T. H. Green and His Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1964)

<sup>9</sup> David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism and Political Theory* (Edinburgh University Press 2000) pp 27-36

<sup>10</sup> The Civic Moment in British Social Thought  
Civil Society and the Ethics of Citizenship, c.1880–1914  
H. S. Jones

DOI:10.1093/oso/9780198833048.003.0002 in *Welfare and Social Policy in Britain Since 1870 : Essays in Honour of Jose Harris*. ed. / Lawrence Goldman. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> David Boucher and Andrew Vincent, *British Idealism and Political Theory* (Edinburgh University Press 2000) pp 27-36

<sup>12</sup> Graham Neville, *Radical Churchman: Edward Lee Hicks and the New Liberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198269779.003.0012.

For an obituary of author, who was a conscientious objector in the Second World War, see <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2009/23-january/gazette/obituary-the-revd-graham-neville>

<sup>13</sup> Neville, Graham. "Peace and War." In *Radical Churchman: Edward Lee Hicks and the New Liberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198269779.003.0012.

Church and how these could relate to patronage, but Neville shows little more in Hicks' case than that conscience means having strong opinions about social justice. This may be commendable but it is no more a matter of conscience than a Conservative churchman's equally firm conviction of *noblesse oblige* and the prosperous Christian's duty of charity. The suspicion in this instance is that the designation of a politician of conscience is an oblique way for the biographer to express admiration for their subject.

My second instance of a figure who has been given the moniker of a politician of conscience is Eleanor Rathbone (1872–1946). She is a valuable comparator for Harvey because from 1937 to 1945 he shared with her the double-member Parliamentary constituency of the Combined English Universities. Susan Pedersen in her 2004 book, *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience*, says of her subject that Rathbone, as a political independent and a woman, might have been expected to be marginal to the House of Commons but she made the two elements work in her favour, taking advantage of her intellectual standing and non-party status to speak from conscience alone.<sup>14</sup> It must be said that, beyond asserting Rathbone's lack of party affiliation enabled her to act freely and without the constraint of whip or local constituency association, Pedersen does not develop the idea of the politics of conscience at any length.<sup>15</sup> The term 'conscience' does not appear in the index to her book and for what Pedersen means by Rathbone as a politician of conscience, the reader has to rely on a few sketchy remarks. We learn that Rathbone's conscience was not a religious matter, because she was not of any faith though she had been brought up surrounded by Quakers and Unitarians. Nor, like Hicks but unlike Harvey, did her conscience lead her to pacifism. She opposed the Boer War but, like Hicks, not war in 1914, which she believed was against Prussianism and to defend democracy. In the 1930s she spoke out against appeasement and in favour of rearmament, a position diametrically opposite to that of Harvey.<sup>16</sup> As for what the politics of conscience means for Rathbone's achievements in the field of social reform, Pedersen has only a few sentences, saying 'For fifty years Eleanor Rathbone held to the belief that purposive collective action in a democratic state could improve human life and could prevent the world from foundering on the shoals of untrammelled selfishness, mutual hatred or apathy.'<sup>17</sup> Pedersen goes on to say that Rathbone was consistent but never sentimental or unrealistic. She knew that reforms were won through democratic politics; she knew that political work was slow and arduous but that the alternative was ceding power to the market, to bureaucrats or strongmen. Pedersen portrays Rathbone as an independently minded and energetic social democrat who urged collectivist solutions to the problems of deprivation and inequality. Pedersen is right that an independent in Parliament is free to pursue their convictions without deference to party, which was an argument for the existence of the university constituencies such as Rathbone represented, where independent candidates often

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<sup>14</sup> Susan Pedersen *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2004) [page number required]

<sup>15</sup> Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience (review)  
Steven Fielding  
Parliamentary History  
Edinburgh University Press  
Volume 26, Part 2, 2007  
pp. 271-273

<sup>16</sup> Review of Susan Pedersen *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2004) by Fred M. Leventhal, Oxford UP [further reference needed]

<sup>17</sup> Susan Pedersen *Eleanor Rathbone and the Politics of Conscience* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press. 2004) pp.377-8

found favour.<sup>18</sup> That Rathbone used her seat for the purpose for which it was available is commendable but does not of itself make her a politician of conscience. In the case of Pedersen's account of Rathbone, 'conscience' is used little more than to equate with the freedom to choose to act rather than follow party lines.

