

What price loyalty? Australian Catholics in the First World War

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Prelude

I am grateful to the Catholic Theological College for inviting me to give the Cardinal Knox lecture for 2018, the centenary year of the end of the First World War, and to reflect on the way the Catholic Church in Australia related to and was affected by that war, a war that began in the same year that Cardinal Knox, in whose honour we meet tonight, was born.

The subject brings together three intertwined strands of historical research which have fascinated me for a very long time: the First World War, the Catholic Church and Ireland. In fact I first acquired my interest in primary school at St Anne's, Bondi Beach in the 1950s when I read a book called *Fighting Father Duffy*.¹ Some of you may remember it. The book tells the story of a Catholic chaplain of Irish descent during the First World War serving in a unit originally known as the 69th New York Infantry Regiment, the 'Fighting Irish'. And, here I am 60 years later, still trying to make sense of the entangled history of the First World War, the Catholic Church and Ireland

When I told a friend I was to give a lecture on the Catholic Church in Australia during the First World War, he asked me how many days I had been allotted. And, of course, to cover a subject as profound as this would take days, if not weeks. But tonight I have only 50 minutes and so my talk will be only a cursory overview. Furthermore, my interest in the subject is as a political and social historian, whereas the topic lends itself to many approaches. A moral theologian might examine the war and its place in the natural order measured against objective, absolute and immutable laws, an ecclesiologist might trace developments in doctrine and practice at home and on the battle field, a cultural historian might consider how the war led people to modify or sharpen their views on religion.

Even within my own narrow area of interest, there is a wide range of topics I could cover, but again time is a limiting factor. So, I have decided to explore a particular theme and to examine events that serve to elucidate it. The theme I have chosen is 'loyalty', for it seems to me that during the First World War the issue of loyalty posed a significant challenge to the Church in Australia as it attempted to reconcile three sometimes competing loyalties: loyalty to the universal church, loyalty to the nation (a concept then ambiguous and in flux), and loyalty to Ireland.

Introduction

The First World War presented the Catholic Church with a unique challenge. The Church's claim to universality meant not only that it was the one true church united by and under the authority of Christ, the pontiff in Rome and Sacred Tradition, but also that it transcended national boundaries. As such it encompassed not only the peoples of the allied countries of the Triple Entente and Italy but also those of the Central Powers, creating in its adherents a tension between loyalty to religion and loyalty to nation.²

¹ Virginia Lee Bishop and Jim Bishop, *Fighting Father Duffy*, Vision Books, New York, 1956.

² Katherine Finlay, 'British Catholic Identity during the First World War: The Challenge of Universality and Particularity', DPhil Thesis, Wolfson College, Oxford University, 2003.

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Protestantism, on the other hand, faced no such challenge. Its main denominations as represented in Australia were essentially national entities, encompassing peoples of the British Empire so that loyalty to nation and religion were synchronous. Moreover, the concept of a holy war against godless Prussianism espoused by many Protestant theologians served to harmonise religious and national loyalties.³

Not so for the universal Church, where national patriotism and civil obligation had the potential to undermine Church unity and authority. Benedict XV, who was elected pontiff on 3 September 1914 in succession to Pius X, chose neutrality as the best means to preserve that unity and authority. The pope's stance led both the Allies and the Central Powers to view him as being partial to the other side, but it also enabled him as universal pastor to minister to all members of his flock with equal charity and to act, where possible, as a mediating force between the two sides and to sponsor humanitarian relief work.⁴

The solution available to the pontiff as the vicar of Christ and as the common father of all Catholics was not available to the pastors of local churches. For them the problem was to square the Church's teaching on war and peace with the duty which in time of war the faithful owed to the civil authority.⁵ In Australia, where Catholics were mostly of Irish stock, a further complication arose by virtue of the unresolved question of Irish self-determination. Australian Catholics in August 1914 therefore faced a three-horned dilemma: how to remain loyal to Rome and to Ireland while at the same time committing themselves to serve Britain's cause in the war.⁶

The Catholic Church in Australia in 1914

Before exploring that issue, let us look at who and what constituted the Catholic Church in Australia on the outbreak of the war.

In 1914 Australia had a population of almost 5 million, of whom approximately 1.1 million were Catholics.⁷ Of those, more than 40 per cent lived in NSW and just under 30

³ For a discussion of Anglican theological objection to the 'barbarous ideology of Prussianism' see John A. Moses, 'Australian Anglican leaders and the Great War, 1914–1918: the "Prussian Menace", conscription and national solidarity', *Journal of Religious History*, vol. 25 no. 3, October 2001, pp 306–323, 309; see also Robert D Linder, *The long tragedy: Australian evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914–1918*, Openbook Publishers, Adelaide, 2000. Lutherans living in Australia faced a challenge of a different sort which I will not discuss here.

⁴ See 'Allocution *Convocare Vos* to the College of Cardinals', 22 January 1915 in Harry C. Koenig (ed.), *Principles for Peace: Selections From Papal Documents Leo XIII to Pius XII*, National Catholic Welfare Conference, Washington, 1943, p. 152.

⁵ This fascinating topic is beyond the scope of this lecture but see, for instance, Richard Schaefer, 'Catholics and the First World War: religion, barbarism and the reduction to culture', *First World War Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 2, October 2010, 123–139. The competing national approaches are exemplified by pamphlets issued in 1915 by a committee of French Catholics ('La guerre allemande et le catholicisme') and a committee of German Catholics ('Der deutsche Krieg und der Katholizismus'), respectively.

⁶ Little has been written specifically on this subject or on the broader issue of the churches in the war. Michael McKernan's *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and Activities of the Major Churches 1914–1918*, Catholic Theological Faculty, Manly (NSW), 1980 remains the single most detailed survey of the latter.

⁷ *Commonwealth Year Book 1916*, p. 91. The Australian population at the 1911 Commonwealth Census was 4,455,002. The figure of 4,940,952 in the *Commonwealth Year Book* indicates a population increase of 10.91 per cent since the census. When discussing religion the census reports use the terms 'Roman Catholic' and 'Catholic (undefined)', in respect of which the Commonwealth Statistician wrote, 'there is reason to believe that a very large proportion, if not practically the whole of the persons who returned themselves simply as "Catholic," and who were in consequence tabulated under the head of "Catholic (undefined)," belonged to the Roman Catholic Church' (1911 Census - Volume I Statisticians Report, p.

per cent in Victoria. At the time only about ten per cent of Australian Catholics were Irish-born. Immigration to Australia had peaked in the 1870s so that, with declining immigration and natural increase, by 1914 about 82 per cent of the population overall was Australian-born. Nevertheless, the Church retained a decidedly Hibernian character. Most Australian-born Catholics had Irish-born parents or grandparents and their priests, brothers and nuns were mostly Irish-born. But a word of caution. While it is broadly true that in early twentieth-century Australia to be Catholic was to be Irish and to be Irish was to be Catholic, it is nevertheless a generalisation. One needs to bear in mind that a significant minority of the Irish in Australia were Protestants and a significant minority of Catholics were not of Irish birth or ancestry.⁸

