

ARTICLES

RESEARCHING RELIGION IN THE ANZAC NARRATIVE

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Introduction

Writing religious history in Australia is fraught with risk, particularly the risk of being ignored. Religion constitutes one of the major areas of silence in mainstream Australian history. Few after pioneering Australian historian Manning Clark give it routine coverage as a force in our national narrative. Indeed, Professor Hilary Carey is not alone in observing ‘a tendency for secular histories of Australia to omit discussion of religion or to downplay its significance’.²

This is something I discovered the hard way. When I first came to the Evangelical History Association (EHA) some years ago,

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2. Hilary M. Carey, ‘Secularism versus Christianity in Australian History,’ in *Secularisation: New Historical Perspectives* (Christopher Hartney ed.; Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 17.

people asked me what I did. On hearing that I had employment as a historian, I was met with a level of surprise and even awe. Wow! An Evangelical Christian who has a job as a historian in an Australian tertiary context. Of course, I was cheating – I was employed by a Christian institution (Avondale College, now Avondale University College), but they still seemed impressed. At the EHA, I heard stories of job applications going nowhere once interviewers suspected an active Christian commitment. I left the meeting with a suspicion that there were mild levels of paranoia present in the Association.

However, I had a bit to learn.

Motivations

My own journey into religious history has been circuitous. I grew up on the Avondale campus, where my father taught French language, literature, culture and history. Most of the historians I knew, virtually all employed in the network of Seventh-day Adventist universities around the world, specialized in denominational history. I thought this rather limited, as if working for a small denomination condemned them to delving into narrow historical topics, which few outside the organisation would appreciate (and, sadly, few within would ever read). I also wondered if it shrank the reputation and reach of the historians and the colleges and universities where they taught.

When I began my academic career I deliberately shied away from parochial topics, choosing instead to research the representation of World War One in Australian film and television. The topic led to a series of publications on historical cinema, including my first foray into religion, when writing about the representation of Seventh-day Adventism in Australian film.³ However, I was approaching a

3. Daniel Reynaud, 'Seventh-day Adventism and ordinary Australia,' *Compass*, No. 3 (Spring 1996), 38-46.

dead end: I was writing about war cinema faster than it was being produced, so in 2003 I began looking for another research topic. I settled on a combination of two personal interests: war and faith, specifically, the religious beliefs and practices of the soldiers of the First Australian Imperial Force (AIF) during the Great War. I imagined it as an ideal bridge to engage a broader Australian audience, as the national preoccupation with Anzac would make people open to discussions of soldier spirituality.

Scholarship

A quick literature review showed that there appeared to be potential in the subject of Great War Anzac religion. The official history of the war rarely touched on religion. Indeed, one of its authors, H.C. Gullett, argued that Australian soldiers accepted chaplains as ‘an example of that Australian habit of paying lip-service to religion, of pretending that religion mattered here’.⁴ C.E.W. Bean, the principal author of the volumes, and himself a clergyman’s son, rarely mentioned religion, but later I discovered that he had planned a dedicated volume on the chaplains. Unfortunately, his monumental work ran out of time and money to do so.⁵ It is a pity that this volume was never realised; while several chaplains deposited notes in the archives on his request, he almost certainly would have consulted other chaplains, officers and soldiers in the course of his research, who have since taken their memories to the grave.

Bill Gammage’s seminal study of the Anzacs, *The Broken Years*, argued that ‘the average Australian soldier was not religious,’ though he suspected that the Anzac was probably similar in that regard to

4. H. C. Gullett, *The AIF in Sinai and Palestine* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1944), 551.

5. Michael McKernan, ‘Foreword,’ in Daniel Reynaud, *The Man the Anzacs Revered: William ‘Fighting Mac’ McKenzie, Anzac Chaplain* (Warburton: Signs Publishing, 2015), v.

soldiers of most other national armies,⁶ a speculation that other research has shown to be pretty much spot on.⁷ I immediately felt that here was room to explore, figuring on the basis of the percentages of church attendance at the time that probably ten per cent of the AIF were active Christians (recognising of course the tenuous relationship between church attendance and personal religious commitment). At that stage I hadn't read much more widely, instead diving straight into primary sources, principally the ego documents of soldiers, such as diaries, letters and memoirs.