### 3.

I have argued there is a weak case for calling Edward Lee Hicks and Eleanor Rathbone politicians of conscience in the way I have defined the term. I have also cited Ian Packer and Julia Stapleton, who have studied contemporaries of Harvey in the context of their religions. There is no question of suggesting that agnostics like Rathbone cannot have a conscience. On the other hand, religion as part of the psychological makeup of the individual rather than just as an identifier cannot be ignored.<sup>19</sup> In Harvey's case, his political career cannot be understood apart from his membership of a faith group and the accompanying set of values. His upbringing and schooling as a Quaker predisposed him towards conscience-based progressive politics and the traditional Quaker testimony to peace.

Harvey was born in Leeds in January 1875. His family were well-to-do Quakers known for good works and Liberal party affiliations. His upbringing and character is portrayed in the childhood memoir by his brother, William Fryer Harvey (1885–1937), entitled *We Were Seven*, with the personal and place names altered but in which Edmund appears as 'Tom, the kindest and most good natured of elder brothers'.<sup>20</sup> Harvey went to Bootham School, a Quaker establishment in York, Victoria University in Leeds (the precursor of the present university) and then to Oxford – allegedly as the first Quaker since William Penn in the seventeenth century – where he was active in the student Christian movement and got a first in Literae Humaniores.<sup>21</sup> After Oxford and two years on a study tour of Europe, Harvey arrived in London in 1900 to be an assistant in the British Museum but groomed for a career in social reform and politics. He became a member of the London County Council under the aegis of Joseph Allen Baker, a Quaker and a leading figure in the Progressive group on the LCC.<sup>22</sup> Harvey was briefly warden of a Quaker settlement, Chalfont House, in Queens Square before becoming Deputy Warden of Toynbee Hall in 1904 and in 1906 succeeding Rev. Barnett as warden. With a growing reputation as a social reformer and with local family connections in the constituency, in January 1910 he was elected as the Liberal MP for West Leeds in succession to Herbert Gladstone. On entering the Commons, he sat with the backbench Liberal Radicals so that, with his position at Toynbee Hall and as an occasional contributor to the periodical *The Nation*, he could be numbered amongst the progressive elite of the metropolis.

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<sup>18</sup> This is a point that Harvey makes in his election address of 1937. MR. HARVEY'S ELECTION ADDRESS: University M.P.s Should be Independent of Party Whips *The Manchester Guardian* (1901-1959); Mar 6, 1937; ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The Guardian and The Observer pg. 19

<sup>19</sup> Packer and Stapleton *ibid*

<sup>20</sup> William Fryer Harvey, *We were Seven* (London: Constable, 1936) p.91.

Oliver Pickering 'Quaker Identities in William Fryer Harvey's *We Were Seven*' (*Quaker Family History Society: Quaker Connections*: no. 60, November 2013, pp. 19-23),

<sup>21</sup> For a review of the literature on the connection between Classics and the political elite, see Stapleton, Julia. "Political thought, elites, and the state in modern Britain." *The Historical Journal* 42, no. 1 (1999): 251-268.

<sup>22</sup> 1904-1907 (*Who was Who*). Joseph Allen Baker (1852-1918) was the father of the peace campaigner Philip Noel-Baker (1889-1982) (*Dictionary of Quaker Biography*, Library of the Society of Friends)

Along with his closeness to the Liberal Radicals and metropolitan progressives, there was one issue with which as a Quaker Harvey was necessarily identified and that was pacifism. The testimony to peace, to use the Quaker phrase, had been reappraised as part of the process of renewal that the Society of Friends was going through during Harvey's formative years. The so-called Quaker renaissance, marked by a conference in Manchester in 1895, entailed the combination of freshly evolving liberal theology and optimistically minded social activism with a newly reclaimed knowledge of, and attachment to, traditional Quaker beliefs which had been discarded by the evangelicals who had dominated the Society in middle of the nineteenth century.<sup>23</sup> Key to these traditional beliefs was the concept of the inward light of Christ which, for the leaders of the Quaker renaissance, was not only the means by which God revealed Himself and His message but was also an unimpeachable verification of the Society's historic refusal of all and every military requirement.<sup>24</sup> However, this renaissance did not lead to a pacifist consensus amongst Quakers. The Boer War which broke out in 1899 showed how far for many Quakers pacifism had become no more than an inherited dogma while for others it was a matter of intense personal conviction.<sup>25</sup> The tension between these two axes came to a climax when Britain went to war in August 1914.<sup>26</sup> In Harvey's case, his membership of parliament, of the governing Liberal party and of the Religious Society of Friends meant war brought especial challenges although, as events were to prove, also enhanced opportunities to serve.

