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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Preaching in Melbourne 1913–1918: What a Difference a War Makes

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Abstract

When evaluating factors shaping the Australian home front during World War I, the impact of preaching is generally overlooked, though historians have identified it as one of the most influential sources of public speech. This paper examines preaching in Melbourne just before and during the war, as reported in the influential *Melbourne Herald*. It asks how preaching was affected by the outbreak of war, and explores its developments, its reporting and its impacts. It points to conclusions about the nature and place of religion in the life of the city, and the interplay of preaching and war that highlight gaps in our understanding of the interaction of religion and war in Australia at that time. It challenges notions about Australian secularity, the degree of sectarianism, and the place of religion in our understanding of the war in both Australia and the wider British world.

Keywords: Preaching in Australia; sermons; World War I; war and religion

I. Preaching in the Early Twentieth Century

Of all the public speech in Australian history, preaching remains the "most productive," and one of its most influential, yet scholars agree that it has "received remarkably little attention from Australian historians."[1] Alan Atkinson encourages historians to take the spoken word seriously, for "speech continues, resilient, unpredictable, always strangely powerful, the medium at the heart of human affairs."[2] Joy Damousi argues that preaching was "perhaps the most significant use of language in the public arena in colonial Australia," being "the main source of moral teaching" and providing "the ethics, meaning and framework for church members."[3] While church leaders in the early twentieth century worried over low rates of church attendance, Ken Inglis suggests "a time when perhaps half the people in Australia heard a sermon every Sunday," though Damousi's estimate of "about a third of the population" being regular churchgoers around the turn

[1]Ken Inglis, "Speechmaking in Australia," *The Allan Martin Lecture* (Canberra, May 15, 2007), 14; Michael Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life: 1788–1914," *St Mark's Review* 227, no. 1 (February 2014): 2.

[2]Alan Atkinson, *The Commonwealth of Speech: An Argument About Australia's Past, Present and Future* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2002), xv–xxii.

[3]Joy Damousi, *Colonial Voices: A Cultural History of English in Australia 1840–1940* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 70.

of the twentieth century is probably a more accurate high point.[4] Damousi notes that "sermons could have great impact."[5] Michael Gladwin states that "the sermon and preaching constitute some of the most important shared cultural experiences in British and Australian history."[6] Yet relatively little has been published on Australian preaching, especially at a local level. This analysis articulates an understanding of how sermons reported in the *Melbourne Herald* responded to war, showing a substantial and evolving religious response to the crisis, and the role of religion in Australia's wartime experience.

The impact of war on home fronts is a well-established field of study, and Australian World War I studies are no exception.[7] However, there are still gaps in our understanding that deserve attention. Jay Winter reminds us that "more local contexts can be helpful in understanding experiences of World War I."[8] The importance of preaching in that era, and the absence of relevant studies of Australian preaching, point to a need for attention to this significant shaper of public opinion. The broad sweep of Geoff Treloar's impressive work on global evangelicalism during the early twentieth century offers few opportunities for detail on preaching in Australia.[9] Michael McKernan's study of the four main Australian denominations focuses principally on sermons related to the war, rather than preaching in general.[10] A local study offers the chance to fill in the blanks of our knowledge of how this influential yet overlooked form of public speech actually functioned under the stress of war, and identify what light that sheds on the bigger picture.

Hence, this article explores the interaction between World War I and preaching and its reporting in Melbourne, the capital of the Australian state of Victoria. It was perhaps the second-most religious city in Australia after Adelaide, with an estimated sixty percent of adults attending church weekly in the period 1870–1914.[11] The preaching data is drawn from the "Churches and Congregations" column of the *Melbourne Herald*, which offers the most consistent reporting of sermons of any major city in this period, beginning twenty months before the outbreak of war and tracking it to the end of 1918. As Australia's second-largest city, and at the time home to the Federal Parliament, its attitudes toward religion in general, and preaching in particular, are of high importance. The pre-war part of the study establishes a benchmark to provide a context for any changes brought about by the war. It looks at denominational coverage, changes in

[4]"Church Attendance," *Daily Telegraph*, September 27, 1913, 19; Inglis, "Speechmaking in Australia," 17; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 71.

[5]Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 145.

[6]Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 2.

[7]See, for example, Joan Beaumont, *Broken Nation: Australians in the Great War* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2014); John Connor, Peter Yule and Peter Stanley, *The War at Home* (South Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 2015); Frank Bongiorno, "'We Cannot Fight Forever': Australia, the First World War and the Question of Commitment," *Social Alternatives* 37, no. 3 (2018): 6–11.

[8]Jay Winter, "The Practices of Metropolitan Life in Wartime," Quoted in Nicole Davis, Nicholas Coyne and Andrew J. May, "World War I on the Home Front: The City of Melbourne 1914–1918," *Provenance: The Journal of Public Record Office Victoria* no. 15 (2016–2017), https://prov.vic.gov.au/explore-collection/provenance-journal/provenance-2016-17/world-war-i-home-front, accessed November 2, 2022.

[9]Geoffrey R. Treloar, *The Disruption of Evangelicalism: The Age of Torrey, Mott, Mcpherson and Hammond* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2017).

[10]Michael McKernan, *Australian Churches at War: Attitudes and Activities of the Major Churches 1914–1918* (Sydney: Catholic Theological Faculty, 1980).

[11]Stuart Piggin and Robert D. Linder, *The Fountain of Public Prosperity: Evangelical Christians in Australian History 1740–1914* (Clayton: Monash University Press, 2019), 386.

sermon themes, shifts in the reporting of preaching, and the impact of preaching pre-war and during the war.