As I progressed, I found other scholars who had gone before or who were travelling alongside. Michael McKernan's study of the major Australian denominations during the war, *Australian Churches at War*, was a superb starting point, establishing the foundations of the domestic religious situation as well as briefly exploring the soldiers' perspectives.⁸ He also published *Padre*, a useful volume on the chaplains, featuring extensive quotes from their diaries and letters.⁹ Bob Linder's wonderful study of Evangelicals in the ranks of the AIF, *The Long Tragedy*, was both a trailblazer for exploring Australian faith and war at the front, and a quality evaluation of the landscape, including a telling attack on assumptions of secularity by highlighting

6. Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1974), xiv-xv.

7. See for example Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport CT & London: Praeger, 2003); Michael Snape, *God and the British Soldier: Religion and the British Army in the First and Second World Wars* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005); Stuart Bell, *Faith in Conflict: The Impact of the Great War on the Faith of the People of Britain* (Solihull: Helion, 2017).

8. Michael McKernan, *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and activities of the major churches 1914-1918* (Sydney and Canberra: Catholic Theological Faculty and Australian War Memorial, 1980).

9. Michael McKernan, *Padre: Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986).

just how many of Gammage's quotes from soldiers demonstrated religious and moral concerns.¹⁰ Michael Gladwin's *Captains of the Soul*, a rare if belated example of officialdom requesting and endorsing religious Anzac history, found that Australian Army chaplains, far from the pessimistic view of Gullett and Gammage, were often highly respected and trusted.¹¹ Colin Bale's studies of AIF headstone inscriptions conclude that 'significant numbers of them appear to have been more interested in religion than has often been thought'.¹² An entire issue of the journal *St Mark's Review* tackled a cross-section of religious aspects of Australia's war.¹³

And, of course, there has been John Moses' ongoing and collaborative research into the religious origins of Anzac Day celebrations, battling another group of historians keen to downplay any hint of religion in favour of a form of secular spirituality in Anzac Day's origins and ongoing memorialisation.¹⁴ Ken Inglis' ground-breaking study *Sacred Places* situated the Anzac legacy in a national secular context with little reference to religion, though to be fair, Inglis was the first to

10. Robert D. Linder, *The Long Tragedy: Australian Evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Adelaide: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity & Open Book Publishers, 2000), 12-17.

11. Michael Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul: A history of Australian Army chaplains* (Newport NSW: Big Sky, 2013).

12. Colin Bale, 'In God We Trust: the impact of the Great War on Religious Belief in Australia,' in *Donald Robinson: Selected Works; Appreciation* (Peter Bolt, and Mark D. Thompson eds; Camperdown, NSW: Australian Church Record, 2008), 307; Colin Bale, *A Crowd of Witnesses: Epitaphs on First World War Australian War Graves* (Haberfield NSW: Longueville Media, 2015).

13. *St Mark's Review*, 231:1 (2015).

14. John A. Moses, 'The struggle for Anzac Day 1916-1930 and the role of the Brisbane Anzac Day Commemoration Committee,' *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 88.1 (June 2002); John A. Moses and George F. Davis, *Anzac Day Origins: Canon D.J. Garland and Trans Tasman Commemoration* (Canberra: Barton Books, 2013).

highlight a religious connection to Anzac Day in the 1960s.¹⁵ Graham Seal has also discussed the Anzac dawn service without examining its religious origins.¹⁶ Tom Frame edited a compilation which brought together a cross-section of scholarly opinion on the origins and nature of Anzac Day, both religious and secular.¹⁷

Then there is the international scholarship, with a significant body of work from the English-speaking world. British scholars include Michael Snape, Edward Madigan, Linda Parker and Stuart Bell.¹⁸ The Commonwealth has seen works by Duff Crerar, Gordon Heath, and Bryant Haigh, with American scholars Richard Schweitzer and Jonathan Ebel, and Anglo-American Philip Jenkins rounding out the field.¹⁹ A burgeoning scholarship also exists on religion and the Great War around the world, studying such diversity as the links between the French church, army and state; German Jewish chaplains; Islam in the armies of France, Germany and the Ottoman empire; religion in the Indian army; and the relationship between various national

15. Ken Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape* (Carlton: University of Melbourne Press, 2005).

16. Graham Seal, "... and in the morning ...": adapting and adopting the dawn service,' *Journal of Australian Studies*, 35.1 (2011), 49-63.

