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CHAPTER EIGHT

“TO THRASH THE OFFENDING ADAM OUT OF THEM”: THE THEOLOGY OF VIOLENCE IN THE WRITINGS OF GREAT WAR ANZACS

DANIEL REYNAUD AND JANE FERNANDEZ

Introduction

Lieutenant Eric Chinner, a devout Baptist officer, exemplified the theology of many Christian ANZAC soldiers in justifying their fighting in the Great War when he wrote, “it is because I KNOW He is fighting for us that I feel He will bless me and guide me in my hour of trial.” The stridency of his opinions is evident while still training at Duntroon in 1915:

[T]his terrible Lusitania affair has made me very keen to get to grips with those inhuman brutes. My greatest desire now is to do something to help wipe out such an infamous nation. The Parson this morning preached on this text—‘What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?’ But he altered ‘man’ to ‘nation’. I am sure that God will take a strong hand in the war and thoroughly punish Germany for this latest atrocity.¹

By 1916, Chinner’s theological justification was less vindictive, marking an attempt to reconcile the contradictions of Christian love for one’s enemies and the war effort, but remained essentially the same in its endorsement of violence to a godly end. He heard a chaplain preach, “I love the German so much that I have come out here to help thrash the offending Adam out of him.” Chinner added:

I am trying to develop such a spirit. I do not want to go into battle with a hatred burning up all that is good. That sounds too much like vengeance. But if I can fight with the feeling of punishing them for the evil they have done I will be helping to ‘thrash the offending Adam’ out of them.²

Chinner’s statements, representative of a broad theology of violence espoused by Christian soldiers at the front, find a framework in René Girard’s theories of sacralised violence, in particular his concept of mimetic rivalry and the related scapegoat mechanism.

The topic is of interest: as one scholar has noted,

“[The churches’] enthusiastic embrace of the challenge of war derives in great part from churchmen’s desire for some event that would shake Australians from their indifference and awaken them to the Christian realities.”³

The history of Australian church-state interactions has been explored by a number of scholars who have noted the various forces that led to collusion between religious bodies and the state, as well as those that led to friction.⁴ Without a state-endorsed denomination in Australia, the various churches quickly fell into rivalry with each other to gain government support for their churches, education systems, and social agendas. The Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Methodists also competed to express allegiance to the ideals of imperial Britain, seeing them as at the least overlapping, if not identical, to the goals of British Protestantism. In this collusion, the churches hoped to gain traction for their own religious agendas in the face of apparent indifference from Australian society.

In effect, the churches saw the war as an opportunity to reverse the persistent tendency of Australian society toward secularism, and of claiming that position of socio-political-spiritual leadership for Christianity

² Letter to parents June 4, 1916, 1DRL0200, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

³ Michael McKernan, *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and Activities of the Major Churches 1914-1918* (Sydney & Canberra: Catholic Theological Faculty & Australian War Memorial, 1980), 8.

⁴ For example, McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*; John Moses, “ANZAC Day as Religious Revivalism: The Politics of Faith in Brisbane, 1916-1939,” in *Reviving Australia: Studies in Australian Christianity* 3, eds Mark Hutchinson and Stuart Piggin (Sydney: The Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity, 1994); Stuart Piggin, *Evangelical Christianity in Australia: Spirit, Word and World, Melbourne* (Brookvale: Acorn Press, 2012); Robert D. Linder, “The Methodist Love Affair with the Australian Labor Party, 1891-1929,” *Lucas* 23 & 24 (1997-1998).

¹ Undated letter, 1915, 1DRL0200, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

that many felt had been lost in the differences between the bodies politic of Britain and Australia. While the responses of the Australian Christian churches to the war is well documented, the theology of Christians actually involved in combat on the front has only incidentally been examined. This chapter seeks to address that gap through appropriating Girard's theory of sacralised violence.

René Girard's theory of sacralised violence⁵ offers us another way of exploring the complex and ambiguous relationships between church and state in Australia during the Great War. Girard draws on the ancient Greek concept of the *pharmakon* to bring attention to the fundamental contradictions homed in sacralised violence, this being that the sacrificial mechanism depends on violence to cure violence. Girard argues that the appointed scapegoat is killed or expelled to provide the community with a 'temporary' peace. This 'generative' principle of scapegoating emphasises how the toxicity of sacralised violence is justified by its presumed or anticipated benefits. The cathartic function of the sacrificial mechanism is supposed to cleanse and purge a community of its bent toward violence. But such a benefit is only possible through the violent unanimity of the group, a community founded on consensual violence. Girard argues that this violence is concealed behind the justification of the 'sacred', thus exempting it from the same moral scrutiny under which the violence towards the scapegoat would ordinarily be condemned.