The extensive coverage given to preaching by the secular press over many decades indicates its significance to contemporary Australians. As recent scholarship has highlighted, Australia's secularity of the era is best described "as non-sectarian Christianity," rather than the older historiography of it being anti-religious.[12] Churchgoing reached its zenith in the late nineteenth century, and churches acted as the spiritual, moral and social leaders of community life, and hence the importance of journalistic coverage of what preachers had to say. Newspaper mentions of sermons peaked during 1910–1919, with Gladwin identifying some 85,541 instances in that decade.[13] Other evidence also points to the influence of sermons in the early twentieth century. Volumes of sermons remained popular with publishers, and reading published sermons at home was "commonplace."[14] Sermons by the renowned British Baptist preacher Charles Spurgeon were still being republished in Australian newspapers during World War I, twenty-five years after his death.[15] As William Gibson noted, "sermons were part of a persistent voice of religion in the streets, houses and ears of the period. Clearly secularization is not the same as the decline of faith, or worship, or even religious culture."[16] Keith Francis concluded from the ubiquity and popularity of sermons that "if the sermon is a universal phenomenon in the nineteenth, and earlier, centuries, then it seems logical to argue that Christianity was everywhere too."[17] Gladwin reinforces the point in the Australian context, noting that the study of sermons speaks on "national and imperial identity; on Australian intellectual life, popular culture, literature, publishing, manners and identity; on traditions of public oratory and rhetoric . . .; on Australian religious life including popular religious expression such as revivalism and holiness traditions, theology, churchmanship and missionary impulses; and on issues of secularisation."[18]

Perhaps part of the reluctance of historians to use sermons lies in the complex nature of the evidence. Firstly, there is the difficulty of definition. Those delivered from a church pulpit on a Sunday morning are obvious, but others took place at times and in venues outside of these, such as outdoors, in theaters, music halls, and public halls. Sermons were preached by professional clergy as well as by lay men and

[12]Stephen A. Chavura, John Gascoigne and Ian Tregenza, *Reason, Religion and the Australian Polity: A Secular State?* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2019), 4–5, 8, 11, 96, 102, 157, 254; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, xv, 61–67, 388–390; Adam Possamai and David Tittensor, *Religion and Change in Australia* (London: Routledge, 2022), 41; Wayne Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought* (Clayton: Monash University Press, 2016), xiii.

[13]Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 10.

[14]Keith A. Francis, "Sermons: Themes and Developments," in *The Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689–1901*, eds. Keith A. Francis, William Gibson, John Morgan-Guy, Bob Tennant and Robert H. Ellison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 31–33; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 103.

[15]Michael Petras, "Charles Haddon Spurgeon's Sermons in Australia," *St Mark's Review* 230, no. 4 (December 2014): 36; "The Best Things for Today," *Melbourne Leader*, August 25, 1917, 55; "The Second Visit," *The Week*, July 6, 1917, 37.

[16]William Gibson, "The British Sermon 1689–1901: Quantities, Performance, and Culture," in *Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689–1901*, eds. Keith A. Francis, William Gibson, John Morgan-Guy, Bob Tennant and Robert H. Ellison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 26.

[17]Keith A. Francis, "Sermon Studies: Major Issues and Future Directions," in *Oxford Handbook of the British Sermon 1689–1901*, eds. Keith A. Francis, William Gibson, John Morgan-Guy, Bob Tennant and Robert H. Ellison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 614–615.

[18]Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 12.

women. There was a continuum between an indisputable sermon and others labelled "as discourses, charges, and lectures," especially in the case of "sermon controversies" delivered by clergy on "contentious issues."[19] This article tends toward a conservative definition, selecting talks presented in church services on Sundays and in evangelistic presentations, though also accepting as sermons those delivered by religious and spiritual organizations such as the Theosophists who did not label their talks as sermons. Articles in the *Herald* that were effectively written sermons, but not literally preached, such as an Anglican defence of the doctrine of the resurrection of Christ, have been considered as context for this article, but not counted as sermons.[20]

The next difficulty is the haphazard nature of sermon preservation. Widely circulated published sermons typically represented the cream of British and American preachers. Weekly press reports in Australia routinely published lengthy extracts from sermons. However, these represent just a tiny fraction of the hundreds of thousands preached during the era of press sermon reporting. A very conservative estimate finds that in 1851, Anglican preachers alone delivered over 16,000 sermons across Australia;[21] seventy-five years later, with a sixfold population increase, and an explosion of church building, that number was exponentially higher.

This study of the *Herald*'s reporting illustrates how small a proportion of sermons were recorded. In 1913, Victoria registered a total of 1,443 ministers of religion, the seven largest denominations supplying 369 Anglicans, 293 Roman Catholics, 264 Presbyterians, 254 Methodists, seventy-seven Baptists, sixty-three Congregationalists, and forty-eight Churches of Christ.[22] If each delivered one sermon a week (many preached several, though on the other hand Catholic and Anglo-Catholic priests did not necessarily offer a sermon each week), then the number of sermons that year in Victoria alone was over 75,000. The population of greater Melbourne, estimated at 651,000 in 1913, was about half of the total of Victoria, while the 1911 census revealed that there was a roughly even split in each denomination between urban and rural membership.[23] As urban congregations were probably larger on average than many rural parishes, one might expect that somewhere under half of the Victorian clergy was Melbourne-based, for argument's sake around 600, who would have delivered a minimum of 30,000 sermons each year. The *Herald* typically reported on between one and four sermons from the greater Melbourne region each week, and occasionally none. In 1913, it gave at least minimal details on ninety-two sermons, representing coverage of at most just 0.3 percent of those delivered. Over the next four years, the number of sermons reported per year averaged in the low seventies; in 1918 it slipped to just thirty – 0.1 percent. Of course, there are many more sources for sermons; between other secular newspapers and the religious press of the various denominations, a larger number of sermon transcripts and summaries survive, though still small in proportion to the total. Despite the ratio of recorded-to-preached sermons being low, the volume of recorded sermons across multiple newspapers, journals, and books provides a fair spectrum of sermons in Australia at the time. Estimating their impact is even more difficult, relying on inconsistent reports of their reception. Yet their sheer volume, and the fact

[19]Gibson, "British Sermon 1689–1901," 5–6.