17. Tom Frame (ed.), *Anzac Day Then and Now* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2016).

18. Snape, *God and the British Soldier*; Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Michael Snape and Edward Madigan (eds.), *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2013); Linda Parker, *The Whole Armour of God: Anglican Army Chaplains in the Great War* (Solihull UK: Helion, 2009); Bell, *Faith in Conflict*.

19. Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War* (2nd ed.; Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Gordon L. Heath (ed.), *Canadian Churches and the First World War* (Eugene OR: Pickwick, 2014); J. Bryant Haigh, *Men of Faith and Courage: the Official History of the Royal New Zealand Chaplains Department* (Auckland: The Word Publishers, 1983); Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches*; Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010); Philip Jenkins, *Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade* (New York: HarperOne, 2014).

churches and the war.²⁰ Much of this has emerged in the last decade, demonstrating a growing sensitivity to its importance.

Processes

My own research began at the Australian War Memorial Archives, with the expectation that sources could be difficult to track down. Figuring that the ones most likely to talk about religion were the chaplains, I started reading their diaries, letters and reports, hoping this would open up other leads. A search of Great War diaries held in the archives under the subject of religion and its synonyms revealed a handful of soldier writings so classified.

The chaplains were never meant to be the focus, but they turned up a number of tempting stories, personalities whose influence was far from negligible, though occasionally not positive. Men like the scholarly Presbyterian chaplain Andrew Gillison, who nevertheless found the common touch with the soldiers, and who gave his life at Gallipoli in a foolhardy attempt to save a wounded man in No-Man's-Land – fatally wounded alongside stretcher bearer Corporal Robert Pittendrigh, a Methodist minister in the ranks. Gillison's impact

20. Xavier Boniface, *L'armée, l'Eglise et la République (1879-1914)* (Paris: Nouveau Monde éditions at Ministère de la Défense DPMA, 2012); Peter Appelbaum, *Loyalty Betrayed: Jewish Chaplains in the German Army During the First World War* (London: Valentine Mitchell, 2014); Raberh Achi, 'L'islam dans l'armée française: entre pratique religieuse et l'identité collective (1914-1918),' at *Foi, religions at sacré dans la Grande Guerre* (Centre Mondial de la Paix, Verdun, 7-9 Novembre, 2012); Mustafa Akaskal, 'Holy War made in Germany?: Ottoman Origins of the 1914 Jihad,' *War in History*, 18.2, 184-199; Eric-Jan Zürcher (ed.), *Jihad and Islam in World War I. Studies on the Ottoman jihad on the centenary of Snouck Hurgronje's 'Holy War made in Germany'* (Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2016); Gordon Corrigan, *Sepoys in the Trenches: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-1915* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006); Sante Lesti, *Riti di guerra: Religione e politica nell'Europa della Grande Guerra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2015); Patrick J. Houlihan, 'The Churches,' in *1914-1918-online: International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, Ute Daniel, Peter Gatrell, Oliver Janz, Heather Jones, Jennifer Keene, Alan Kramer, and Bill Nasson eds; Freie Universität Berlin, Berlin 2015-10-22, DOI: 10.15463/ie1418.10747, accessed 22 August 2019.

outlasted his death, men writing eulogistically about him months later. Or Anglican T. P. Bennett, whose given name initials were serendipitously also short for 'The Padre', and who had an affectionate and moving poem written in his honour by his Commanding Officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Crouch. The larger-than-life Salvationist William McKenzie soon leapt off the pages of his extensive diaries and letters, his scrawling handwriting as energetic as his personality, while the equally prolific Anglican diarist Walter Dexter also impressed with his energy, stickability, and penetrating observations. Among the remarkable Catholic chaplains was John Fahey, probably the only chaplain to land at Gallipoli on the first day, experiencing a life-time's worth of near misses in just three weeks, and the extraordinary Jesuit priest Michael Bergin, perhaps the only Anzac never to have gotten closer to Australia than Egypt, who was killed at Passchendaele in 1917, much to the distress of so many in his battalion, including staunch Protestants. There were a few who won mixed reviews or outright negatives, including the generally popular Anglo-Catholic William Maitland Woods, whose encyclopaedic knowledge of ancient history sometimes came across as a showy, or the combatively sectarian Presbyterian J. Lawrence Rentoul, who couldn't help his tendencies to take offense against Anglican encroachments, or the pompous Baptist Donald McNichol whose insistence on his rights and privileges as an officer, at the expense of carrying out his responsibilities, offended many. I could list so many others, mostly good, but also bad and indifferent, but don't tempt me to begin.