In 1914 the Catholic Church in Australia comprised six metropolitan sees and twelve suffragan dioceses. In each of the metropolitan sees and in nine of the twelve dioceses the bishop was Irish-born. And each of the three Australian-born bishops had received all or part of his priestly training in Ireland. And, notwithstanding six replacements, thus it remained throughout the war, the only change being the appointment in 1918 of an Australian-born bishop to the newly created diocese of Wagga Wagga.⁹

In 1914 there existed only one Australian seminary, St Patrick's College, Manly, which had opened in 1889, thus beginning a process of Australianising the priesthood. But progress was slow. By 1914 it had produced only 160 priests out of about 800 with 70 per cent of priests in Australia still being Irish-born, albeit down from 87 per cent in 1901. But 1914 saw the formation of the Manly Union, an alumni association of priests trained at the Manly seminary. Its objectives were to stress the Australian character of the Church and its need for an Australian priesthood and hierarchy. However, it had little effect during the war.¹⁰

In 1914 the Australian church may have spoken with an Irish accent, but its ideas and attitudes were those of Rome, transmitted through Irishmen trained at the Roman colleges. A significant exception was the man from Maynooth, Daniel Mannix; perhaps another reason why he often stood out from his episcopal brethren during and after the war.¹¹

In 1914 the Catholic laity were largely quiescent in matters ecclesiastical. Their role, in the hackneyed expression, was 'to pray, pay and obey'. The numerous societies and sodalities to which they belonged were under clerical control. But there were some

200). The total for those categories in 1911 was 996,804, which gives a total for 1914 of 1,105,534, if one applies the population increase factor.

⁸ In round figures Catholics accounted for some 85 per cent of Irish emigration to Australia (Oliver MacDonagh, 'Emigration from Ireland to Australia: an Overview' in Colm Kiernan (ed.), *Australia and Ireland 1788-1988: Bicentenary Essays*, Gill and MacMillan, Dublin, 1986, pp. 121-137, 132).

⁹ *The Official Directory of the Catholic Church in Australia*, E.J. Dwyer, Sydney, 1995.

¹⁰ After the war tensions emerged between Irish-born clergy and Manly Union priests due in part to the latter's desire to disengage the Australian church from involvement in Irish affairs, which they regarded as an impediment to social harmony. See Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community: An Australian History*, 3rd rev. ed., New South Wales University Press, Sydney, 1992, pp. 356-363; K.J. Walsh, *Yesterday's seminary: a history of St Patrick's Manly*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1998; Edmund Campion, *Australian Catholics*, Viking, Melbourne, 1987, p. 78.; Kevin Livingston, '“In Those Days”: Secular Priests and Earlier Periodicals', *Australasian Catholic Record*, Vol. 50, 1973, pp. 267-293; Anthony Cappello, 'Italian Australians, the Church, War and Fascism in Melbourne 1919-1945', MA Thesis, Victoria University, 1999, p. 2. See also John Luttrell, '“Australianizing” the Local Catholic Church: Polding to Gilroy', *Journal of Religious History*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2012, pp. 335-350.

¹¹ John N. Molony, *The Roman Mould of the Australian Catholic Church*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1969.

exceptions, the most significant being the Catholic Federations formed in a number of states just before the war. The federation movement was a lay initiative that was encouraged by Archbishop Mannix and tolerated by Sydney's Archbishop Michael Kelly. It advocated the Catholic position on a number of secular issues, especially state aid for Catholic schools. It was a forerunner of Catholic Action that emerged post war.¹²

In 1914 the role of women was well defined but circumscribed. Caught between two images of femininity, the ideal of the Virgin Mary and the allure of the temptress Eve, a woman's sphere, according to Cardinal Patrick Moran 'was her home, where she reigned as the queen and mistress, surrounded by her loving husband and little children' or in poet John O'Brien's words, 'the little Irish mother'. But as historian Anne O'Brien has noted, many women were empowered by religious affiliation, which became a vehicle for autonomy and sisterhood that played an important role in reform movements. In the 1910s women's associations were beginning to form for other than missionary and devotional reasons, such as the Catholic Women's Association founded in New South Wales in 1913 and the Catholic Women's Social Guild founded in Melbourne in 1916. Even though these associations fitted the institutional view of the role of women, they gave them the freedom to determine their own ethos and function.¹³ During the conscription campaigns a number of Catholic lay women were prominent, including Bella Guerin, Annie Golding, Agnes Macready and Gertrude Phillips.¹⁴

In 1914 the Catholic Church in Australia was regarded by many Protestants with suspicion. This was not a new phenomenon. Catholic loyalty had been a matter of concern since Elizabethan times.¹⁵ In Australia the Hibernian character of the Church added another layer of suspicion. The attempted seizure of the colony by Irish convicts in 1804 during the Castle Hill rebellion and Henry James O'Farrell's attempt to assassinate Prince Alfred, Duke of Edinburgh, in Sydney in 1868 reinforced the stereotype of the 'rebellious Irish'. In the years immediately preceding the war the Catholic Federation's campaign for state aid for Catholic schools and the highly charged debate over home rule for Ireland widened the sectarian divide. In 1911 the *Methodist* newspaper told its readers: the Catholic Church 'seeks to segregate its young people, and to bring them up under influences which imbue their minds with the narrowest and most bigoted notions, separating them in the most sacred relations of life from the rest of the citizenship of the State'.¹⁶ The *Australian Christian World* opined, 'there is very widespread conviction that the loyalty of Roman Catholics to the British Crown is of the thinnest quality and may in time prove the undoing of Australia'.¹⁷ And, to a degree, they had a point. The Church's insistence that it alone was the repository of religious truth, thus precluding ecumenical engagement, its marriage laws both before and following adoption of the *Ne Temere* decree in 1908 and its maintenance of a separate education

¹² Jeff Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric: Sectarianism in Australia 1910-1925*, Citadel Books, Sydney, 2002.

¹³ Quotes from O'Farrell, *Catholic Church*, pp. 254, 259; Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2005, pp. 10, 83-85. See also Sally Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism: Catholic Women's Struggles for Self-Expression*, Studies in the Christian Movement, Sydney, 1985.

¹⁴ See *Catholic Press* 22 November 1917, p. 14; 6 December 1917, p. 11; 13 December 1917, pp. 8, 13, 18, 19; 20 December 1917, p. 17.