#### 4.

So far I have argued that the idea of a politician of conscience can be derived from T.H.Green and that there is thin justification for the designation as given by their biographers to Edward Lee Hicks and Eleanor Rathbone. I have also shown how Harvey was brought up in the milieu of a reinvigorated Quakerism and was set on a political career as a progressively minded Liberal when the First World War broke out. I aim to show that his response to the war warrants calling him a politician of conscience.

I have alluded to two types of the politics of conscience. The first of these is the classic act of conscientious objection, a refusal on the grounds of firm belief to meet a requirement of the state, typically a military one. Evidence for Harvey as a politician of conscience of this sort comes from two episodes during the First World War. The first such was on Britain's entry into the war in August 1914, which prompted him to resign as a Parliamentary Private Secretary to Charles Masterman. He had been appointed the previous year and might have looked forward to a ministerial career, but felt bound to refuse to be a part, however so junior, of the governmental war machine.<sup>27</sup> His stepping down as a PPS was in the Quaker tradition of refusing a military requirement rather than a protest against the war. He could not actively support, but he did not condemn, Britain's entry into a war which, he told Parliament, had been brought about by 'men in high places', though he hastened to add that he did not mean by this Britain's own leadership.<sup>28</sup> Free of the duties of a PPS Harvey

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas C. Kennedy *British Quakerism 1860-1920* (Oxford University Press) p.5

<sup>24</sup> Ibid [Thomas C. Kennedy *British Quakerism 1860-1920* (Oxford University Press)] p.248

<sup>25</sup> Elizabeth Isichei, *Victorian Quakers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1970) p.150-2. Prominent among Quakers who supported the Boer War was Caroline Stephen, Virginia Woolf's aunt.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas C. Kennedy *British Quakerism 1860-1920* (Oxford University Press) chapter 9 *passim*

<sup>27</sup> Masterman, by contrast, went on to head the government's wartime propaganda service.

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/WW1/duty-and-democracy-parliament-and-the-first-world-war.pdf> (2018) p.39

responded to other moral imperatives of war by throwing himself into Quaker relief work on the continent. His main area of operations was Chalons-sur-Marne, where he was the Commissioner of the Friends War Victims Relief Committee and amongst other achievements organised the building of a maternity hospital which survives to this day.<sup>29</sup>

His resignation as a PPS was not his only act of conscience during the First World War, for in 1917 he sacrificed his career a second time. On the outbreak of the war, Leeds Liberal Association realised that Harvey, as a Quaker, could not take an active part in the struggle but they appreciated his work for war victims. With the introduction of conscription, however, the Association disagreed with Harvey's opposition to the Military Service Act and feared that he would damage their reputation with the voters. Matters became worse in March 1917 when Harvey appeared at the Stockton by-election on the same platform as Edward Backhouse, a Quaker and family friend who was calling for peace by negotiation. Backhouse was the only candidate to stand against the Liberal bidding to succeed the previous MP, also a Liberal, who had died in post. Harvey's campaigning against his own party vexed his constituency association, which de-selected him as their candidate at the general election expected to be held at the war's end.<sup>30</sup> Appreciative of his services and character, however, the Association agreed he retain his seat in the meantime.<sup>31</sup> Harvey must have known that his support for Backhouse at the Stockton by-election would jeopardise his relations with his constituency association. While his conduct on this occasion may not have been a conscientious objection in the strict sense, his campaigning against his own party was a career-limiting act of principle akin to his resignation as a PPS.