Girard argues that the sacrificial mechanism can also generate a sacrificial crisis, building and overflowing into imitative violence or mimetic rivalry. He states that in mimetic rivalry the object of desire is inconsequential, serving only to obscure that fact that the rivals are in fact doubles. Hence, mimetic rivalry serves only one purpose: to sustain the myth of difference. And what gives greater power to this myth is the kudos of divinity, the sacralising of this violence, which enables the perpetrator to deny a role in the violence and impute it instead to God. It is this theological basis of sacrifice which Girard calls the great and wilful misunderstanding of violence, or the "unperceived victimage mechanism". He writes that human beings "kill and continue to kill, strange as it may

⁵ René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977); René Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World: Research Undertaken in Collaboration with Jean-Michel Oughourlian and G. Lefort* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987). The discussion on Girard's theory is adapted from Chapter 2 of Fernandez-Goldborough, *The Second Skin: A Critique of Violence* (Saarbrücken: Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).

seem, in order not to know that they are killing."⁶ For the sacrificial system to work, the participants must in essence refuse to investigate the 'truth' of the sacrificial act. This wilful blindness, necessary to make the sacrifice effective, is best sustained through the theological basis of sacrifice. "Men can dispose of violence more efficiently if they regard the process not as something emanating from within themselves, but as a necessity imposed from without: a divine decree." So long as the role of sacrifice can be attributed to placating divine sanctions, there can be no fear of reprisals.⁷ Our interest is in exploring to what extent Christian Anzacs either consciously or unconsciously explained what was really a secular war effort through the theological basis of sacralised violence, through its mechanisms of scapegoat and mimetic rivalry, and whether the experience of war had any impact on this.

The Churches and the War

The works of Michael McKernan and Robert D. Linder⁸ have done much to reveal the interaction of Australian religion and the Great War. Their studies have shown how the major denominations responded to the war, and the complex relationships that existed as it progressed. Linder notes that the Australian churches, like their overseas counterparts, had no properly developed theology of war.⁹ McKernan characterises the initial responses of the four major denominations (Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian, and Methodist) as largely supportive of the war effort, operating from a conviction of the ideological harmony of the British Empire and the kingdom of God. Many believed that the war would produce spiritual gains.¹⁰ While these attitudes began to change as the stalemate persisted, the mainline Protestant denominations maintained their support for the war effort and for conscription. Certainly the war raised a number of hard questions for the churches, demanding a review of their attitudes and sometimes their doctrine, particularly of Evangelicals and their eschatological constructs.¹¹ The dominant view constructed Germany as the villain, or scapegoat in Girardian terms, as personified by the Kaiser

⁶ Girard, *Things Hidden*, 163.

⁷ Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 7, 14.

⁸ McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*; Robert D. Linder, *The Long Tragedy: Australian Evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Adelaide: Centre for the Study of Australian Christianity & Openbook, 2000).

⁹ Linder, *The Long Tragedy*, 155.

¹⁰ McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*, 32-39; Linder, *The Long Tragedy*, 72.

¹¹ Linder, *The Long Tragedy*, 12.

who needed to be punished and crushed in order to restore the world to harmony so that British Christianity—or Christian Britishness (the two were often indistinguishable)—could resume its global sovereignty. But as the war progressed and the human cost to the Allies grew beyond anyone's imaginings, the churches began to see the war as God's punishment on secular society, and the casualty lists as an indictment on Australia's spiritual failings. Thus, as Girardian theory predicted, the scapegoat ceased to be merely the Kaiser or the German nation, but expanded to include their own sons and husbands. Allied casualties, particularly those of Christian soldiers, came to be seen as sacrifices made to expiate for the sins of the world, as the cost of reconciling the world to God, and therefore as scapegoats whose sacrifice brings peace. By expanding the scapegoat to include punishment for Australia's sins, this view saw the war as a weapon in the battle against secularity.