[20]"Churches and Congregations," *Melbourne Herald*, (hereafter cited as CCMH) June 25, 1917, 3.

[21]Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 2.

[22]A. M. Laughton, *Victorian Year-Book, 1913–14* (Melbourne: Albert J. Mullett, 1914), 331.

[23]Laughton, *Victorian Year-Book*, 204–205; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia taken for the night between the 2nd and 3rd April, 1911, Volume II, Part VI Religions*, 827, 842.

that a significant percentage of the population regularly attended church, implies that they made an important contribution to the public discourse on a range of issues.

Preaching in the early twentieth century shared some generic qualities. The lengthy expository sermon of the Reformation era had evolved into one that typically was "less academic and more practical in tone and style," with a more "*scientific* [sic] outlook upon life."[24] Along with this went a decline in doctrinal preaching.[25] Sermons usually had a key text, but rather than being the subject of the sermon as in earlier centuries, it acted as a theme setter, or even a departure point. There was also a trend to shorter sermons, typically under half an hour, and an increased use of techniques of entertainment, including humor, to hold the attention of congregations. "Civic righteousness" and the social gospel became greater concerns.[26] In British lands, these took the character of an assumed "'generic' Protestantism, which encompassed imperial loyalty and the celebration of uniquely British (or Anglo-Saxon) virtues of freedom, tolerance, justice and civic duty," in what Hilary Carey aptly refers to as "God's empire."[27] In a preaural mass media era where the art of public speaking was still taught in schools, there was a continuing emphasis on the performative aspects of preaching, especially of diction, tone and expression, which were considered an inseparable part of the "ethical and moral aspect of delivering God's message."[28]

Naturally, there were differences as well, often along denominational lines. The "stress on the sacraments and prayer" as the centre point in worship services of Catholics, Anglo-Catholics, and Anglican high church clergymen made sermons an optional extra, though they often preached sermons as well. On the other hand, evangelicals "saw the pulpit as the primary vehicle of Gospel proclamation," making the sermon the heart of the service.[29] Emotive preaching styles, especially in evangelism, while waning, were more characteristic of churches from the Restorationist tradition, belittled by one critical contemporary commentator as "Americanisms"; Presbyterians, Anglican, and Unitarians tended to rely on stolidly British common-sense rationalism and logic.[30] Most preachers either memorized their sermon, used prompter notes, or preached extemporaneously, though Anglicans were among those more likely to read their sermons.[31] One Anglican canon returning to Australia considered the average Australian preacher to be better than those in England, as "He is not such a slave to his manuscript, and is more animated."[32] Given that a good proportion of Australian

[24]Edwin Charles Dargan, *The Art of Preaching in the Light of Its History* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922), 221; Ralph G. Turnbull, *A History of Preaching Volume III, From the Close of the Nineteenth Century to the Middle of the Twentieth Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1974), 430.

[25]H. R. Jackson, *Churches and People in Australia and New Zealand, 1860–1930* (Wellington: Port Nicholson Press, 1987), 125–141.

[26]F. R. Webber, *A History of Preaching in Britain and America* (Milwaukee: Northwestern Publishing House, 1957), 456–601; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 341.

[27]Hilary M. Carey, *God's Empire: Religion and Colonialism in the British World c. 1801–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 5–6.

[28]Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 60–61, 71.

[29]Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 4.

[30]Michael W. Casey, *Saddlebags, City Streets and Cyberspace: A History of Preaching in the Churches of Christ* (Abilene: ACU Press, 1995), 13–15, 19–21, 26–27; "Round the Churches," *Quiz and the Lantern*, March 28, 1895, 8; Damousi, *Colonial Voices*, 71–73.

[31]David Hilliard, "Round the Churches with Quiz: Preaching in Adelaide in the 1890s," *St Mark's Review* 230, no. 4 (December 2014), 7–8.

[32]CCMH, March 23, 1914, 3.

clergymen were in fact imported from Britain, it suggests that these preachers were adapting to their less socially constrained Australian audiences in the performative dimension of preaching, as a dynamic interaction between preacher and congregation.[33]

Sermon topics were characterized as having "an extraordinarily miscellaneous nature," with "hardly an area of contemporary human concern or enquiry which was unexplored in terms of the Church's spiritual mission."[34] The vast majority covered religious beliefs and doctrine, and Christian personal behavior. Topical preaching on political, social, and economic affairs, mission sermons and occasional sermons for high days in the church calendar, such as Christmas and Easter, and royal and national anniversaries, made up a much smaller proportion.[35]

Many Australian papers published regular weekly columns of religious content, though none were as consistent in featuring sermon summaries as the *Melbourne Herald*. Other papers printed church news columns on an irregular basis. Sermon coverage mostly consisted of uncritical reports, and it was common to have the popularity or effectiveness of preachers overtly stated and the size of congregations noted as "large" or "crowded." Poor preachers were damned with faint praise rather than critiqued, the reporter focussing on the non-preaching elements of their ministry that were praiseworthy. However, religious journalists often noted the quality of particular preachers. The *Newcastle Morning Herald* reporter described one preacher as "an elocutionist of a very high standard" who was "listened to with rapt attention," while another sermon left him "deeply impressed with the whole service, which was whole-hearted, reverent, and thrilling." With parochial pride, he considered the preaching in Newcastle to be "of a higher order, because they are carefully and thoroughly prepared."[36]