I have described Harvey's two acts of conscience in the First World War which damaged his prospects. I am now going to look at Harvey as a politician of conscience in the way he protected and promoted the right of the conscientious objection to military conscription. The story begins in late 1915 when the defeat at Loos on the Western Front and the impasse in Gallipoli meant war would not end soon. In December 1915, as a prelude to the introduction of conscription, Asquith appealed in Parliament for unmarried men to enlist. Harvey responded calling for an exception for religious conviction.<sup>32</sup> The following month the government accepted his amendment to the Military Service Bill which granted conscientious objectors an exemption from military service, non-combatant as well as combatant, on the condition that the applicant was engaged in work of national importance. This was a novel measure in unprecedented times so it is not surprising that problems immediately arose. One of these was the lack of official advice as to what constituted work of national importance. In response, the government set up the Committee on the Work of National Importance, which became known by the surname of its first chairman, Thomas Pelham, and to which Harvey was one of those appointed.<sup>33</sup> On 14 April 1916 the Pelham Committee issued a circular to tribunals listing occupations recommended as of national importance and advising tribunals to allow conscientious objectors a choice as to the alternative service they provided.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Milligan biography chapter 11 p.3. In [?1922] Harvey attended the ceremony for the hospital's move into permanent accommodation (Synopsis of Correspondence)

<sup>30</sup> *Yorkshire Evening Post* - Saturday 29 September 1917 p.5. Harvey wrote in May 1917.

<sup>31</sup> At the Coupon Election of December 1918 he was succeeded as MP by the Liberal candidate John Murray (1879-1964).

<sup>32</sup> <https://www.parliament.uk/documents/WW1/duty-and-democracy-parliament-and-the-first-world-war.pdf> (2018) p.40. See also Parliamentary Debates 5<sup>th</sup> Series vol lxxvii pp 267-270.

<sup>33</sup> Order in Council dated 28 March 1916. Library of the Society of Friends TEMP MSS 835/8/1. The other appointees were Charles Fenwick MP (1850-1918) and Graham Prockter Spicer (1881-1918).

<sup>34</sup> Library of the Society of Friends TEMP MSS 835/8/1

The Pelham Committee's circular reflected Harvey's influence in two ways and showed how he helped craft a practicable policy which balanced individual freedom with the demands of the wartime state. Firstly, there was the prominence given to welfare work. This reflected in part the good standing of the Friends' Ambulance Unit, which had been operating since the start of the war as an important opportunity for non-combatant service.<sup>35</sup> Work in civilian asylums might not have found its way onto the circular, however, but for Harvey's intervention at a crucial stage in the Committee's deliberations. The second instance of Harvey's influence, and less to be expected in wartime but reflecting Harvey's liberal ethic, was the emphasis that the circular placed on flexibility and freedom of choice. During a session of the Pelham Committee on 30 March 1916 Harvey successfully argued for conscientious objectors to be given some choice as to the alternative service they provided, because the precise connection of a trade or occupation with the war effort was a matter of judgement. For example, the apparently innocuous timber trade was producing props for trenches while there was ostensibly war work, such as a welfare post in a munitions factory, which a conscientious objector might be willing to undertake because it entailed service to the person rather than the direct production of war material. As Harvey was later to point out but modestly without taking credit, the strength of the British legislation was that unlike comparable legislation in the US it did not depend on membership of a particular denomination but allowed for secular as well as religious grounds for objection.<sup>36</sup> The system of alternative national service which the Pelham Committee helped create reflected Harvey's liberal and pacifist values, about which I say more later in my discussion of his moral theology of conscientious objection. Beforehand, I turn to Harvey and the story of the re-introduction of conscription in the Second World War.

Harvey was back in parliament in March 1937 as one of the two MPs for the Combined English Universities. At a time of rising international tension he nevertheless hoped for peace and in September 1938 was one of the many MPs who welcomed back Neville Chamberlain after the Munich Agreement, writing to his wife Irene how the Prime Minister 'carried the House away - many congratulated him, me included.'<sup>37</sup> However, when by May 1939 it was evident that war was not far off, the government prepared the re-introduction of conscription with a preliminary Military Training Bill. The right of conscientious objection, which Harvey had done so much to establish in the First World War, meant that with conscription again in prospect, opinion was already attuned to exemption for conscientious objectors. This meant that the legislation's passage and subsequent administration was uncontroversial although it was not without incident, as we shall see. As an independent and without a vexatious local party association, Harvey was free to criticise the principle of compulsion in the Military Training Bill. He said that the totalitarian preparation for war was a notion foreign to the British tradition of individual freedom, which shows that his objection to conscription was libertarian not pacifist. At the same time, he paid tribute to the government for their efforts to ensure justice for conscientious objectors so there was, as Harvey wrote of Parliament's consideration of the Bill, 'Hardly a touch of bitterness in the Debate - a striking contrast from 1916'.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Rebecca Wynter, 'Conscription, Conscience and Controversy: The Friends' Ambulance Unit and the "Middle Course" in the First World War' (*Quaker Studies*, 12/2016, Vol.21(2), pp.213-223)