It was soon clear to me, despite McKernan's work on padres, that there was still much to say (Gladwin's book was an enterprise still unknown to me at that stage). In particular, the material on William McKenzie was singularly captivating. Provoking me was a body of published material that misrepresented his achievements, not least

the works of evangelist Col Stringer. His hagiography of McKenzie made up in enthusiasm what it lacked in accuracy and organisation – and it was very enthusiastic! While I understand the intent of such writing, in the long-term it does more harm than good. It's what I call 'lying for God', a tendency to whitewash the bad behaviour of Christians and exaggerate the good in the hope of making God look better. Sadly, when the truth comes along, usually at the hands of sceptics, the damage caused by the loss of credibility is greater than any benefit. If we lied about that, then perhaps we just lied about God, full stop. Just as the Bible is rigorously honest in documenting the virtues and failings of its heroes, so we as Christians, and especially as Christian historians, have a duty to the truth, even though at times it might reflect badly on us'. But isn't that the essence of the Gospel, that God's favour to us is despite our failings, not because of our perfections? Gilding God's lilies usually backfires; on the other hand, as the apostle Paul testified, God's strength is made perfect in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9-10).

The inaccuracies and gaps in McKenzie's story encouraged me to dig deeper. Researching in The Salvation Army archives in Melbourne uncovered a wealth of material, and its archivist, Lindsay Cox, issued a witty challenge to produce a better biography. At first it felt a little presumptuous for an Adventist to tell the story of one Australia's greatest Salvationists, but the idea grew, and I set aside the larger work of soldier religion to concentrate on a more reliable account of McKenzie's extraordinary life. I was also able to track down two granddaughters, the eldest of whom had known him well, while the other knew him from family stories. The first, the now-late Jean Newall, a devout Anglican, worried at first that I was one of that breed of modern historians who sought to tear heroes down from their pedestals. She also wondered how an Adventist could possibly relate to McKenzie the Salvationist. I confess to having conducted a quick

mental inventory of shared Adventist-Salvationist experiences: an emphasis on Scripture—check; an imperative to evangelism—check; a connection between a person’s physical and spiritual states—check; no smoking/drinking/swearing/gambling/dancing—check; diligent tithe-paying—check; strict sabbatarianism (admittedly on different days)—check; a tendency to legalism—check. After reading some early drafts, Newall became a willing partner with a fount of first-hand accounts of her grandfather. McKenzie’s youngest granddaughter, Ann Zubrick, an academic and a leader in the Australian Society of Friends, offered family memories but also invaluable critiques of the manuscript, broadening its reach and ensuring greater rigour in its context.

As this project developed, I was delighted to be given six months’ research leave to write up the manuscript, during which time I discovered that I loved writing even more than teaching. I also found my voice as a writer and my home as a researcher. I already had a fair bit of publishing behind me, including several books, but nothing felt as natural as this. I’d always suffered a vague level of unease while writing about film, as I am not a visual thinker; on the matters of religion and war I was very much in my element, for reasons I can only partly explain.

With this done, I returned to my big-picture work. It was built around a data-bank of quotes from the diaries, letters and memoirs of about 1,000 Anzacs – the same sample size that Gammage used for *The Broken Years*. After I had exhausted the diaries catalogued as containing religious material in the War Memorial Archives, I simply tried lucky dip. I also turned to the digitised, and often transcribed, diaries and letters held by the Mitchell Library, State Library of NSW, as well as from the Victorian, South Australian and Queensland archives. Others were available online or in print, while some acquaintances shared precious family papers with me. The

process of exploration continues, and I have now read the papers of over 1,200 service men and women, though with diminishing returns as the new diaries tend to confirm what I had found in the earlier ones. Only occasionally does a new insight or topic emerge.