These laudatory stories, common to most newspaper reports on preaching, must have borne some relationship to the truth, even if distorted by judicious selection of the better preachers. The satirical columnist "Quiz," one of the few critical commentators on preaching in the mid-1890s, noted the popularity and effectiveness of some Adelaide preachers even as he gently mocked their foibles, though he was severe on the preaching of a number of others.[37] David Hilliard's analysis of Quiz's column in 1890s Adelaide, probably the most religiously inclined city in Australia, concluded that the typical preaching was "often humdrum, sometimes thoughtful and occasionally memorable," a conclusion that may well hold up for other, less religious, Australian cities of the era.[38]

II. Melbourne Preaching Prior to World War I

The tone of the weekly *Melbourne Herald* "Churches and Congregations" column was similar to that of other newspaper reports on preaching. The *Herald* was an influential evening paper, tending to the centre-right, though its sermon reporter was avowedly non-Conformist in inclination. It appeared in the Monday edition of the paper over many years, usually on page three, and occupied most, if not all, of the page. The

[33]Atkinson, *Commonwealth of Speech*, 72–74; Francis, "Sermon Studies," 623.

[34]Gibson, "British Sermon 1689–1901," 3.

[35]Francis, "Sermons: Themes and Developments," 34; Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 4–5.

[36]"Around the Churches," *Newcastle Morning Herald*, February 25, 1913, 6; April 15, 1913, 6; April 22, 1913, 6.

[37]See the "Round the Churches" column, *Quiz and the Lantern*, across 1895, 8.

[38]Hilliard, "Round the Churches with Quiz," 12.

Table 1. Denominations and sermon reportage 1913–1918

Denominations	Percentage of Melbourne's population	Number of sermons reported per period					
		1913–July 1914: 149 sermons	August–December 1914: 33 sermons	1915: 77 sermons	1916: 70 sermons	1917: 78 sermons	1918: 30 sermons
		Percentage of total sermons reported					
Anglican	39	17	15	27	28.5	24	13
Roman Catholic	21	9	0	2.5	0	2.5	3
Presbyterian	16	11	6	13	10	10.5	3
Methodist	11	12	0	14	13	12	0
Other belief groups	13	51	79	43	48	51	81

lead article normally covered a particular sermon, usually from an evangelical church, beginning with a short biography of the preacher and then summarizing the sermon, with extensive verbatim quotation, and often noting its reception and impact. The rest of the page was devoted to "Around the Churches," composed of many short items of news across the broader denominational spectrum. Typically, these tracked the arrivals and departures of clergy from parishes, various denominational meetings and projects, histories of particular church buildings, congregational news, and profiles of clergymen, missionaries and lay church leaders. Embedded in these shorter articles, some sermon topics were preserved, which contributed to the data for this article.

The *Herald* reported on 149 sermons between January 1913 and the first week of August 1914. The most striking element of the sermon reporting is the paper's partiality for evangelical and non-conformist expressions of religion, as well as Christian sects and various fringe groups that at best ambiguously sat under the umbrella of Christianity (see Table 1). Perhaps this reflected the influence of its religiously marginalized Jewish chairman of directors, Theodore Fink. Only half of the reported sermons came from the four leading denominations of Anglicans, Catholics, Presbyterians, and Methodists, despite collectively representing some eighty-seven percent of Melbourne's population. The city's denominational proportions were similar to those across the nation, with a couple of variations. Anglicans matched the national average of thirty-nine percent, while Catholics were marginally below the national average, yet Anglican and Catholic sermons were under-represented by fifty percent. Melbourne was a Presbyterian stronghold at sixteen percent compared to the national average of just below thirteen percent and, along with the Methodists, who were close to the national average, were more fairly represented in reported sermons.[39]

The minor denominations formed the other half of the reported sermons while composing just thirteen percent of the denominational total. Congregationalists attracted eleven percent of the total sermon coverage, Baptists ten percent and Theosophists nearly seven percent, quite disproportionate to their actual relative numbers. Almost a quarter of the reported sermons were delivered by a collection of minute denominations and para-denominational

[39]Data interpreted from Laughton, *Victorian Year-Book*, 204–205; *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia*, 827.

Table 2. Frequency of sermon themes 1913–1918

Sermon theme	Number of sermons reported per period					
	1913–July 1914: 149 sermons	August–December 1914: 33 sermons	1915: 77 sermons	1916: 70 sermons	1917: 78 sermons	1918: 30 sermons
	Percentage of total sermons reported					
Spiritual life	54	42	33	24	31	0
Doctrine	28	13	12	34	39	76
Morality & ethics	7	3	6	8	8	7
Occasional	11	42	49	34	22	17

organizations, each making up fractions of one percent of the population. The Churches of Christ contributed about three percent, while the YMCA, Unitarians, and Seventh-day Adventists each attracted about two percent of the coverage. Other sermons reported included the Christadelphians, the International Bible Students' Association, the Temperance Hall, the Free Church of Spiritual Philosophy, and the independent Melbourne congregation known as the Australian Church, founded by former Presbyterian Dr Charles Strong. Clearly, the *Herald* sermon reporter inclined heavily to nonconformist churches. While not representative of the spread of denominations, it does offer a valuable corrective to the usual dominant voice given to the Anglicans and Catholics. In any case, this study reveals that there was not that large a gap between the preacherly concerns of the smaller churches and those of the large denominations in peacetime.