<sup>36</sup> "'Records of Conscience", review by T. Edmund Harvey of John W. Graham, 'Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919' (London: George Allen & Unwin 1922) in *Friends Quarterly Examiner* vol 223 (1922) pp 185-200.

<sup>37</sup> Harvey to Alice Irene Harvey, 28 September 1938

<sup>38</sup> S.J.W. Nicol, 'T.E.H. And Conscription In The Second World War' (unpublished typescript)

Following the Military Training Act and once war broke out in September 1939, an emergency National Service Bill was rushed through Parliament, opposed in the Commons only by Harvey and six others. Thereafter, the government introduced progressively stronger measures but took account of lessons from the first war, such as the need for applications for exemption on grounds of conscience to be handled by special tribunals. In January 1941, and in response to the German bombing campaign which had started the previous September, the government introduced a measure to make fire-watching compulsory. Controversially, there was no exemption for conscience, only for hardship. Harvey rightly foresaw that some pacifists would consider civil defence so closely associated with military service as to entail a conscientious objection. A striking such instance was Kathleen Lonsdale (1903–71), a Quaker and scientist, who served a month in Holloway prison in 1943 for refusing to register for civil defence duties though, had she done so, she could have claimed exemption on grounds of hardship as a mother of small children. Harvey for his part, far from resenting her rejection of his efforts for conscientious objectors, collaborated with her by intervening with the authorities of their behalf. For example, in June 1943, he led a delegation which included Lonsdale to the Commissioner for the Metropolitan Police on the question of repeat prosecutions of those defying the conscription laws. According to Denis Hayes, Harvey conducted himself with 'his customary Quaker charm'.<sup>39</sup> This remark says more about Harvey than Quakers generally, who have a tradition of plain speaking. It is a testament to Harvey's character and his commitment to a practical politics of conscience that, on the one hand, he praised the government's concessions to the right of conscience and, on the other, cooperated with the absolutists like Kathleen Lonsdale to mitigate the consequences of their determination to test the legislation to destruction.<sup>40</sup>

## 5.

So far we have seen how in the two world wars T. Edmund Harvey – who I am arguing was the quintessential politician of conscience – helped set up a regulated system of conscientious objection and alternative national service. Harvey's work for the conscientious objector was rooted in an understanding of the moral and political principles at stake. The first evidence of this dates from April 1913, when he declined to join a public meeting of the National Service League, a pressure group campaigning for national military service.<sup>41</sup> He wrote to the League's president, Lord Roberts, 'I regret that the thought of national service should be narrowed in meaning to correspond with the military ideals of the National Service League, instead of embracing, as it should do, every form of civic activity by which men may serve their country without injury or menace to any other people.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Denis Hayes, *Challenge Of Conscience: The story of the Conscientious Objectors of 1939-1949* (Published for the Central Board for Conscientious Objectors by George Allen and Unwin Limited 1949).

<sup>40</sup> S.J.W. Nicol, 'T.E.H. And Conscription In The Second World War' (unpublished typescript)

<sup>41</sup> Leeds Mercury - Saturday 19 April 1913 p.5;

Stearn, Roger T. "National Service League (act. 1902–1914)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 28 Sep. 2006; Accessed 15 May. 2020.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-95555>.

<sup>42</sup> Leeds Mercury - Saturday 19 April 1913 p.5; Stearn, Roger T. "National Service League (act. 1902–1914)." *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. 28 Sep. 2006; Accessed 15 May. 2020.

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-95555>.