Both McKernan and Linder note a minority of dissenting voices in many denominations—Catholic, Anglican and Evangelical—those who bridled at assuming that the Empire and God were at one in the war, and those who feared the war's corrupting influence on humanity at the individual level and on society at large. Some clergymen were concerned that war would introduce their young men to the vices of drink, gambling, bad language, and sexual immorality, while others argued more broadly that wars were only ever fought for selfish material ends.¹² This group denied the value of the war in tackling Australian secularism. While this minority refused to submit to the dominant view of sacralised violence, both McKernan and Linder make clear that the churches largely maintained an attitude perfectly compatible with that of Chinner, seeing the war as a God-given opportunity to “thrash the offending Adam” out of its designated scapegoats. However, though Linder devotes some attention to the experiences of chaplains and soldiers and explores in some detail the responses of Christian soldiers after the war, the focus of both studies is on the varied responses of denominations and of individuals in Australia. Little light has been shed on what happened when men of faith faced the crucible of war.

For while Christians far from the front could theorise about religion and war, fighting men faced the reality of the confrontation of the two. Naturally, soldiers carried with them to the war the opinions they had formed as civilians, and their letters reveal that they continued to be engaged in the ideological and religious debates that occupied the minds of those still in Australia. Their ideological construct of the war, however,

was subject to a scrutiny not available to Australian civilians, namely the firsthand experience of war itself. To what extent did fighting men simply reflect the attitudes and values of civilian Christians in Australia, or did the war force them to come to new opinions? How did the fighting man reconcile his pre-war beliefs in the Prince of Peace with the violence of war?

Sources

Girard's concept of mimetic rivalry finds resonance in the Great War, as the British fought their racial and cultural cousins: the Germans. Australians, under the influence of popular social Darwinism, participated more deeply in this rivalry in a determined effort to assuage their fears that the British racial stock had degenerated in the Antipodes. If the British Empire, assumed to be the evolutionary pinnacle of humanity which conferred on its Anglo-Saxon members the rights of being the chosen sons and instruments of God, was called to a civilising mission to purify the earth, Australians could see themselves as agents of this mission. In this light, the war converted into a crusade to redeem ‘Civilisation’. British Protestant values were set against the barbarism of the ‘Huns’ who were reconstructed from their natural cousin-brother status to the Otherness of inferior Asiatics. These notions are touted in Anzac letters and diaries, which form the larger part of the evidence used here.

Diaries and letters are sources of mixed value as evidence in the matter of religion. The first issue is of course their mere survival. The vast bulk of letters and diaries written by soldiers have been lost, and what remains may or may not be representative. Nevertheless, it is all that we have of first-hand evidence of the religious beliefs of soldiers. Secondly, the likelihood of soldiers writing about religion in their diaries and letters varies considerably. With time for reflection, some soldiers were notable for recording long passages of philosophical thought; however, even the most religious of men tended to write little about religion when in actual combat. The diary of the saintly Chaplain Andrew Gillison has almost no references to faith once on Gallipoli, in contrast to the entries prior to arriving on the peninsula; similarly, the spiritually anguished Tom Richards almost never wrote of religion once he switched career to a combat officer. On the whole, though, there are relatively few references to personal religious beliefs, but this absence is not peculiar to the Anzacs: Great War British and even American soldiers, from a more overtly

¹² Linder, *The Long Tragedy*, 75-80.

religious country, were just as reticent on the subject.¹³ In some cases, we can know through other sources that particular soldiers were active Christians, but their surviving diaries and letters give little or no clue as to that. Another issue is that letters in particular, and to some extent diaries, were written with an audience in mind, and it may be that some recorded religious sentiments were for domestic consumption rather than a true reflection of the individual soldier's attitudes. On the other hand, letters were also subject to censorship, which could account for the absence of criticism of the war and its justifications in some cases, either through self-censorship or the active intervention of the censors. Nevertheless, the proportionally little evidence that remains contains a fair number of references to religious beliefs across a spectrum of attitudes, and so is of value to this study.

The War as God's War

In the Great War rhetoric of Australia, the scapegoat was Germany at large, and the Kaiser in particular. As this chapter has explored, the Kaiser embodied the evil, the Original Sin, which needed purging from the world in order to restore peace. While this rhetoric was shared among the general community, it had even greater significance for Christian Australians. For most Christian Anzacs, the new community to be born of this purging would not be one whose Australian identity would be forged from the Gallipoli story, or the spiritual narrative of secular Australia, but that of a truly Christian Australia with a revived faith.