A breakdown of sermon themes (Table 2) shows that the Melbourne evangelical churches preached along lines typical of churches in Britain and America at that time, and in keeping with Gladwin's findings on Australian preaching.[40] Four main themes emerge in pre-World War I Melbourne sermons: the spiritual life of the Christian; doctrine and apologetics; occasional sermons marking high days in the religious and political calendars; and morality and ethics. Naturally, a number of sermons slotted into more than one category, a discourse on the spiritual life would have implications about morality, for example. Similarly, doctrine and apologetics often blended together applications to the spiritual life. Nevertheless, there is sufficient distinction between the broad categories to make them valid.

Just over half the sermons preached concerned themselves principally with the personal spiritual life, and more than a quarter were on doctrinal aspects, with a degree of interplay between the two. About ten percent were occasional sermons, but most of these were for church calendar occasions; only two concerned themselves with national and international politics. One of these was delivered by the Methodist Dr W. H. Fitchett, an ardent imperialist and author of the best-seller *Deeds that Won the Empire*, the other by a Presbyterian, and both delivered to celebrate Empire Day, praising the empire as God's instrument and a force for "tolerance, generosity, justice."[41] Ethics

[40]Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 4–5.
[41]CCMH, May 26, 1913, 3.

and morality made up six percent of the sermons. As was usual at the time, most sermons came with a Bible text delineating the theme. These were overwhelmingly chosen from the New Testament, particularly the Gospels. Less than a third of the texts were Old Testament, with Isaiah and the Psalms the favorite sources.

The *Herald* column was warm in its praise of many preachers. A panegyric on Methodist preacher Reverend R W Thompson labelled him as "highly respected," commanding "large congregations, as his sermons are helpful and practical," and being a "good organiser and a hard worker."[42] The Baptist Reverend Sydney Dorman was described as "a capital organiser and a sound, thoughtful preacher," while Methodist S. J. Hoban was "widely known" as "a preacher of considerable power."[43] A large and predominantly young congregation in the New Presbyterian church in St Kilda heard a sermon that was "masterful, simple, and effective."[44] Auditorium services delivered by an Anglican preacher were popular with audiences, who appreciated sermons that lasted for half an hour only, and delivered without notes.[45]

Herald articles often noted the effectiveness of sermons, adding weight to the arguments of Gibson and Francis that secularization had not diminished the power of religion in society, despite appearances to the contrary.[46] One article claimed that no fewer than forty percent of university students were members of the Men's University Christian Union.[47] Several others recorded lunchtime services run by Presbyterian and other clergy for working class people who did not have access to Sunday church services. They ran at fifteen large factories and workshops across the city, with voluntary congregations of up to 1,000 men and 500 women respectively per site, giving up their own time for a half-hour service of hymns, a musical solo and a ten-minute talk. One photo shows a crowded Tuesday lunchtime service at the Newport Railway Workshop.[48] The Church of England Men's Society held open-air services on the banks of the Yarra, which attracted plenty of vocal opposition from "the anarchist orator and the socialist with the flaming necktie," but the preachers were able to hold their own. One Unitarian church congregation increased rapidly in response to the attractive modernist outlook of the preacher, which drew university students and educationalists to his congregation.[49] Articles on "Go to church" campaigns doubling numbers in Methodist churches clearly add evidence to the conclusion that church and sermons still held considerable appeal to a large number of people across the social spectrum.[50] The *Herald* column revealed sermons much along the lines of Protestant denominations across Australia, Britain and even the USA, demonstrating that preaching in the smaller sects shared common concerns with those of the larger, more traditional denominations.

III. Changes in Melbourne Preaching during World War I

During the war years a number of changes were evident in both preaching and the reporting of preaching. The topicality of the war induced a synthesis of several pre-war

[42]CCMH, February 3, 1913, 3.
[43]CCMH, March 10, 1913, 3; September 1, 1913, 4.
[44]CCMH, February 9, 1914, 3.
[45]CCMH, July 6, 1914, 3.
[46]Gibson, "British Sermon 1689–1901," 26; Francis, "Sermon Studies," 614–615.
[47]CCMH, September 8, 1913, 3.
[48]CCMH, September 15, 1913, 3; May 11, 1914, 3.
[49]CCMH, May 18, 1914, 3.
[50]CCMH, June 22, 1914, 3; June 8, 1914, 9.

themes: spiritual life, morality, occasional and even doctrinal sermons, as preachers sought to make a practical connection between religion and current events. The clergy eagerly seized the opportunity that war provided to make multiple facets of religion immediately and urgently relevant. There were also shifting balances in denominational coverage, while the last year of the war saw a dramatic decline in the emphasis given to reporting sermons.

The largest topical shift came in the drop in sermons whose main theme was personal spirituality, which declined from over half to a third or less for most of the war years, and which failed to feature at all in the handful of reported sermons in 1918. Nevertheless, they still made up an important minority of topics. Sermons on Matthew 16:26 and its call to value the soul over worldly gain, or on marriage, family worship, and prayer in the Christian home, or on not letting anxiety hinder spiritual growth and obedience to God's law, or on the need for the old-fashioned Gospel and an outpouring of the Holy Spirit, continued the pre-war trend of addressing personal spiritual growth.[51]