Harvey subsequently refined his theory as a moral theology consisting of three interrelated ideas – the Christian citizen, the kingdom of God, and moral pioneering. He wrote:

We have [...] in our Quaker history a lesson for our own lives of the meaning of Christian citizenship. You can see there a two-fold strand constantly interwoven: one, respect for the state as representing authority in the community: and the other, desire to serve the community through the state and in other ways, but along with that, the desire above all to serve the Kingdom of God: this means that we must be willing, when loyalty to the Kingdom of God demands it to refuse the demands of the state and show the highest loyalty to the state and the best citizenship by refusing demands that are wrong, because it is only in that way that the conscience of our fellow citizens can be reached, and in the end a better law come into being.<sup>43</sup>

The first of the ideas in this passage, that of the Christian citizen, is found in T. H. Green although, as Harvey was aware, the idea that the Christian inhabits an earthly and a supernal world in tension with each other goes back to St Augustine.<sup>44</sup> After the notion of the Christian citizen, the second idea in the passage of 1937 is that of the Kingdom of God. This idea, also found in Augustine, hinges on exegesis of Jesus' remarks in the Book of Luke when, Harvey explained elsewhere, Jesus spoke of the Kingdom of God as something now rather than not yet.<sup>45</sup> Harvey sees the preaching of Jesus as moral not eschatological. This led him in the quoted passage to assert a higher law, that of duty to God, which trumps duty to the state and in so doing gives rise to a morally higher obligation. If the conscientious objector must in their spiritual duty refuse to undertake the earthly duty of military service for their country, they must endeavour to do even more than is required in fulfilling an alternative task. The Christian citizen who is granted exemption from military service on grounds of conscience is bound by that conscience and by divine law to offer the state another, higher form of service.

This gives rise to a third strand in Harvey's ethics of conscientious objection, which was that of the conscientious objector as a moral pioneer. This is the point Harvey is making in the passage from 1937 when he refers to how the conscientious objector's action can lead to a better law coming into being. He made the same point in a speech in Parliament many years earlier, on 19 January 1916, which was praised by a Quaker contemporary, John William Graham, as worthy to rank with the utterances of another Quaker parliamentary orator, John Bright (1811–89).<sup>46</sup> Harvey spoke of his belief that civilisation was improved by recognising the rights of conscientious objectors and that such recognition would raise the world's moral tone, help reduce the risk of war and enhance the chances of peace.<sup>47</sup> Later on, in an article he wrote in 1941 on Christian citizenship in the crisis of the second war, Harvey declared that the individual renunciation of war had to be more than just negative but rather be bound up with a positive contribution of service and 'contagious

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<sup>43</sup> Quaker Faith & Practice passage 23.88, taken from Friends World Conference official report held at Swarthmore and Haverford Colleges near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, September 1st to 8th 1937 / prepared by an editorial committee appointed by the Conference Business Committee

<sup>44</sup> T. Edmund Harvey *The Long Pilgrimage* (Harrogate: Woodbrooke Extension Committee, 1921) p.8

<sup>45</sup> *The Long Pilgrimage* pp29-34. The passage is Luke chapter 17 verses 20 and 21.

<sup>46</sup> J.W.Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919* (London: George Allen & Unwin) pp55-56

<sup>47</sup> Loc. cit [J.W.Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919* (London: George Allen & Unwin) pp55-56]

good will'.<sup>48</sup> The idea of conscientious objectors as pioneering peace-builders and a redemptive minority was one he shared with Christian pacifists of the Peace Pledge Union.<sup>49</sup> In the peroration to the article of 1941, Harvey referred to the Sermon on the Mount saying, 'The blessing in the Beatitudes is given not to those who abstain from war but to the makers of peace. [...] Peacemaking is not a question of refusing or declining or objecting but a positive and creative act, arousing in others a positive response and an answering witness of soul.'<sup>50</sup>

Harvey's article of 1941 was a restatement of the position he had developed in the First World War. Because in the Second World War Harvey was an independent MP and unencumbered by party ties or ministerial position, he was free to reprise his role as the protector of the legitimate conscientious objector without fear of career-limiting repercussions. His basic ideas remained the same. He made clear in Parliament that he opposed military conscription on liberal principles but that he did not dispute the right of the state to defend itself by force. He disagreed with those Quakers who, with the extension of conscription in the Second World War, saw compulsory service in civil defence in the same light as compulsory military service. He reminded them that conscription was regarded by the government, rightly or wrongly, as essential to the survival of the country, and he cautioned against too much stress being laid on conscientious objection as opposed to conscientious obligation, using a striking phrase which summed up his ethical theory.<sup>51</sup> The effect of this was that, while his fellow parliamentarians saw Harvey as a man of principle, absolutists amongst his own faith community saw him as a compromiser.<sup>52</sup> Both were right, because Harvey's interpretation of the Quaker peace testimony drove him to seek to resolve differences between pacifists as much as pacifists generally sought peace amongst war-makers.