¹⁵ In 1570 the Papal Bull *Regnan in excelsis* had absolved English Catholics from allegiance to the Queen. The Powder Treason of 1605, in which Guy Fawkes attempted to blow up parliament, reinforced this attitude.

¹⁶ *Methodist* 21 January 1911, p. 1.

¹⁷ *Australian Christian World* 23 December 1910, p. 2.

system committed the Church to an attitude of estrangement from aspects of Australian society.¹⁸ As historian John Molony observed:

More than any other Australians, partly because they were Catholic and partly because they were mainly of Irish stock, they felt a certain alienation from the culture, the bonds of Empire, the ties of loyalty to the Crown that were part of the total mental and emotional outlook of most other Australians.¹⁹

Catholic Support for the War

To most Catholics of Irish descent, terms such as 'home' and 'mother country' meant Ireland not England and their nation was Australia not the Empire. Whilessoever the interests of the two coincided they and Empire loyalists shared common ground. And such was the case in August 1914 when the war began. Catholic bishops, societies and newspapers across the country readily declared their support for the cause of the British Empire in the war:

- Archbishop Carr of Melbourne said, 'We as Catholics are called upon by our religious principles, our loyalty, and our self-interest to join heartily with our fellow-citizens in aiding the mother country';²⁰
- His coadjutor, Archbishop Mannix 'hoped that the efforts of the Allies would be crowned with success and that the result would bring honour to the British Empire';²¹
- Archbishop Kelly of Sydney said in a sermon, 'It is a good thing to have our young men standing up and saying: "We have a country worth fighting for, and we will fight for it." No one can be indifferent in this country';²²
- Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane told a contingent of soldiers that the war was a noble and just war and that 'he hoped they would reflect honour on their religion as Catholics, on their country as Australians, and on the Empire and King for whom they had volunteered to fight';²³
- Archbishop Clune of Perth told a Christian Brothers' old boy's gathering that England's 'very existence was in danger, and it was their duty to assist in maintaining the safety of the Empire'.²⁴

Some Catholics thought they had spied a silver lining to the dark clouds of war. Kelly in his sermon added, 'If this war pleased God, the people of the various religions would have such esteem for one another that there would be no more disabilities put upon their schools, and the question would not be asked in connection with their public work whether a person was a Catholic or not'. Sydney's *Catholic Press* opined: 'And out of this war if we survive it, may come one good thing. It may set the seal on our nationality, and give our native land its proper place in our minds and hearts. ... Peace hath its victories, but war, undoubtedly, unites a people'.²⁵

¹⁸ Patrick O'Farrell, "Protest without Anarchy. The Church in Australian History", *Bulletin of Christian Affairs*, Vol. 1 No. 5, 1970; Livingston, 'In Those Days', pp. 279-282.

¹⁹ John N. Molony, *The Roman Mould of the Australian Catholic Church*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1969, p. 6.

²⁰ *Argus* 10 August 1914, p. 9.

²¹ *Tribune* 10 October 1914, p. 2.

²² *Sydney Morning Herald* 10 August 1914, p. 7; *Freeman's Journal* 13 August 1914, page 21.

²³ *Freeman's Journal* 17 September 1914, p. 17;

²⁴ *WA Record* (Perth) 7 November 1914, p. 9.

²⁵ *Catholic Press* 6 August 1914, p. 27.

And in August 1914 the Australian people did unite behind the war effort. Sectarian and industrial conflicts that had threatened social harmony before the war subsided as Catholics and Protestants, capital and labour found common cause. What little opposition there was to the war in 1914 came mostly from international socialists and a small group of pacifists, Protestants more so than Catholics.

Two factors, in particular, assisted Australian Catholics in good conscience to support the British Empire's cause in the war. Firstly, the *casus belli* for Britain's entry into the war was Germany's violation of Belgian neutrality in breach of an international treaty. Catholic teaching on war and peace endorsed the concept of a just war and some bishops explicitly rationalised their support for the war in terms of just war theory, relying, in particular, on the invasion of Belgium by a Prussian-militarist dominated Germany. Catholic newspapers were full of the heroic deeds of the soldiers of 'brave little Catholic Belgium' and of Cardinal Mercier's courage in standing up to the Germans. The second factor was the commitment by John Redmond, leader of the Irish Parliamentary Party, of Ireland's support to Britain in the war, followed in September 1914 by the enactment of the Irish Home Rule Bill, albeit suspended for the duration of the war. Australian Catholics of Irish descent had no need to be concerned that participation in the war on Britain's side was a betrayal of Ireland. On the contrary it could be argued that it would hasten the day when Ireland would have its own parliament.

Thus in 1914 the three-horned dilemma seemed to have been resolved. Catholics hoping the war would bring a reconciliation between Orange and Green would have been encouraged by a statement by Rev. W. T. Kench at the Orange Demonstration on 12 July 1915, when he declared, 'This was not the time to indulge in sectarianism. Roman Catholic men were fighting shoulder to shoulder with them in the trenches'.²⁶ However, such sentiments were not universally held and many Protestants continued to doubt the loyalty of Catholics. Their doubts were reinforced by rumours of a secret deal between the Holy See and the Austrians to restore the pope's temporal power, implying that, by virtue of their allegiance to the Pope, Australia's Catholics could not be trusted to give unswerving loyalty to Britain and the Empire.²⁷

As to the level of Catholic support for the war measured not in terms of rhetoric but by the number of enlistments, the Oxford *Centenary History of Australia and the Great War* shows that Catholic enlistments leading to embarkation were 18.65 per cent of the total, while the proportion of Catholic adult males to the adult male population was 20.1 per cent. Although its figures suggest a greater relative enthusiasm for the war among Protestants compared to Catholics, the differential hardly justifies Protestant claims of shirking. But, significantly, the authors demonstrate that the enlistment gap was mostly due to declining Catholic enlistments from 1917 onwards, which was not the case with the other religions.²⁸

²⁶ *Sydney Morning Herald* 12 July 1915, p. 5.

²⁷ Robert P. Thomas, "Catholics and Conscription" in Arnold D. Hunt and Robert P. Thomas, *"For God, King and country": a study of the attitudes of the Methodist and Catholic press in South Australia to the Great War 1914-1918*, Salisbury College of Advanced Education, Salisbury, 1979, p. 20.

²⁸ Jean Bou et al., *The Australian Imperial Force*, Vol 5 of *Centenary History of Australia and the Great War*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne, 2016, pp. 91-94. In June 1917 and October 1918 the Defence Department released figures showing how many soldiers from each of the major religious denominations had embarked for overseas service with the proportion for Roman Catholics being not dissimilar to those cited by the Oxford centenary history: 18.57 per cent and 18.73 per cent, respectively. So the Catholic enlistment rate was publicly known, though Catholic and non-Catholic newspapers interpreted the data

A likely reason for the decline was the reappearance of the three-horned dilemma, thought to have been resolved in 1914. The horrific toll which the war was exacting raised the question of the justness of its continued prosecution while the unravelling of the settlement in Ireland caused many Australian Catholics of Irish descent to question their continued support for Britain in the war. Although the decline in enlistments does not appear until 1917, its genesis was Easter week 1916.