While the range of the responses of Christian soldiers shifts between outright support for the Allied crusade to ambivalent responses to both the war and Christianity, the dominant register in the relevant Anzac letters and diaries is the conviction of the unique and sacred destiny of the Empire through repetitive characterisations of Britain as a master race and child of divinity, and embellished through an array of religious allusions: a sacred Nation and sacred blood. The exploitation of quasi-religious language to this end is noticeable in clichés that support the view of the Great War fought in Britain's interest as God's War advancing God's Righteous Cause and representing Humanity's Hope. For instance, Anglican Chaplain Walter Dexter writes that the "pride of race comes

¹³ Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt Among British and American Great War Soldiers* (Westport CT & London: Praeger, 2003), 117.

upon me strongly"¹⁴ while Methodist Chaplain Albert Bladen records with pride of "a deep religious vein in the British nation, a heritage received from puritan ancestors which subsequent vicissitudes have never entirely dissipated," and notes that at the Gallipoli landings the Australians demonstrated that "Britain's sons were showing themselves worthy descendants of the parent stock."¹⁵ Presbyterian Chaplain Francis W. Rolland wrote that his role was to "keep alive the Faith in their cause that men came away with,"¹⁶ blending both religion and patriotism into a single faith. This marrying of religion and patriotism meant conversely that those who did not enlist were regarded as both 'shirkers' and unbelievers: Corporal William Blaskett wrote feelingly to his sister that he thought that no shirker could be a Christian. "I may be biased, but it seems to me, that fighting for Right against Might, is a very practical form of Christianity."¹⁷

Other writings betray how the quasi-religious language of the war became more militant. Anglican Chaplain Thomas 'T. P.' Bennett wrote of discovering that "Bible and Battle are virtual synonyms," and preached on the text, "The battle is not yours, but the Lord's,"¹⁸ while Everard Digges La Touche, a noted Anglican theologian who died in his first battle as an infantry officer at Gallipoli, spoke of Christ and [British] King in one breath, and saw himself as fighting a holy crusade against German liberal Protestantism, securing the victory for those who had died before him.¹⁹ Other soldiers also made the connection between God, Empire, and duty. Company Quarter Master Sergeant Alfred Guppy found a sermon "or more correctly a lecture on Devotion to the Flag... impressive and stirred our deepest patriotism."²⁰ Private George Davies, a Methodist Home Missionary in civilian life, wrote a series of pious moralising diary-letters addressed to a young protégé, Willie, in which he portrayed the war as product of ungodly influences opposed to the steady "upward and onward" spiritual march of man. Yet his simple pronouncements were not without

¹⁴ Diary entry, March 11, 1915, PR00248, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

¹⁵ Albert Bladen, *An Anzac's Tracks*, M/S PR01752, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

¹⁶ 1DRL0646, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

¹⁷ Letter to Madge Blaskett, April 18, 1916, 1DRL0130, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

¹⁸ PRMF0015, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

¹⁹ 1DRL0243, Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Michael Jensen, "Everard Digges La Touche," *The Blogging Parson*, June 22, 2007, accessed February 16, 2012, <http://mpjensen.blogspot.com/2007/06/everard-digges-la-touche.html>.

²⁰ 3DRL1545, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

conflict; he recorded that in January 1916, after much wrestling with his soul, he decided to “make a sacrifice on behalf of my country, and accordingly gave my name in as a recruit.”²¹

A soldier who wrote enthusiastically of the alliance between Christianity and country was journalist Oliver Hogue, who wrote under the penname ‘Trooper Bluegum’. Of the clergy he said:

The Church Militant! Was it ever so militant as now, when all the powers of darkness, all the forces of the Devil, are arrayed against Christianity and all the manifold blessings of Civilization? ... And here, on Gallipoli ... [w]e have our chaplains, and we have ministers of the Gospel fighting as ‘happy warrior’ in the ranks.²²

Roman Catholic Chaplain Thomas Mullins wrote of celebrating Mass for soldiers “who had poured forth the fullest measure of their lifeblood on the sands of Gallipoli.”²³ Presbyterian Chaplain Ernest N. Merrington wrote of soldiers in Egypt “feeling the thrill of their comrades’ noble sacrifices at the Dardanelles. ... The deeper spiritual note was sounding in all hearts.” Elsewhere he noted how the Anzacs saved the land “made sacred by their brothers’ blood and their comrades’ graves,” and wrote of soldiers “singing the great hymns of Christendom with full and resonant voices, which filled the valleys of the battle-field with the glorious strains of the triumph of Divine Love and Life over sin and death.”²⁴ Merrington’s unpublished manuscript is an encomium of the Empire. An extension of the Church Militant theme saw also the forthright claims of God, not just as Britain’s champion, but as the surrogate soldier fighting personally and intimately for the Allied cause. In effect, these statements are classic examples of Girard’s scapegoating mechanism where the community claims divine sanction for their violence, while creating a moral-spiritual distinction between their own actions and those of their brother-rival.