Harvey's moral theology of conscientious objection served to position him in the middle of the spectrum of pacifist discourse as an intermediary between the strict pacifist and the state.<sup>53</sup> His praise for the 'contagious good will' of the true peace-maker was a veiled criticism of absolutist pacifists and secular anti-war political agitators. Harvey disagreed with those who felt 'that they cannot agree to undertake any specific service which the State may require of them in war time, lest by so doing they should contribute to its greater efficiency in war.'<sup>54</sup> Harvey tersely said of the 1,500 conscientious objectors of the First World War who would accept nothing but absolute exemption that by their actions they won few friends for their cause.<sup>55</sup> He criticised the stridency of the absolutists and others who in the name of peace were 'proud, bitter and intolerant' of those with whom they disagreed. More strongly, he condemned secular anti-war activists, saying that not all those who resisted the claims of the state – by which he meant military conscription or alternative

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<sup>48</sup> 'Christian Citizenship in the Crisis Of War' (*Friends Quarterly Examiner* Vol.75; no.299 (Seventh Mo. 1941) p215

<sup>49</sup> Andrew Rigby, 'Pacifists in War-time, the Search for a Role: the Peace Pledge Union, 1936-1945' in P Brock & T Socknat, eds, *Pacifism: 1918-1945*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997) p.11

<sup>50</sup> 'Christian Citizenship in the Crisis Of War' (*Friends Quarterly Examiner* Vol.75; no.299 (Seventh Mo. 1941) p215

<sup>51</sup> S.J.W. Nicol, 'T.E.H. And Conscription In The Second World War' (unpublished typescript)

<sup>52</sup> Milligan typescript

<sup>53</sup> Rebecca Wynter, 'Conscription, Conscience and Controversy: The Friends' Ambulance Unit and the "Middle Course" in the First World War' (*Quaker Studies*, 12/2016, Vol.21(2), pp.213-223)

<sup>54</sup> Letter to *The Friend* 21 January 1916 (reproduced in a centennial article in *The Friend* 26 February 2016 p.12)

<sup>55</sup> 'Records of Conscience': Review by T. Edmund Harvey of John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1922) in *Friends Quarterly Examiner* vol 223 (1922) pp 185-200.

civilian service – did so for the highest of motives.<sup>56</sup> One of those against whom this remark was aimed may have been Bertrand Russell, who in 1916 had singled Harvey out for criticism, mischievously calling him an elderly Quaker even though Harvey was the younger man by three years.<sup>57</sup>

## 6.

[So to draw the threads together]...Harvey's work for conscientious objection in both world wars, underpinned by a moral theology, qualifies him as a politician of conscience in the way I have defined the term. My argument rests, firstly, on his own acts of conscience: in 1914 when he resigned as a PPS and in 1917 when he campaigned for a peace candidate against his own party. Secondly and more substantially there was his work for the statutory exemption of conscientious objectors in 1916, followed by his work for the Pelham Committee. As Harvey said of this time, although modestly without mentioning his own contribution, it was remarkable that 'a state in the midst of a great war recognised the right of conscience, at any rate in principle, for its individual citizens'.<sup>58</sup> When war came again he reprised his role as the protector of the moderate pacifist. Consistently he kept to a middle position, using language aimed at the Christian pacifist to justify the privilege of a statutory exemption from conscription as entailing an enhanced obligation to serve by other means. What makes Harvey the quintessential politician of conscience was his dedication to the very cause of the right of conscience, a cause he upheld with wisdom and integrity in a long career of faith in action.

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid ['Records of Conscience': Review by T. Edmund Harvey of John W. Graham, *Conscription and Conscience: A History 1916-1919* (London: George Allen & Unwin 1922) in *Friends Quarterly Examiner* vol 223 (1922) pp 185-200.]

<sup>57</sup> Keith Robbins *The Abolition of War: the Peace Movement in Britain 1914-1919* (Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 1976) p.84

<sup>58</sup> Friends World Conference 1937