Perhaps the most striking discovery was how widespread religious observations were in soldier writings. Having expected them to be hard to find, I was amazed to come across them regularly. Well over a third of the soldiers commented on religion and morality, and when it came to nurses, the proportion was much higher again, reflecting a cultural bias that permitted women and penalised men in matters of religious expression. Despite this, as Linder observed of Gammage's research, a religious sensibility was easily discernible to those who were looking for the evidence. Sometimes, soldiers simply noted every Church Parade they attended on Sundays, with no further comment. Others wrote the title of the sermon. That they were bothered to record these routine events, however briefly, implies something. Depending on what else they chose to record, I could draw inferences about their attitude to religion from these notes. For example, there were some whose diary comments were sparse in the extreme, yet every church parade was faithfully recorded, suggesting that these mattered.

But many more offered extended commentary, passing judgement on chaplains, sermons, services, religious attitudes among their fellow soldiers and among the cultures that hosted them, and their own religious reflections. I was surprised to discover that by far the majority of these were positive towards religion; a few were neutral or indeterminate, while proportionally few were negative. And even here, they seemed to have had high expectations of faith, for typically they were disappointed at religion's failure to provide adequate answers. As for the less-than-two-thirds who said nothing

about religion, it would seem that indifference rather than dislike accounted for the silences in their diaries.

Another interesting fact emerged when both diaries and letters of an individual were preserved, allowing a comparison between the two. In several cases, there was a dramatic contrast in the mentions of religion. Some wrote diaries devoid of religious events, yet wrote letters home about church services, personal devotions and religious reflections. Others reversed the religious commentary, noting it in dairies but never in letters. In each case, it was a reminder that silence in diaries or letters did not guarantee a secular mind-set in a soldier, as other lost writings might have carried religious commentary. Based on this, the less-than-two-thirds silent majority could reasonably be expected to have included at least a few more religiously-minded men

Some popular myths could be dispelled – there are indeed atheists in foxholes! While an initial exposure to combat tended to raise religious consciousness, it usually subsided once soldiers realised that religious observance, whatever eternal benefits it might promise, did nothing for one's chances of temporal life. Similarly, war experiences changed the religious outlook of relatively few soldiers. Instead it tended to reinforce whatever belief trajectory a soldier took to war. Naturally, there were some who found faith or lost it on the battlefield. Certainly, a number kept faith in God but lost faith in institutional religion, but by and large, the net effect was that war did little to change attitudes to faith, despite the expressed fervent expectations of many Christians that the conflict would turn hearts to God.

Outcomes

The Anzacs and religion was a larger field than I had expected, and I invested nearly a decade in research before gaining any return in publications. Now, with a large bank of data, the payoff is a capacity

to generate new articles relatively quickly. The principal research needed at the moment is the contextual secondary literature in which to embed the article. To date, my research has resulted in three books and a booklet, as well as eight journal articles, four book chapters and nine documentaries, as well as popular magazine articles and media appearances.

The first book was the biography of Chaplain McKenzie. Of course, writing was the easy part; publishing was another story. Despite a leading Anzac historian labelling it as ‘one of the finest books on the AIF’s historical experience to appear in the course of the Great War centenary’,²¹ no major publisher was interested. And I had imagined it as an eminently marketable topic for a general Australian audience at a time when the centenary of the Gallipoli landings peaked interest in Anzac. Instead, *The Man the Anzacs Revered* was released by the small Australian Adventist Church publishing house Signs in 2015.²² So much for not doing research with limited general reach! However, it sold well in this context, becoming the first Signs publication to break into the Koorong distribution network, and it stayed on Signs’ best-seller list for three years.

Having done with the side-line to my principal aim, a comprehensive study of soldier writings on religion, I organised the soldiers’ quotes into a series of themes which became chapters in the book, from enforced religion at church parades to voluntary church attendance, personal spirituality, the relationship between God and war, various religious beliefs, soldier ethics, attitudes to padres, and generic spirituality. Along with an introduction and a section of pocket biographical and source notes on every soldier quoted in the book

21. Peter Stanley, correspondence with the author, 8 October 2018.

22. Daniel Reynaud, *The Man the Anzacs Revered: William ‘Fighting Mac’ McKenzie, Anzac Chaplain* (Warburton Vic: Signs Publishing, 2015).