Easter Rising

As dawn broke across Australia on 25 April 1916, heralding the first Anzac Day, a day which commemorates what many regard as the defining moment in the birth of the Australian nation, Irish rebels who had seized the General Post Office in Dublin the day before were fighting to establish a nation of their own. When news of the outbreak of violence in Dublin reached Australia, many Catholics of Irish descent condemned the rising as a stab in the back and a threat to the promised implementation of home rule. To them, it was the rebels who were disloyal: to Ireland as well as the Empire. Even Archbishop Mannix initially described the rising as deplorable and its leaders as misguided, though he attributed the cause to the British government's appeasement of the Carsonites and its shifty policy on home rule.²⁹

The mood among Australian Catholics of Irish descent changed, however, when General Sir John Maxwell began using harsh measures to restore order in Ireland: execution of the rebel leaders, deportation of thousands of others and the imposition of martial law. They soon became openly critical of British rule in Ireland. Catholic newspapers began drawing parallels between the behaviour of the English in Ireland and the Germans in Belgium. All of this provoked a Protestant backlash. Sectarianism, which had largely lain dormant since the outbreak of the war, flared up and intensified as Protestant loyalists regarded such criticism as disloyal to the British Crown, already under threat from without but now also from within. Perhaps loyalty to Ireland and loyalty to the Empire were no longer compatible after all. The tension was to increase later in the year following the defeat of the first conscription referendum.³⁰

Conscription Referendum 1916

Nothing in Church teaching prohibits compulsory military service for defence at home or overseas, and during the 1916 referendum campaign the Vatican's representative in Australia, Archbishop Bonaventura Cerretti, issued a statement making it clear that conscription was not an issue of faith or morals upon which the Church could direct its members.³¹ Not surprisingly, therefore, Catholics as Catholics held differing personal opinions on the government's proposal, including individual bishops, of whom, only two expressed their views publicly in 1916: Archbishop Clune of Perth declared 'that whoever believes in the righteousness and justice of the war we are engaged in ought not to hesitate to vote for compulsory military service in Australia';³² Archbishop

differently. See *Argus* 23 June 1917, p. 18; 22 October 1918, p. 4; *Catholic Press* 28 June 1917, p. 26-27; *Tribune* 24 October 1918, p. 4.

²⁹ *Advocate* 6 May 1916, p.25; *Freeman's Journal* 4 May 1916, p. 25; *Catholic Press*, 11 May 1916, p. 21.

³⁰ Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, pp. 134–136; Peter Overlack, "'Easter 1916' in Dublin and the Australian press: background and response", *Journal of Australian Studies*, no. 54/55, 1997, pp. 188–193; RP Davis, 'Tasmania and the Irish revolution, 1916–22', *Tasmanian Historical Research Association: Papers and Proceedings*, vol. 21 no. 2, 1974, pp. 69–88; Thomas, 'Catholics and Conscription', pp. 15–17.

³¹ *Freeman's Journal* 5 October 1916, p. 23; *Catholic Press* 5 October 1916, p. 25.

³² This was in a cable to the Defence Minister, Senator GF Pearce of Western Australia, which was reported in the newspapers, including those in the eastern states. Clune's biographer has pointed out the

Mannix in Melbourne said that 'conscription is a hateful thing and it is almost certain to bring evil in its train'.³³

Perhaps the most ardent supporter of conscription was Archbishop Kelly of Sydney, an inaugural member and vice-president of the Universal Service League (USL) formed in September 1915 to promote compulsory service. In line with the Cerretti declaration he remained silent and, in fact, resigned from the USL during the campaign on the ground that he wished to hold himself free from all party.³⁴ Catholic newspapers around the country adopted divergent viewpoints, while among the Catholic laity there were also differences of opinion.³⁵ The Catholic Church's official silence was in stark contrast to the loud and almost monolithic support of conscription by Protestant leaders from the pulpit as well as on the hustings.³⁶

In the result, the referendum was defeated and supporters of conscription, casting around for a scapegoat, found one in the Irish Catholic community, claiming that in the referendum Catholics had voted for Ireland not Australia in order to strike a severe blow at Great Britain.³⁷ The perceived role of the Irish Catholic vote in the referendum's defeat became the occasion of some of the most vitriolic attacks ever made on the Irish Catholic community in Australia. Charges of disloyalty and plotting to overthrow the Empire re-emerged, adding in wartime a sinister dimension to the customary sectarian taunts. To many Protestants, the Catholic Church's official silence was a clear breach of its moral and patriotic duty to support the war effort. The fact that some Catholic clergy and newspapers had made anti-conscription statements without sanction, demonstrated that the Catholic Church was more than derelict in its duty, it was, in truth, positively disloyal.

The growing anti-Catholic animus intensified after Archbishop Mannix spoke at the Christian Brothers' school, Brunswick in January 1917, describing the war as 'an ordinary trade war', reported in some newspapers as 'a sordid trade war'.³⁸ This and

ambiguities in Clune's statement but concludes that given Clune's pro-war stance and pro-empire speeches the cable should be given the 'maximalist interpretation' that it received (Christopher Dowd, *Faith, Ireland and Empire: The Life of Patrick Joseph Clune CSSR 1864-1935*, St Paul's Publications, Sydney, 2014, pp. 185-186). The *Sydney Morning Herald* published the text of Archbishop Clune's cable twice (21 October 1916, p. 16; 27 October 1916, p. 6).

³³ *Advocate* 23 September 1916, p.25.

³⁴ *Daily Telegraph* 11 September 1915, p. 13; 21 September 1915, p. 7; 14 November 1916, p. 6.

³⁵ For a description of these divergent views see Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, pp. 138-142; Jeff Kildea, 'Australian Catholics and Conscription in the Great War', *Journal of Religious History*, v.26, no.3, Oct 2002, 298-313, 300-301.

³⁶ It was not absolute, however. For example, a group of nine ministers from various Protestant denominations signed a Manifesto from Protestant ministers—'Conscription and Christianity'—opposing conscription. A copy is in the Riley Collection in the La Trobe Library, Melbourne. For a description of some of the activities of Protestant pacifists and anti-conscriptionists see Bobbie Oliver, *Peacemongers: conscientious objectors to military service in Australia 1911-1945*, Fremantle Arts Centre Press, South Fremantle, 1997, pp. 40-43.

³⁷ For a discussion of these claims see Kildea, 'Killing Conscription: the Easter Rising and Irish Catholic attitudes to the conscription debates in Australia, 1916-1917', *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society*, Vol 37 No 2, 2016, pp. 161-180.