However, instead of dominating sermon themes, they were more often blended into sermons on the war and on morality. McKernan has argued that the churches failed to produce thorough reviews of the theological, moral, and ethical issues of the war, though Geoff Treloar points to evangelical Christianity's "theological and ethical leadership" which provided a framework for a "holy war" against creeping secularism, German militarism and liberal theology.[52] The *Herald* column provides ample evidence of these issues being addressed through sermons across the spectrum of denominations. Moral themes worked particularly well for churches in the Holiness and Restorationist traditions such as Methodists, Salvationists, and Churches of Christ, which placed great emphasis on entire sanctification and morally upright behavior. A Methodist sermon claimed that prayer was the nation's most important asset, which would help win the war.[53] A Presbyterian preacher argued for faith in God and the Bible in an age of doubt hastened by war.[54] The reverse was also true, as many war-related occasional sermons included an application to personal spirituality and morality, as exemplified by an ambitious, all-inclusive Baptist sermon. It highlighted a need for a spirit of thankfulness for great imperial leadership, and for the anti-war attitude of the empire that did not desire war, which, the preacher stated, was "foreign to the temper of the British soul." He was also thankful for the Allied war aim of world peace, and for unmasking the true character of good (the Bible, and the Cross) and evil (the drink trade) in the world.[55]

The decline in a focus on personal spirituality was more than made up by a four-fold increase in occasional sermons to the end of 1915, the bulk of these about the war. While these also declined over the next three years, they were still occurring at a higher rate than in peacetime. The opening months of the war unsurprisingly saw ten of fourteen occasional sermons supportive of the empire's role in the war, mostly delivered within two weeks of the start of the war. Two more were on war-related prophecy, and only two occasional sermons were not war-related.

[51]CCMH, February 15, 1915, 3; April 12, 1915, 3; February 7, 1916, 3; January 22, 1917, 3.

[52]McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*, 2–3; Treloar, *Disruption of Evangelicalism*, 120–122, 171; Michael Gladwin, *Captains of the Soul* (Newport, NSW: Big Sky, 2013), 78–83.

[53]CCMH, January 3, 1916, 3.

[54]CCMH, October 2, 1916, 3.

[55]CCMH, January 8, 1917, 3.

IV. War Sermons

War sermons were distributed throughout the war but were more common around key events such as major battles, demonstrating the close attention paid to social context by Melbourne's preachers. For example, there were peaks in October and November 1914, as the First Battle of Ypres ended the British retreat in France and fixed the front lines in Flanders. Other peaks occurred immediately after the Gallipoli landings in April, then after the May counter-offensives by the Turks, and after the Battle of Pozières in France in August 1916. These were overwhelmingly supportive of the empire and the war effort. In October 1915, an Anglican sermon spoke of the war helping soldiers to see the bigger picture of life, while a Presbyterian preacher stated that the British empire was destined by God to be an emissary of freedom and justice to the world.[56]

War sermons were usually overtly political. Peacetime preaching had seen examples of such, particularly around celebrations for national festivals such as Empire Day (May 24), or inaugural sermons to city councillors on their civic duties after elections. Such trends naturally continued during the war, with a heightened emphasis on patriotism as a religious duty. McKernan has criticized the churches for culpably following the lead of politicians with regard to the war,[57] but Stuart Piggin regards as "anachronistic" charges that the churches missed an opportunity by simply supporting war, stating "It is inconceivable that significant numbers of churchgoers could then have thought in any other way about Empire or war."[58] Indeed, several scholars contend that rather than politics influencing religion, it was the churches that shaped the political opinions of the time, with many seeing an intrinsic connection between God, king, and empire.[59]

Melbourne clergymen delivered sermons on topics such as upholding the Belgian Relief Fund, or a "strong appeal to the people to pay the cost of keeping the British Empire," and a rabbinical sermon on Jewish "duty to the British Empire."[60] Prussian militarism was an easy theological target given its alliance with the moral relativity of German liberal Protestant theology, which appeared to be exemplified in the German disregard of Belgian neutrality.[61] One Anglican service took pains to elaborate on the duties of Christian citizenship, relating it to the war and asking for unity, discarding "the question of Liberal or Labor" or of "religious differences just now." The priest asked them to vote for the Sword of the Spirit, before adding, "and then there is the other sword. There is the hideous, blear-eyed, hungry-jawed dragon of Prussianism that must be slain. . . .And there is among ourselves the dragon of disloyalty." Presbyterian and Unitarian sermons offered "stirring appeal[s] in favor [sic] of voting Yes at the Reinforcements Referendum," criticizing the "No" vote as refusing the responsibilities of maintaining freedom and an Australian nation.[62] While Catholic opposition to conscription was reported, none of those sermons was featured in the "Churches and congregations" column.

[56]CCMH, October 4, 1915, 7; October 11, 1915, 7.

[57]McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*, 172–175.

[58]Stuart Piggin, *Spirit, Word and World: Evangelical Christianity in Australia*, Revised Ed. (Brunswick East: Acorn Press, 2012), 83.

[59]Hudson, *Australian Religious Thought*, xiii; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 484, 487; Roger C. Thompson, *Religion in Australia: A History* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994), 57–58; Treloar, *Disruption of Evangelicalism*, 10, 121–125.

[60]CCMH, March 15, 1915, 3; March 6, 1916, 3; October 2, 1916, 3.

[61]Treloar, *Disruption of Evangelicalism*, 122; Thompson, *Religion in Australia*, 57.

[62]CCMH, December 17, 1917, 3; December 24, 1917, 7.

There were, of course, others who preached against the war and against conscription, to which the *Herald* gave rather bold coverage, considering the pervasive government censorship to shut down opposing voices. In particular, Dr Charles Strong of the progressive Australian Church used the pulpit to denounce war and the conservative theology of conventional Christianity, appealing to women to unite and make impossible another war.[63] A Congregationalist minister, quoting Jesus in Matthew 26:52 ("They that take the sword shall perish by the sword"), argued against war as a solution.[64] Prominent Melbourne Theosophist Amelia Lambrick considered that "the present war shows that man is out of harmony with the Supreme will, and the strife which is imperilling the foundations of civilisation is antagonistic to all that God stands for."[65] As war weariness increased over the last two years of the conflict, war-related sermons decreased, though they still kept the rate of occasional sermons well above the level of peacetime preaching.