(in collaboration with my research assistant Marcia Forbes), the initial manuscript also included seven chapter-length biographies of soldiers with significant spiritual journeys.

The next task was finding a publisher. Again I tried a range of relevant commercial publishers, and this time I got closer. One leading war history publisher actually went so far as to send me the minutes of the meeting that refused the manuscript. They listed five pros, including that it was a ‘useful and considered approach’, ‘thoroughly researched’ and ‘informative’, and then four cons. One was a technicality, which a simple ‘search-replace’ would address, another wanting coverage of non-Christian beliefs (which I actually addressed in some detail in one chapter – the evidence suggests that there is little to say on the subject). The other two were telling. It was labelled a ‘niche topic’, and they feared that publishing it might affect their future funding. ‘Niche’? A quick scroll through the publisher’s catalogue suggests that ‘niche’ is their norm. On the other hand, they were eager to get a copy when it was published by someone else. I cannot avoid the impression that the topic of religion spooked them, especially as they mentioned that Gladwin’s book was already on the market, though among the pros they had said that mine filled a different space in that market.

I was, however, able to interest Australian Scholarly Publishing (ASP), which had published my book on Anzac cinema.²³ I was grateful for their support, even though their distribution network meant that it would not sit alongside other Anzac history books in chain bookshops, removing it from the view of most Australian book-browsers. *Anzac Spirituality* came out in 2018.²⁴ ASP was concerned

23. Daniel Reynaud, *Celluloid Anzacs: The Great War through Australian Cinema* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2007).

24. Daniel Reynaud, *Anzac Spirituality: The First AIF Soldiers Speak* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018).

about the length of the manuscript and asked me to shorten it. With a heavy heart, I cut the section of expanded soldier biographies, until I realised that they had done me a favour. Having winnowed it down to just seven stories in the initial manuscript, I was able to expand it back to twenty-seven in a sequel volume, *The Anzacs, Religion and God* in 2019.²⁵ This allowed space to explore the individual spiritual journeys of a cross-section of soldiers, adding a personal dimension to the previous book's thematic approach. Alongside the books are peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters, including articles on William McKenzie, Anzac attitudes to religion, the work of chaplains, The Salvation Army, and the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the Pacific during World War One.²⁶

25. Daniel Reynaud, *The Anzacs, Religion and God: The spiritual journeys of twenty-seven members of the AIF* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2019).

26. Daniel Reynaud, 'The legend of William McKenzie,' *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, 2.7 (June 2014), 7-36; Daniel Reynaud, Paul Bogacs and Carolyn Rickett, 'Beyond telling: Narrating trauma in the wartime writings of Great War AIF Chaplain William McKenzie,' *TEACH*, 10.1 (2016), 47-52; Daniel Reynaud, 'Lest we forget: Fighting Mac, The Army and contemporary Australia,' *The Australasian Journal of Salvation Army History*, 1.2 (2016), 42-52; Daniel Reynaud, 'Revisiting the secular Anzac: the Anzacs and religion,' *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, 2.9 (2015), 73-101; Daniel Reynaud, "'That sacred band of crusaders:' The AIF as God's Warriors,' *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review*, 2.12 (December 2018), 61-84; Daniel Reynaud, 'Signs of Spiritual Crisis or Evidence of Unexpected Commitment? Attitudes to Compulsory Church Parades in the First AIF,' *Journal of Religious History*, 41.1 (March 2017), 97-110; Daniel Reynaud, 'In two armies: The experiences of two Salvationists in the first AIF 1914-1918,' *The Australasian Journal of Salvation Army History*, 4.2 (2019), 27 - 40; Daniel Reynaud, 'A Second Front: Canon Garland, Chaplain Maitland Woods and Anglo-Catholicism in the Australian Imperial Force during World War One,' *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 72.1 (January 2021), 95-112; Daniel Reynaud, and Jane Fernandez, "'To Thrash the Offending Adam out of Them': The theology of violence in the writings of Great War Anzacs,' in *Secularisation: New Historical Perspectives*, 134-150; Daniel Reynaud and Larisa Miler, 'Australian Chaplains at Gallipoli: Role, Impact and Influence,' in *Çanakkale 1915, Tarih, Ekonomi, Edebiyat ve Sanat/ Gallipoli 1915: History, Economy, Literature and Art* (M. Mehdi İlhan, Mehmet Bulut, and Ibrahim G. Yumuşak eds.; Istanbul: Istanbul Sabahattin Zaim Üniversitesi, 2017), 199-218; Daniel Reynaud, 'Religion (Australia),' 1914-1918-online. *International Encyclopedia of the First World War*, 2019; Daniel Reynaud, 'World War One and The Seventh-day Adventist Church in the South Pacific,' *Encyclopedia of Seventh-day Adventists*, 2020.