³⁸ Reports of Mannix's speech appearing in the *Advocate* 3 February 1917, p. 12 and the *Tribune* 1 February 1917, p. 5 used the expression 'ordinary trade war'. However, the *Age* 29 January 1917, p. 7 used 'ordinary, sordid trade war'. It is claimed that an early edition of the *Argus* used the expression 'a sordid trade war' but that in later editions the word 'sordid' was illegible as if the printing plate has been mutilated (Cyril Bryan, *Archbishop Mannix: champion of democracy*, Advocate Press, Melbourne, 1918, pp. 72; photographic copies of the articles are reproduced at pp. 232-235). Even the Governor-General in a

other public utterances by Mannix, critical of the government's war policy, soon elevated him to national status and earned him the role of bogey-man in the minds of the government's supporters and hero to its opponents. His support of Sinn Féin, which advocated Ireland's separation from Great Britain, also drew fire. But it was his 'Australia first' rhetoric that most offended Empire loyalists. To Mannix 'there was an Australian as distinct from a British imperial interest, and [the] Australian interest should govern both the extent and mode of [Australia's] participation' in the war.³⁹ And, in his opinion, Australia had done enough to assist Britain in a war that was far-away and did not directly affect Australia. To Empire loyalists who regarded the empire as one and indivisible such talk was treasonous. They called on the government to prosecute and deport him and set about establishing Loyalty Leagues and Protestant Federations as a counterweight to Mannix and the militant Catholic Federations.⁴⁰

Mannix's public profile rose further during the federal election campaign of May 1917. Fought in a bitterly sectarian atmosphere, it saw the circulation of anti-Catholic pamphlets and cartoons by a pro-government newspaper owner Critchley Parker, leading Archbishop Mannix to castigate Hughes and his Nationalist Party, accusing them of acquiescing in the dissemination of the material. Many Catholics, particularly those who had climbed the social ladder, were embarrassed by Mannix's outspokenness. They wrote letters to the newspapers denouncing the archbishop, they implored his fellow bishops and the Vatican to curb Mannix's behaviour, and some even joined the chorus of Empire loyalists calling for him to be prosecuted and deported. In number they were small. According to Mannix, the Catholics they represented would 'fit in a lolly shop'. But in social terms they were influential. Ironically, however, their protests might have helped maintain Catholic unity, for by siding with the enemies of the Church they compelled the bishops to show solidarity with their episcopal brother.⁴¹

But Mannix's outspokenness was not the only threat to church unity and authority. Archbishop Kelly's more subtle but well-known support for the war and conscription alienated many working-class Catholics, some of whom expressed themselves publicly and forcefully at the 1917 St Patrick's Day celebrations in Sydney at which Kelly appeared on the platform with a number of pro-conscription politicians. When the archbishop invited Premier W.A. Holman to speak a section of the crowd booed and jeered the former Labor leader, preventing him being heard. In what amounted to a public challenge to their authority, neither Kelly nor the Apostolic Delegate, Archbishop Cerretti, could persuade the demonstrators to be silent.⁴²

Benedict XV's peace-note and the Australian response to it

While the propriety of Mannix's role as a political leader might well be questioned, his reasoned critique of the war was of an entirely different character. The conditions that had made the *jus ad bellum* so compelling in August 1914 were not so clear in 1917. Were Australians really fighting for the defence of small nations, when Ireland's national aspirations were being suppressed? And what had the prime minister meant when he

despatch to London reported that Mannix had said 'sordid trade war' (L.L. Robson, *The First AIF: a study of its recruitment 1914-1918*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1970 p. 148).

³⁹ B.A. Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix: The Quality of Leadership*, Melbourne University Press, Carlton, 1984, p. 77.

⁴⁰ Glenn Calderwood, 'A Question of Loyalty: Archbishop Daniel Mannix, the Australian Government and the Papacy, 1914-18', *Footprints*, June 2005, pp. 12-48, 22-27.

⁴¹ Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, pp. 145-146, 165-166, 168-170; Santamaria, *Daniel Mannix*, pp. 83-86.

⁴² Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, pp. 149-150.

said in May 1916, 'This war is at the bottom a war for the economic domination of the world'? Is that not what Mannix had said at Brunswick? Furthermore, with millions of lives already lost, was it morally right to engage in a seemingly endless war of attrition? At the very least, these questions invited consideration as to whether the war continued to satisfy the test of *jus in bello*, particularly as regards the principles of right intention and proportionality. As historian Michael McKernan observed:

Mannix ... fulfilled the legitimate role of church leader in scrutinising the actions of the state in the light of morality. ... Mannix was reviled not because he entered the field of morals but because, when he did so, he made unpalatable suggestions. If the war was unjust, no churchman could support it.⁴³

In discussing such matters Mannix was almost alone among churchmen in Australia. His fellow bishops, many of whom had used just war theory in 1914 to assure their people of the justice of Britain's cause, chose to offer no guidance on the morality of the war during its latter stages.⁴⁴

In an address at the opening of a wing of the Sacred Heart Boarding School at Geelong on 25 August 1917 Archbishop Mannix elaborated on his thinking about the current state of the war. While his short but pithy remarks at Brunswick had attracted the headlines, it was his Geelong speech which provided elucidation of his 'trade war' thesis. He began by asking, 'What are we fighting for?' and, referring to Pope Benedict XV's recent peace note, he urged his audience to ponder over the words of the pontiff and to ask, 'Is it or is it not time to make peace?'⁴⁵

The pope's peace note, issued a few weeks earlier and directed to the belligerents, set out a seven-point plan for a negotiated settlement of the conflict. This was the latest in a series of initiatives in which Benedict had exhorted the warring nations to make peace. Early in the war the Holy See had declared its neutrality, a stance that was a source of embarrassment to national hierarchies on both sides of the conflict who had declared the justness of their respective nation's cause in the war. The pope's subsequent calls for 'peace without victory' were not welcome either and each side saw them as being supportive of the other. In France Benedict was known as 'le Pape boche' and in Germany 'der französische Papst'.⁴⁶

In mid-1917 Benedict and his Secretary of State Cardinal Gasparri believed the time was right for a major peace initiative. After three years of devastating warfare, they judged that the warring peoples, if not their governments, were showing a growing desire for peace. The peace note which emerged was, in the words of historian John Pollard, 'a synthesis of Benedict's great moral passion and Gasparri's worldly pragmatism'.⁴⁷ It provided for a return to the status quo ante bellum by the evacuation and restoration of occupied territories, the reciprocal renunciation of war reparations and the conciliatory negotiation of rival territorial claims. It also called for a new international order based on 'the moral force of right' rather than 'the material force of arms', simultaneous and reciprocal diminution of armaments, the institution of arbitration as a substitute for

⁴³ McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*, p. 123.