Allied to this was the process of scapegoating, which some soldiers made particularly overt in their writings, contrasting the anti-type Kaiser

²¹ Private diary entry, January 21, 1916, 2DRL0789, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

²² Oliver Hogue, *Trooper Bluegum at the Dardanelles: Descriptive Narratives of the More Desperate Engagements on the Gallipoli Peninsula* 2nd ed. (London: Andrew Melrose, 1916), 223-224.

²³ “An account by Chaplain the Rev T. Mullins, MC, 4th Light Horse Brigade AIF,” 1DRL0522, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

²⁴ Ernest N. Merrington, *With The Anzacs 1914-15: A Journal of the Great Convoy, Egypt and the Dardanelles*, unpublished manuscript, 3DRL3237, Australian War Memorial, Canberra, 43, 89, 155.

with the sacrificial archetype, Jesus. The Theosophist Lieutenant Charles Alexander wrote:

the World is in agony through the actions of one man, instead of One Man suffering for the misdeeds of the whole world; and as this suffering is symbolical of what the World would have to go through, so, actually I take it, the Kaiser will have to bear the responsibility and the results of the present suffering of the World – so I think anyone might say ‘God help the poor Kaiser’!²⁵

Similarly, Chaplain Bladen wrote of the “monstrous iniquity” of Germany.²⁶ As Girard points out, the role and fate of the scapegoat cannot be confined to the alienated enemy: it spills over into the community that expels it. This is reflected in the writings of some soldiers who saw the war as God’s judgement for the immorality, not just of the Germans but of all humanity, including the Allies. Major Geoffrey McRae represented this group when he expressed faith in God’s protection, but considered that, “This war is chastening the earth and is perhaps God’s judgement on us for drifting into idle and careless ways.” Without justifying the violence from a religious point of view, he saw its impact as potentially positive, driving men back to God.²⁷ Thus the war had a sacred purpose, but the target of its refinement was broader than that of the religious imperialists, encompassing the secular outlook of those on their own side.

The War as Morally Ambiguous or Evil

Not every Christian soldier responded to the war from the dominant position. Other men offered alternative responses along a continuum, from those close to the dominant position to those who denied the war any redeeming spiritual status. Some soldiers encompassed several points along the continuum, sometimes shifting from outright support to an ambiguity over the merit of the war, and even to disgust for it at various points, while others demonstrated a clear progression from the point of support to that of a rejection of religious justifications, under the influence of their war experiences, as we shall see below.

²⁵ Letter to mother, April 6, 1917, 1DRL0019, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

²⁶ “An Anzac’s Tracks,” unpublished M/S, PR01752, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

²⁷ Letter to sister Helen, September 7, 1915, 1DRL0427, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Consequently, some saw the war as a journey towards the sacred, emphasising its potential for conversion and salvation, but without necessarily implying any sense of it being God's active instrument of purification or punishment. For these people, religion provided comfort, assurance, and peace in the middle of a threatening and often senseless situation. Many in this group saw religion as a blessing to others at the spiritual level, without any overt connection between religion and winning the war. A good number of these respondents implied an accord with the views of the God-King-and-Country Crusaders, but limited themselves to more personal religious responses. Their voluntary participation in the war suggests, however, that they were more or less comfortable with the moral vindication of the violence of their community. Many of these soldiers and chaplains posited their roles as witnesses, evangelists, and confessors of faith, especially to their unsaved brethren in the AIF; while a smaller number saw themselves as martyrs and heroes of Christ, rather than of the war effort or of Britain or Australia. Many found the trauma of war sparked strong religious interest and anticipated a post war revival, an expectation that was to be disappointed. Lieutenant Colonel Ignatius Norris was a regular communicant, and his priest wrote to Mrs Norris after his death to assure her of the comfort that Norris' faith gave him, which allowed him to carry out his duties with calm assurance.²⁸ Chaplain Merrington, officiating in an interdenominational communion service, wrote "As I tendered the elements in the name of the Perfect Love, a feeling of sacred comradeship, not limited to earth, swept over us. Those grimy and gory hands which lay open to receive the Bread were ennobled in this service by the Spirit of the Master."²⁹