Even before I had published any books or articles, I was asked if I could contribute some Australian historical content for the religious television programme 'It Is Written Oceania' (IIWO). I agreed to write six half-hour documentaries about the Anzacs and religion, and in 2009 travelled with a film crew to Egypt and Turkey, where we filmed on location. Along with three more episodes filmed in 2014, they were broadcast over the next few years, with the screenplays adapted as an accompanying booklet called *Faith of the Anzacs*.²⁷ There were feature episodes on three chaplains – McKenzie, Bennett, and Gillison – as well as one each on the New Zealand and Australian chaplains in general, one on the enigmatic soldier Tom 'Rusty' Richards, and one on soldier spirituality.²⁸ Most are available on Vimeo. I've also been asked to contribute pieces to popular magazines and newspapers such as *Signs of the Times*, the *Adventist Record* and the *Newcastle Herald*, and have given a number of radio and television interviews on the topic.

Reception

The response to this body of work has been mixed. For the most part, material targeting a popular audience has been well received and reached a wide audience. Despite the religious emphasis, the documentaries were sufficiently commercially attractive to Channel 7 to be shifted from the religious broadcast graveyard shift of the early hours of Sunday mornings into prime daytime viewing slots,

27. Daniel Reynaud and Gary Kent, *Faith of the Anzacs* (Sydney: It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2010).

28. *Fighting Mac: the story of William McKenzie* (It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2012); *Bennett: Gallipoli Chaplain* (It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2014); *Chaplain Gillison: Martyr of Gallipoli* (It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2015); *The Kiwi Chaplains* (It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2015); *Brothers in Arms: Anzac Chaplains* (It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2010); *The Tom Richards Story* (It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2015); *Faith of the Anzacs* (It Is Written Oceania/Adventist Media Network, 2010).

usually on Anzac Day. One was just before the Anzac Day AFL game and reached an estimated audience of 250,000 in the eastern states. They also generated record high responses from viewers for IIWO episodes, and requests for the booklet ran at ten times the usual rate – over a thousand in just the first week. The lead episode won media awards in Australia and America, while a magazine article won an Australasian Religious Press Association award.

The academic work has been favourably reviewed in Christian journals and by some secular organisations, but has largely escaped the attention of mainstream history journals. Peer reviewer comments on articles submitted to mainstream journals have rejected statements that historians in general viewed the Anzacs as not religiously inclined, arguing instead that it is the legend which is secular. They have indicated an increasingly sophisticated scholarship recognising the complex emotional and social lives of soldiers. I take their point, though even in these cases religion is mentioned in passing at best. They also offered useful criticism of how I had handled the evidence, which was much appreciated, and welcomed my attempts to speak of the religious lives of the Anzacs, though none of the articles were accepted in secular journals. So there has been a dichotomy in responses: generally the work has been welcomed by Christian academics and critiqued or ignored by secular ones. Getting published is always a difficult task and many secular academics can tell similar stories about their work in non-religious arenas, but occasionally I get glimpses of bias against religion, as I've already suggested. In one interesting exercise, I sent the manuscript of *Anzac Spirituality* to a prominent exponent of both popular history and aggressively anti-religious opinions. I asked this person for feedback. I was of course hoping to provoke a public statement that would provide useful publicity. The best I got was a reply to the initial offer, undertaking to read the manuscript, but for me not to expect

it to bring about any change of mind. I missed my cue: I should have responded that I was sorry that this writer's opinions were immune to evidence, precisely the criticism s/he makes about Christians. I contacted this writer several times after sending the manuscript but never got a reply.