V. Other Sermon Themes

The theme of national and imperial spiritual and moral renewal was a major concern of the churches during the war, and was heavily intertwined with issues of theodicy, heralding perhaps a minor revival of interest in topical doctrinal issues. Preachers addressed questions of theodicy thrown into relief by the war, such as why God permitted such widespread injustice, suffering and death, and why he appeared to be silent or disengaged. The answers offered included typically mainstream Christian responses that God was still sovereign, that he was using the war for a greater good, including imperial renewal, and that the war was a result of humanity's selfish exercise of free will. Sermons also addressed suffering and loss, especially during memorial services for soldiers who had died, framing their deaths in terms of Christian sacrifice on behalf of others, and the exchange of temporal for eternal life. However, the difficulties of these issues were tailor-made for the smaller sects to inject their perspectives, contrasting them with those of mainstream Christianity. Theosophists advanced their views on the immortal soul and the need for a pure spirituality.[66] Dr Strong preached on the failures of conventional Christianity, and the need for contemporary answers to current challenges.[67] Seventh-day Adventists used prophetic interpretation to predict the outcomes of the war, hoping to demonstrate a God who was in control of history.[68]

There was a widespread expectation "that out of the evil of war might come the good of Christian revival in Australia, which would fill the gaps of flagging personal faith."[69] The number of free-standing sermons on morality remained at much the same level of pre-war preaching, but war sermons were frequently couched in moral terms, of individual behavior and even more particularly of the collective responsibility. Two Presbyterian sermons in the same week in 1915 demonstrate the point. One, titled "Why God Allows War," argued that war acted in God's hands to perfect character, while another was more narrowly focused on temperance, proclaiming drink to be a

[63]CCMH, January 18, 1915, 3.
[64]CCMH, March 22, 1915, 3.
[65]CCMH, November 13, 1916, 3.
[66]CCMH, May 17, 1915, 3; November 13, 1916, 3; July 16, 1917, 3.
[67]CCMH, August 20, 1917, 3.
[68]CCMH, June 3, 1918, 11; July 15, 1918, 3.
[69]McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*, 66–68; Thompson, *Religion in Australia*, 57.

greater enemy than Germany.[70] The following week, a Wesleyan (Methodist) preacher blamed selfishness for the war, hoping that the war would purify the nations.[71] Other sermons blamed materialism for choking spiritual life, but asserted that the war would result in "the national salvation of the British empire," or argued that victory was delayed because the nation's thoughts were not on God, or appealed to congregations to support soldiers in avoiding immorality, a subject addressed with "great delicacy and tact."[72]

Doctrinal sermons experienced an initial decline before resuming their usual rate by 1916–1917, and then climbing to an astonishing sixty-eight percent in 1918, as reporting of sermons on personal spirituality collapsed entirely. However, these figures are distorted by the changed nature of sermon coverage that year. Two-thirds of the sermons reported were from miniscule religious groups, including Seventh-day Adventists, Theosophists, Unitarians, Christadelphians, and the Modern Spiritualists. They were more likely to be engaged in evangelism and sectarian doctrinal wars than in nurturing a large, settled flock, so it is not surprising that three-quarters of sermons reported were doctrinal. While fringe groups dominated the coverage, evangelistic campaigns were also run by the four large denominations, sometimes directed in opposition to each other.

Included in the doctrinal sermons were those on biblical prophecy, which had been popular before the war, but now took on an urgent topicality. They often concerned the imminence or otherwise of Armageddon and the second coming of Christ. A disproportionate number of these were from Seventh-day Adventists, a sect with a dominant eschatological focus. However, there was widespread interest in biblical prophecy as it related particularly to Turkey and Palestine, evident in lively exchanges of views between various preachers, and continuing correspondence published in the *Herald*. Preachers from several denominations saw the war as verifying biblical prophecy, and though they differed in their interpretations, they were almost uniformly inaccurate. Some spoke of a golden age to follow the war, based on Revelation 11:15, or confidently predicted the Turks would lose Constantinople (today's Istanbul) and move their capital to Jerusalem.[73] Others saw the war as Armageddon, and anticipated the imminent end of the Christian church, replaced by Christ in the New Jerusalem.[74] As such, they were not merely doctrinal but also occasional in theme.

Doctrinal sermons were also closely aligned with mission sermons, which were negligible in pre-war reporting yet formed about five to ten percent throughout the war, particularly from 1916 to 1918. In fact, revivalism was widespread in Australia in the late 1800s and early 1900s, fostered by international as well as local evangelists. Evangelicals in particular saw the war as "an unparalleled opportunity for evangelism," turning it into a crusade against secularism, and its topicality won a greater proportion of journalistic coverage.[75] Evangelistic campaigns in the latter years of the war were more prominently featured in the *Herald* column. Mission sermons encompassed a focus on foreign missions as well as domestic evangelistic campaigns, run by a spread of major and minor denominations. Various missions were noted repeatedly to be well

[70]CCMH, May 10, 1915, 3.

[71]CCMH, May 17, 1915, 3.

[72]CCMH, July 5, 1915, 3; May 29, 1916, 3; August 14, 1916, 3; December 4, 1916, 3; January 8, 1917, 3; July 16, 1917, 3; June 4, 1917, 9.

[73]CCMH, July 23, 1917, 3; June 21, 1915, 3.