Other soldiers and chaplains were equally personal in their religious statements, finding strength in their faith, but refusing to make a connection between it and their mission as soldiers. Corporal George Easton wrote to his parents that he was surprised that he survived the strain of a battle, "yet I know it was not my own strength but mainly my confidence in the power of our Heavenly Father."³⁰ Chaplains like Salvationist William McKenzie, Bennett, and Bladen frequently spoke of the comfort that the services of religion provided the men, without linking it to war aims or imperial goals. Bennett wrote on Gallipoli:

²⁸ Robin S. Corfield, *Don't Forget Me Cobber: The Battle of Fromelles*, (Melbourne: Miegunyah Press, 2009), 141.

²⁹ "With The Anzacs 1914-15," 147, 3DRL3237, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

³⁰ Letter to parents, September 26, 1917, 1DRL0255, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

[T]he truth of the matter is that the realities of war have melted away the surface shyness of men about religion — they feel they are up against questions of life and death — As a censor I can testify to the real part religion bears in a soldier's life — it was shown in the innumerable letters home I have read in which the writers ask for the prayers of their relatives or express their trust in God.³¹

Corporal Ronald Pittendrigh, a Methodist minister who enlisted and served in the medical corps lost his life rescuing the wounded on Gallipoli. Of him it was said, "One of the motives which moved him was the conviction that he might be of some service to his fellow soldiers by living among them, sharing their hardships and dangers, and showing what a Christian life was before their eyes, while, at the same time, seizing every opportunity of winning them for Christ."³² Of most of these responses, however, it would be safe to say that while the connection was not overtly attached to these utterances, they occurred in the general context of support for the war. McKenzie and Bennett, for example, made a number of statements indicating their pride of race and belief in the Allied cause.³³

A smaller number of soldier writers went further in separating religion from the war by desacralising it. The pseudonymous Private Frederick Brown's fictionalised autobiography tracks his spiritual journey as he struggled to make sense of the war. He began as a kind of sacraliser by wondering if God was using British war aims to "purge the world of international immorality." When told by a chaplain that the war was part of God's plan to rid the world of 'insects' like the Germans, "I plucked my courage up and said 'The padre didn't know what he was talking about; God did not cause this war, man did'." He only enlisted on the proviso that God got him into the Medical Corps, so that he would not have to kill. By the end of the war he had a firm faith in God, but little in institutional religion that condoned war.³⁴

Rarely emerging from the war writings of soldiers is the notion of complete disjunction, of war as the antithesis of God's purposes. Frederick Brown's attitude is typical of those who perceived some level of disjunction between their faith and the war. At the simplest level this was an acknowledgement that the war was hellish and not conforming to the

³¹ Diary, November 12, 1915, PRMF0015, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

³² *The Methodist*, September 25, 1915.

³³ Bennett Diary, November 12, 1915 PRMF0015, Australian War Memorial, Canberra; McKenzie, Letter to Hay, August 28 1915, PR 85815, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

³⁴ Unpublished novelised diary M/S, March 3, 1918, MSS1360, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

Christian ideal. But others saw the war as in some way contradicting the tenets of their faith, and felt uncomfortable with the overt nationalism of many of the churches. Finally, there were some who took this disjunction to a greater length, distancing religion from the war almost entirely. These people either abandoned religion as a justification for the war, or were entirely opposed to religions supporting the war. For many of these, war was a necessary evil, but they could make no connection to any kind of religion that they could value. They positioned themselves variously as individuals swimming against the mainstream, or as proponents of a new kind of spirituality that was not chained to denomination or human politics. There are relatively few records of such a nature, understandable perhaps when one considers that the Australian army of the Great War was composed entirely of volunteers thus eliminating many Christian pacifists who would not enlist. Nevertheless, while many soldiers supported the war in general, they could consider it to be the work of evil, and a number of chaplains wrote in disgust about it.