⁴⁴ Some bishops reaffirmed the justice of the cause as if nothing had changed since 1914. For example, Archbishop Duhig said on 19 August 1917, 'We are in this war in the absolute belief that we have right and justice on our side' (*Freeman's Journal* 23 August 1917, p. 18).

⁴⁵ *Advocate* 1 September 1917, p. 26.

⁴⁶ John Pollard, 'Papal Diplomacy and The Great War', *New Blackfriars*, Vol. 96, Issue 1062, 2015, p. 149.

⁴⁷ Pollard, 'Papal Diplomacy', p. 156.

armies and freedom of the seas.⁴⁸ A few weeks later, Gasparri, on behalf of Benedict, elaborated on the disarmament component by proposing the abolition of compulsory military service, an addendum Mannix relied on during the conscription campaign to urge Catholics to vote No.⁴⁹

From the outset the waters of public opinion around the world were poisoned against the pope's peace note, as newspapers on both sides of the conflict, relying on leaked summaries of selected parts, condemned it even before the full text was available. The Central Powers gave conditional endorsement of the peace note, but in principle only, with no reference to territorial evacuation. The Allied nations either rejected or ignored it, with President Wilson's polite but firm rejection effectively serving as the response of all.⁵⁰ In Britain most Catholic newspapers defended the peace note, though often out of loyalty rather than conviction. But it was repudiated by many Catholic leaders, clerical and lay, including the Archbishop of Westminster, Cardinal Francis Bourne, who in rejecting the pope's call for compromise said, 'We demand the total triumph of right over wrong. ... There may be in our land some people who want peace at any price, but they have no following among us. We English Catholics are fully behind our war leaders'.⁵¹

In Australia, the pope's peace note was met by almost total silence from the Catholic bishops. Archbishop Duhig of Brisbane spoke about it in a sermon in which he rejected claims that the note was inspired by the Central Powers, and praised the pope for endeavouring 'to pour into the wound of the war-wearied world the oil and wine of peace'. However, he said he declined to comment on the note itself because he had no knowledge that would warrant his doing so.⁵² Perhaps that is what exercised the minds of his confreres, after all its efficacy was arguably a matter of prudential judgment more than of faith or morals. Only Archbishop Mannix and Bishop Patrick Phelan of Sale publicly defended the peace note itself. Mannix's immediate response was to urge Catholics to 'stand by the advice of the Pope in your thoughts, in your words, in your acts, and in your prayers to the God of nations, and do not be misled by the prejudiced press'.⁵³ But he did not leave it there. At Geelong, as we have seen, he gave an extensive address that positioned his own thinking on the war in the context of the pope's efforts for peace.⁵⁴

The secular press in Australia reported the pope's peace note mostly with reference to English press reports. While many of the dailies gave credit to the pope for his desire to put an end to the horrors and devastation of the war they generally argued that talk of peace was premature and that the note provided no basis for securing a peace that would last given German militarism.⁵⁵ Like their British counterparts, Australia's Catholic newspapers mostly came out in support of the pope's peace note, including its

⁴⁸ 'Exhortation *Dès Le Debut* to the Belligerent Peoples and to their Leaders', 1 August 1917 in Koenig (ed.), *Principles for Peace*, pp. 229-232.

⁴⁹ *Tribune* 20 December 1917, p. 5. The text of Gasparri's letter is in Koenig (ed.), *Principles for Peace*, pp. 235-236.

⁵⁰ John Pollard, *The Unknown Pope: Benedict XV (1914-1922) and the Pursuit of Peace*, Bloomsbury Academic, London, pp. 126-128.

⁵¹ Quoted in Y. Taouk, 'The Roman Catholic church in Britain during the First World War: a study in political leadership', Ph D Thesis, Western Sydney University, 2003, pp. 256-257.

⁵² *Freeman's Journal* 23 August 1917, p. 18.

⁵³ *Advocate* 25 August 1917, p. 24.

⁵⁴ *Advocate* 1 September 1917, p. 26.

⁵⁵ See, for example, *Register* (Adelaide) 18 August 1917, p. 6; *Leader* (Melbourne) 6 October 1917, p. 31.

content, though they acknowledged that the gap between the belligerents and the state of the war at that time was such that it was unlikely to succeed. Adelaide's *Southern Cross*, which gave extensive coverage of the peace note's reception around the world, sagely observed that while no true patriot or Christian can desire peace at any price it was also true that there is also a price too high for military victory.⁵⁶ Along similar lines, some have argued that had the belligerents adopted Pope Benedict's plan, his 'peace without victory' might have saved the world not only from the catastrophic last year of the war but also from the 'peace of the victors' that eventually emerged in the Treaty of Versailles and the many misfortunes that flowed from it in the decades that followed.⁵⁷

Conscription Referendum 1917

By the time of the second conscription campaign at the end of 1917, Mannix was no longer a lone voice in the hierarchy opposed to conscription. For many bishops the shift had come about not only in reaction to rising anti-Catholic sentiment in the community but also because of the actions and omissions of the federal government which they regarded as motivated by anti-Catholicism. Following circulation of Critchley Parker's pamphlets and cartoons, Catholic newspapers joined with the bishops in condemning them and arguing that attacks on Catholics with accusations of disloyalty and threats to deprive them of their civil rights were harmful to recruiting. (And as we have seen, the statistics suggest there might be some truth in that assertion.) However, despite representations requesting the government to use the *War Precautions Regulations* to ban such anti-Catholic propaganda, Hughes, the prolific regulation-maker, declined to do so, nor would he agree to hold an inquiry.⁵⁸

Relations between the Hughes government and the Catholic Church were further strained with the government's proposal to increase the rate of income tax for bachelors and widowers who had not enlisted for active service. The so called 'Bachelor Tax', an incentive to encourage unmarried men to enlist, came under severe criticism from Catholic prelates and newspapers because priests and teaching brothers were not to be exempted from the tax, despite government assurances to the contrary. The *Freeman's Journal* opined: "[T]here can be no doubt that the trail of the sectarian serpent runs through the whole sorry business . . . Surely, there is a perfection and refinement about this latest phase of anti-Catholic persecution which suggest the hand of Mr William Morris Hughes'.⁵⁹ It was against this background that the second conscription referendum campaign occurred. Thus, at the same time as Archbishop Mannix was occupying the headlines, Archbishop Kelly and others were quietly, but progressively, abandoning their erstwhile support of conscription.

The campaign was more bitter and divisive than it had been in 1916. Apart from religious divisions, Australia was plagued by industrial unrest at a level not seen before and not seen since. Workers whose standard of living was being eroded by stagnant wages and rising prices had become militant, resulting in a general strike in New South Wales in August that spread nationwide. The degree of rancour expressed during the campaign, especially across the religious divide, led a Presbyterian Chaplain, Colonel

⁵⁶ *Southern Cross* 24 August 1917, p. 10.