The future

Doing this project has been like entering what I thought was a bed-sitter room but instead finding a mansion. I have more than enough potential research projects coming from this data collection than I can fit into the rest of my life. I am thinking of a biography of Chaplain Dexter, possibly a more focused study of the Great War chaplains to add to existing studies, as well as articles on a variety of other Anzacs-and-religion topics such as music, sermons, and the work of the YMCA.

But that is just the start. Working through the ego documents, I couldn't help noticing other topics, and began collecting quotes there as well. Given that Gammage mentioned politics and sex as two other topics alongside religion that the Anzacs did not write about, I collected those as well, and have enough for an article on politics (he was right; they hardly mention it) and many articles or even a book on matters of sex, if the term is broadened to include the relationships they had with the women in their lives – mothers, sisters, wives, girlfriends, and ladies in passing. In particular, in collaboration with my wife, a gifted foodie and hospitality teacher, I amassed thousands of statements about their diet, and have completed a few articles and a first draft of a book on Anzac eating habits. It's been a huge deal of fun, and absolutely fascinating. Other possible topics are on Anzac poetry and the artwork that adorns many diaries.

Conclusions

This project has been quite a learning curve. Having moved into religious history, I have discovered a deep and engaging field of endeavor that has educated me in multiple ways. I perceive a difference in emphasis and interest between Christian and secular historians: while we share a commitment to historical rigour, we do not share the same perspectives and priorities. I have learnt a considerable degree of nuance from secular reviewers, as well as coming to some understanding of their preoccupations. On the other hand, I see that we Christian historians have our own set of concerns that don't get much oxygen in the secular historical arena – hence the voice provided by such groups as the EHA and the Religious History Association. (As an aside, I learnt during an exchange professorship in the USA in 2017 that religious history had been ghettoed in America until relatively recently, a fact that surprised me about the most overtly Christian nation on the planet. I guess that gives us reason to hope that perhaps Australia will eventually bring religion into the historiographic mainstream).

I also suspect that we religious historians need to listen and speak better to secular historians and audiences. There is some encouragement in works being published by Australian Christian historians. To name but two shining examples, Gladwin's *Captains of the Soul* and Meredith Lake's *The Bible in Australia*²⁹ are clear exemplars of how to bridge that divide, and engage a wider audience. I hope to find a similar connection with the Australian community through Anzac religious history.

My own research has opened up some illuminating perspectives on perhaps why I haven't been heard as well as I would like. Firstly, the

29. Meredith Lake, *The Bible in Australia: A Cultural History* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2018).

well-documented English resistance to public religious expression, an immunity passed on to Australian culture. And secondly, building from this, as historian John Hirst has argued, the secularity of Australian public life is a result of a desire to avoid Old World sectarian conflict from disrupting New World community-building, achieved by excluding faith from the public sphere, and restricting it to private practice.³⁰ This kind of dichotomy was increasingly evident in my research, which revealed a much higher level of religious engagement than I had initially suspected, yet a public face of secularity. Ironically, despite the strong blowback against public religious discussion, levels of personal spirituality in contemporary Australia are close to those of manifestly-religious America. Somehow, we need to find a way to articulate an analysis of this powerful personal force which below the surface is shaping much of the apparently secular cultural crust. Whether a person is religious or not, religion has been and continues to be a force in Australian history, which no conscientious historian can afford to overlook.

The public silence on faith is perhaps at its most ironic in how secular Australia has made a religion out of Anzac, complete with a dogma (the Anzac legend), cathedrals and temples (the cathedral-like Australian War Memorial, the Melbourne Shrine of Remembrance and Sydney Anzac Memorial), local shrines (monuments, obelisks, and RSLs), holidays (Anzac Day, and Remembrance Day) rituals (daily ode in RSLs, the Anzac Day dawn parade) and pilgrimages (Gallipoli, Villers-Bretonneux, and Kokoda), while simultaneously arguing that the legend is purely secular. At the personal level, there is the irony of me sidestepping religious history because of its parochial nature, only to find myself pursuing it with vigour and entangled in its parochialism. I had naively thought that a topic like

30. John Hirst, *Sense and Nonsense in Australian History* (Melbourne: Black Inc, 2009), 13-18.

mine might be an excellent bridge between secular and religious Australians, but I see that it is more problematic than that. Not that the conversation cannot be had, but that as a Christian historian, I need to learn where secular historians and audiences are itching if I am to scratch successfully.