McKenzie, having just witnessed the attack at Lone Pine and having buried 450 men after it, called war “the most damnable, insensate [sic] folly of which mankind could be guilty.”³⁵ Anglican Chaplain Andrew Gillison struggled to reconcile a Christmas service with a mission of war,³⁶ while Roman Catholic Chaplain Joachim Hennessey recorded having “qualms of conscience” about his work.³⁷ Certain church organisations could also exhibit this attitude. The *Victorian Independent*, the mouthpiece of the Congregational Churches, wrote of several Congregationalist volunteers in the Medical Corps that “the pleasing feature of their mission is that they go forth to succour, not to kill.” Salvationist Chaplain Benjamin Orames wrote in a letter published in *The War Cry*, after visiting the wounded in hospital, “So much for war—glorious (?) war. What an awful thing it really is!”³⁸ While experiencing intimations of the incompatibility of their governing frame and their actual experience, many of these men failed to think through the tensions to their logical conclusion, and hence remained essentially within the dominant frame.

Some made a more thorough journey however. Another soldier, John Baillie, found that his war experiences led to the loss of faith but assured his girlfriend, “I don’t want you to think I am a thorough heathen for I am not—I am just the same as I was when I went away from you—but ‘religion

³⁵ Letter, August 26, 1915, published in *War Cry*, 23 October 1915, 8.

³⁶ Diary, December 31, 1914, PR86028, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

³⁷ “My Experiences as a Chaplain with the A.I.F.” IDRL0635, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

³⁸ *War Cry*, September 30, 1916.

as she is seen’ has a lot to answer for I think.”³⁹ Other soldiers also experienced a loss of faith in organised religion and left their denominations during or after the war.⁴⁰ Without leaving his denomination, controversial Presbyterian Chaplain-General Lawrence Rentoul denounced the war in December 1918 as a violation of every principle of the Ten Commandments and insisted that as with all wars, this war did not produce moral or spiritual cleansing or purification,⁴¹ thus denying the validity of scapegoating, and undermining the hope that many Christians had that the war would give Christianity a decisive edge in its battle with secularism.

The case of Tom Richards is perhaps the most interesting. His capacity for mixed loyalties is reflected in his career as a Rugby Union international for both Australia and the British Lions, and he volunteered for the army as a man suspicious of the Empire, its war, and its officers. As a Medical Corpsman, he was simultaneously uneasy about his non-combatant role and yet proud of that status. He ended up seeking a transfer to a combat unit and becoming an officer, while never moderating any of his former doubts. He both respected and disliked his father’s ties to organised religion, and he was annoyed with a clergyman who gave “his one-sided version of Britons [sic] righteousness in taking the part of the weaker nations in the present war,” being upset at the hypocrisy of using God to justify the Allied cause. He often skipped church to avoid “listening to prayers for our own puny selves and it grieves me to hear prayers for the defeat and overthrowing of the enemy.” He struggled with his own faith, liking the music and ritual of Anglicanism but hating its support for the war and its excessive formality. Nevertheless, he also disliked the homely, uneducated approach of the non-conformist chaplains.⁴² The one thing he did consistently was to deny the war any kind of spiritual justification.

Conclusion

Girard’s concepts of scapegoating and mimetic rivalry are helpful frames of reference when examining the responses of Christian Anzacs to the war. By and large, they remained within the frameworks described by Girard, using extensive scapegoating of the Germans to shift the responsibility

³⁹ Letter to girlfriend Nellie, December 7, 1917, PR00621, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

⁴⁰ Linder, *The Long Tragedy*, 161.

⁴¹ J. Lawrence Rentoul, “War and Religion,” *Messenger*, December 13, 1918, 794.

⁴² Diary, September 6, 1914, December 22, 1914, 2DRL0786, Australian War Memorial, Canberra.

onto those they were killing. When the enormity of the war threatened the justification, a common resort was to expand the identity of the scapegoat to include the evils of British society. Even more common was the use of mimetic rivalry to separate their own identity from those of the enemy.

Occasionally, however, the reality of what they were doing and witnessing broke through these defences, forcing soldiers to acknowledge the horror of the situation and the fact that the scapegoating and the mimetic rivalry could not fully conceal or justify the murderous task they were undertaking. Only in a handful of cases in the surviving documentation was there serious, sustained resistance to the justifications of scapegoating and mimetic rivalry. In effect, the experience of war did little to change the justification for war, except perhaps to weaken the commitment of some Christian Anzacs to denominational religion when the scapegoating and mimetic rivalry failed to provide a convincing theological rationale for the war. Secular Australia was not transformed into a religious nation through the crucible of war; if anything the churches had lost ground in their contest with the forces of secularism, and the ANZAC story was constructed over time into the spiritual narrative of secular Australia.

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