⁵⁷ Pat Walsh, 'Centenary of Pope Benedict's Lost Peace' (<https://drpatwalsh.com/2017/08/20/centenary-of-pope-benedicts-lost-peace/>). See also Calderwood, 'A Question of Loyalty', pp. 31-34.

⁵⁸ Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, pp. 155-157.

⁵⁹ Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, pp. 161; *Freeman's Journal* 11 October 1917, p. 24.

Crookston, recently returned from the front, to reprimand the audience at a particularly rowdy meeting:

I can hardly realise, coming from there, what all this noise is about. I think it is very pitiable that at such a time there should be anything like disunity among a free people of this fair land. ... I was wondering what our boys would think if they could be transplanted, with the mud and blood of the trenches on them, to this meeting tonight. Can you imagine your own brothers and sons not caring much, and not even inquiring what religion their chaplain is?⁶⁰

And to a large extent he was right. The one bright spot in terms of interdenominational relations during the war was the service rendered by the chaplains of all denominations, often cooperatively.⁶¹ Catholic chaplains in particular gained a reputation of being close to the men, due in part to the Church's sacramental theology. Before battle they heard the men's confessions and gave them the Eucharist and afterwards anointed them on the battlefield or at an advanced dressing station. Guy Chapman, an Anglican, famously wrote that 'the Church of Rome sent a man into action spiritually cleansed. The Church of England could only offer you a cigarette.'⁶²

By the time the vote on conscription was taken, Archbishop Kelly's conversion was complete and he publicly admonished Catholics not to support the government's proposal. What had eventually moved Kelly conscientiously to a position of direct and open opposition to conscription was the government's refusal to include in the regulations governing the conscription proposal an exemption for seminarians and teaching brothers. Although Hughes had given assurances to Kelly and his fellow bishops, in the current climate that was not good enough. Already burned by the Bachelor Tax, they took the view that, unless Hughes's assurances were translated into legislation, they ought not be trusted. They were also aware of the recent experience across the Tasman, where contrary to government assurances, the Wellington Military Service Board had decreed that seminarians and members of religious orders must, if medically fit, enrol in New Zealand's conscript army. Increasingly, it dawned on the bishops that the government's scheme for the introduction of conscription posed a danger to the church's ability to staff its schools and parishes. Because this was a matter that directly affected the interests of the Catholic Church, Archbishop Cerretti's dictum of 1916 requiring the Church to remain neutral did not apply.⁶³

Many Catholics were aggrieved that leading conscriptionists regarded their religion as something to be reviled publicly without penalty, that their priests and teaching brothers were to be taxed by the politicians soliciting their votes, and that the viability of their schools and seminaries was under threat. Members of the Catholic hierarchy and official church institutions, who had been silent in 1916, now began to campaign actively against conscription because they believed the Church itself was in peril. Although their concerns had nothing to do with theology, its source was religion rather than ethnicity,

⁶⁰ *Catholic Press* 6 December 1917, p. 11.

⁶¹ See McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*, chs 4 and 8; Michael McKernan, *Padre: Australian Chaplains in Gallipoli and France*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 1986; Tom Johnstone, *The Cross of Anzac: Australian Catholic Service Chaplains*, Church Archivists Press, Virginia (Qld), 2000, chs 3-6.

⁶² Guy Chapman, *A Passionate Prodigality: Fragments of Autobiography*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York, 1966, p. 117. The extent to which this reputation was deserved is considered in Martin Purdy, 'Roman Catholic Army Chaplains during the First World War: Roles, Experiences and Dilemmas,' MA Thesis, University of Central Lancashire, 2012, ch. 4.

⁶³ Kildea, 'Australian Catholics and Conscription'.

class, or national sentiment which were the major considerations for most others. While the flamboyant and outspoken Archbishop Mannix may have appealed to the working-class sentiment of Catholics, to their Irishness, and their Australian nationalism, it was the troubled entreaties of the pious and restrained Archbishop Kelly that alerted them to the dangers that conscription posed to their church.⁶⁴ It was now an issue under which Catholics could unite under the leadership of their bishops.

When the votes were counted the outcome was an increased majority against conscription, with Victoria joining the states that had voted No in 1916. Conscriptionists had no doubt as to the reasons why the vote was lost. The Governor General, Sir Ronald Munro Ferguson, in his report to the colonial secretary wrote, 'The organised opposition was composed of the Labour Party and the Roman Catholics. This body, organised and capably led by Archbishop Mannix comprises the Irish element which would be hostile to any proposals of the Government'.⁶⁵ His secretary, Major George Steward, who was also director of the Secret Intelligence Bureau, was more emphatic, telling his British counterpart, 'I attribute the defeat almost entirely to the Roman Catholic element ... particularly do I attach the greatest blame to Dr Mannix'.⁶⁶

However, while Catholic anti-conscriptionists did play a significant part in the campaign, their contribution to the outcome, including that of Archbishop Mannix, has been exaggerated, both by commentators at the time and by many historians thereafter. The myth of a monolithic Catholic community led by Archbishop Mannix being the cause of the defeat of conscription gained currency because it suited both sides. It enabled Hughes and anti-Catholic bigots to blame the "disloyal" Irish Catholics for their own failure to persuade a majority of their compatriots to vote in favour of conscription. At the same time, it suited Catholic activists, such as the Catholic Federation, who were anxious to unify Catholic support behind efforts to advance Catholic interests, to be able proclaim there was solidarity among Catholics both lay and cleric.⁶⁷ In truth it was the predominantly Protestant labour movement which defeated conscription.

Following the referendum's loss suspicion of Catholic disloyalty intensified through 1918. An open display of Sinn Féin flags at the St Patrick's Day parade in Melbourne and allegations that Mannix had saluted the Irish tricolour but not removed his hat when the national anthem was played, led to a loyalist protest meeting in the Melbourne Town Hall demanding the federal government take action against the disloyalists.⁶⁸ In May a pastoral letter issued by Archbishop Kelly was widely interpreted in the secular press as making continued Catholic support of the war effort conditional upon resolution of the troubles in Ireland and of the education question in Australia. Attempting to defuse the issue, Kelly wrote to the press denying the inference, but saying that his pastoral letter should be taken as 'a friendly warning and exhortation regarding two glaring obstacles

⁶⁴ The pro-conscriptionist Archbishop Clune chose to remain silent during the 1917 campaign, though his 1916 statement was republished in pro-conscription newspapers (Dowd, *Faith, Ireland and Empire*, p.188).

⁶⁵ Quoted in D.J. Murphy, "Religion, Race and Conscription in World War I", *Australian Journal of Politics and History*, Vol. 30, 1974, pp. 155-163, 160.

⁶⁶ Copy letter 30 January 1918 from George Steward to Frank Hall (NAA: A8911 240 Reverend Dr D MANNIX (Anti-Conscription and Anti-British Utterances: Sinn Feiner)).

⁶⁷ Kildea, 'Killing Conscription'.

⁶⁸ *Argus* 18 March 1918, p. 7; 22 March 1918, p. 8; *Sydney Morning Herald* 21 March 1918, p.7; 22 March 1918, p. 6.

to Catholic enthusiasm in the matter of voluntary enlistment'.⁶⁹ That seemed to confirm rather than refute the criticisms, leading the *Methodist* newspaper to complain that 'the conviction is strengthening all round that Roman Catholicism is anti-loyal and anti-British, and must not in any way be subsidised by public funds ... to train a generation of bigots and disloyalists', adding threateningly that 'disgruntled Irishmen are simply impossible and should be dealt with as open enemies'.⁷⁰

End of the War of the Nations

The armistice of 11 November brought an end to the war of the nations but not Australia's sectarian war. Although a significant factor souring interdenominational relations had been removed, the two issues that had divided the nation before the war remained unresolved: state aid for Catholic schools and Irish self-determination. Both would cause further trouble in the immediate post-war years. In 1919 the Catholic Federation of NSW established the Democratic Party which contested the 1920 and 1922 state elections in an attempt to coerce the Labor Party into agreeing to fund Catholic schools. It did not work and, despite refusing to countenance state aid, the Labor Party retained the support of Catholic voters, winning government in 1920. With the departure of pro-conscription Protestants from the party in 1916, Catholics comprised 60 per cent of the caucus and 40 per cent of the cabinet, a result that spread alarm amongst Protestants fearful of Rome rule. In 1922, following a bitter sectarian election campaign, the Nationalist party was elected on an openly anti-Catholic manifesto. Chastened by the experience the Church withdrew its support of direct political action and the state aid issue simmered for the next forty years before it finally ceased to be an issue dividing Australians along religious lines.⁷¹

In 1919 the issue of Irish self-determination also flared up with the War of Independence, to which Australian Catholics of Irish descent lent their moral support. Catholics on both sides of the conscription debate now found common cause. Empire loyalists who feared that Irish self-government was the first step in the dissolution of the British Empire, continued to claim that Catholics were disloyal. In a marvellous piece of theatre, immortalised in the film *Ireland will be Free*, Archbishop Mannix, escorted by 14 Victoria Cross recipients on horseback and followed by thousands of returned servicemen marching in uniform, turned the 1920 St Patrick's Day parade into a graphic rebuttal of the persistent allegations that Australian Catholics of Irish descent were shirkers and disloyal to the Empire.⁷² But it was not until the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty in December 1921 and its adoption by the Dáil the following month that Ireland ceased to resonate as an issue dividing Australians along religious lines.

Conclusion

The First World War had presented Australian Catholics with both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge was to remain loyal to Rome and to Ireland while at the same time committing themselves to serve the British Empire's interests in the war. The opportunity was the chance that they might be accepted as equal members of the

⁶⁹ *Catholic Press* 9 May 1918, p. 11; *Freeman's Journal* 9 May 1918, p. 10; *Daily Telegraph* 22 May 1918, p. 10.

⁷⁰ *Methodist* 18 May 1918, p. 7.

⁷¹ Kildea, *Tearing the Fabric*, pp. 201-229.

⁷² Jeff Kildea, 'Ireland Will Be Free: Fanning the Flames of Sectarianism in Australia 1920-21', a paper given at the Menzies Centre, King's College London on 12 April 2017 as part of the 'Screening Australia' seminar series.

Australian community and their Irish heritage and their distinctive religion esteemed. The justness of Britain's cause in the war – the defence of the rights of Belgium – and the enactment of Irish home rule soon after the commencement of hostilities enabled Australian Catholics in good conscience to meet the challenge. And, by sharing in the blood sacrifice, they seized the opportunity to reap the rewards of increased tolerance and the satisfaction of their grievances.

During the first twenty months of the war their hopes looked as if they might be realised. However, the sectarianism that returned in the aftermath of the Easter Rising and the accusations of disloyalty that emerged during the conscription campaigns and following the pope's peace note destroyed those hopes for a generation. Instead of increased acceptance and respect, the last years of the war and the early post-war years saw an intensification of ethno-religious rivalry to levels not seen before or since.⁷³

As the enlistment figures show, Catholics did answer the nation's call to arms broadly in proportion to their number in the eligible adult male population. But their antagonists refused to believe it, labelling them shirkers and pro-German and taunting them with claims that their spiritual leader was conspiring with the Central Powers to dismantle the British Empire. So poisonous was the sectarian atmosphere in early post-war Australia that Catholic returned soldiers felt compelled to form a separate ex-service association following attacks on the loyalty of Catholics by officials of the main returned service league.⁷⁴

Present troubles aside, the Catholic Church in Australia has probably never faced a crisis such as it did during and immediately after the First World War. Twenty years later, when Australia found itself involved in yet another world war, none of the issues that had dominated discourse then – Ireland and the Empire, rates of enlistment, and the moral justification of the war – rose again to test the loyalty of Australia's Catholics to their nation, their heritage and their Church.

Despite the severe challenge which the First World War had posed to the unity and authority of the universal Church, it had managed to survive and in some countries, such as Great Britain, to prosper.⁷⁵ In Australia, too, Church unity and authority, though threatened, were maintained. But in balancing competing loyalties to nation, heritage and religion they were purchased at a price: an almost complete absence of pastoral guidance as to the morality of the war in its latter stages including an embarrassed silence in the case of the pope's peace note, a diffident solidarity in the case of the polemics of the outspoken man from Maynooth, and the continued alienation of Catholics from their fellow Australians.

⁷³ Jeff Kildea, "A veritable hurricane of sectarianism": the year 1920 and ethno-religious conflict in Australia' in Hilary Carey and Colin Barr (eds.), *Religion and Greater Ireland: Christianity and Irish Global Networks 1750-1950*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 2015

⁷⁴ Letter from the General Secretary of the Catholic Returned Soldiers and Sailors Association published in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and republished in *Catholic Press* 22 June 1922, p. 15. See also *Catholic Press* 22 June 1922, pp. 17, 24; *Freeman's Journal* 22 June 1922, p. 22.

⁷⁵ *Faith Magazine*, July - August 2017 (<http://www.faith.org.uk/article/british-catholics-and-the-great-war>). See also Andrew Soane, 'The First World War and perceptions of Catholicism in England', *Anuario de Historia de la Iglesia*, Vol. 23, 2014, pp. 137-150.