[74]CCMH, April 27, 1914, 3; November 23, 1914, 3; January 29, 1915, 4; January 10, 1916, 3; September 3, 1917, 3; February 11, 1918, 3; June 3, 1918, 3; July 22, 1918, 10.

[75]Treloar, *Disruption of Evangelicalism*, 20–27, 122, 127.

attended, sometimes forcing a change to a larger venue.[76] A string of missions occurred in June 1918, beginning with an Anglican "Mission to Catholics – with a small 'c'," which delivered a Christo-centric sermon that could have been preached in a variety of Protestant churches, incidentally proving to be very similar to one by a Catholic priest.[77] Public lectures by Catholics targeting non-Catholics explained distinctive Catholic beliefs, countered by a consortium of Protestants criticizing Catholicism's claims to infallibility, arguing that all worship the same God.[78]

The success of many evangelistic series during the war suggests that there was some justification for Christian expectations of a religious revival during the war, though the long-term trend in religion in Australia was actually of uneven decline after World War I. The evidence from the "Churches and Congregations" column speaks to the significance given to religion by large numbers of Melbournians. Open-air services on the banks of the Yarra attracted large gatherings, and while hecklers were prominent at first, they faded away. A Congregationalist Empire Day service attracted many councillors and a large audience for a "stirring address."[79] Twenty-five Presbyterian ministers continued the pre-war lunchtime services in large factories across the city, attracting audiences in different venues during the war of 200–600. While many who attended these meetings were regular church attenders, "large numbers who do not go to any church are reached, and this is where the special benefit of the system comes in," the reporter noted. These services, also run by other churches such as the Anglicans, continued during the war, though attendances suffered from the strikes in 1917.[80] A very active correspondence section in the "Churches and Congregations" column testified to the impact and interest aroused by the reports of the previous week's sermons.[81] "Go to Church" campaigns by various Protestant churches, and the Anglican "Mission of Repentance and Hope" by charismatic Queensland Anglo-Catholic Canon David Garland also resulted in appreciable increases in church attendance in Melbourne.[82]

Some other themes emerged from wartime coverage of preaching. Sectarianism is of particular interest, given that "historians have been quick to fasten on sectarianism as the distinctive feature and biggest handicap of Australian Christianity," especially between Catholics and Protestants, but also to some extent between various Protestant groups.[83] It is evident in some sermons recorded, as well as in lively correspondence and in other articles in the "Churches and Congregations" column, and also appearing in other *Herald* articles outside of the column.[84] Baptist J. Keith Macintyre was a most active controversialist, lashing out at various other denominations and religious personalities, including deriding a Church of Christ minister for claiming his church was without sectarianism.[85]

[76]CCMH, October 2, 1916, 3; May 14, 1917, 3; May 21, 1917, 3; August 19, 1918, 3; October 28, 1918, 3.
[77]CCMH, June 3, 1918, 11.
[78]CCMH, June 24, 1918, 10.
[79]CCMH, May 24, 1915, 3.
[80]CCMH, October 25, 1915, 3; October 22, 1917, 7.
[81]See for example, CCMH, October 8, 1917, 3.
[82]CCMH, October 22, 1917, 3.
[83]Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 579; Michael Hogan, *The Sectarian Strand: Religion in Australian History* (Ringwood: Penguin, 1987), 289.
[84]For the latter, see for example "Dr Mannix and his critics," and "Origin of Inquisition," *Melbourne Herald*, September 29, 1917, 6.
[85]CCMH, December 6, 1915, 3. See also the Monday editions between November 29 and December 20, 1915, 3, for extended correspondence on the topic.

Some friction between Catholics and Protestants was aired at various times, perhaps most visibly between Melbourne's coadjutor bishop, and from 1917 archbishop, Daniel Mannix and Baptist controversialist T. E. Ruth, but most of these conflicts took place in non-church public forums. While preachers often engaged in political advocacy, many tried to separate the pulpit from divisive politics. Nevertheless, Dr Strong accused both sides of being as bad as each other, claiming Protestants had merely borrowed Catholicism's false tendency to dogma based on proof-texting.[86] It was not surprising that a counter-thrust to Strong came from Macintyre.[87] On the religious sidelines, preaching wars were fought between Seventh-day Adventists, Unitarians, and the Churches of Christ over prophetic interpretation and which day was the Christian sabbath.[88] More benignly, a Congregational minister argued against church union with Methodists and Presbyterians because of a feared loss of "little fellowships" like that of Jesus and his disciples.[89]

At the same time, an even stronger emphasis in the sermons and articles of "Churches and Congregations" was on an ecumenical spirit promoting church unity, reinforcing more recent Australian religious historiography which highlights the strength of inter-denominational cooperation.[90] Praise for a Catholic service came from a correspondent, pen-named "Anglican," who paid his respects to "the Mother Church," just as Methodists paid respect to Anglicanism.[91] An overflowing Baptist church hosted a sermon delivered by an Anglican priest.[92] Sermon reports, backed up by a stream of short articles, stressed decades-old initiatives for unity across a range of denominations, most commonly between Presbyterians, Methodists, and Congregationalists, whose expected imminent union was in fact only realized in 1977. However, other, sometimes unlikely, hands were extended across denominational boundaries during the war. A "League of Men" across multiple denominations explored church unity. Methodists, Congregationalists, Baptists, and Salvationists joined for united intercession services over the war, and Baptist and Churches of Christ members fraternized at a shared harvest festival.[93] Even T. E. Ruth, notorious for his inflammatory political statements, repeatedly bridged the deep divide between Protestants and Catholics in his sermons, highlighting many shared core beliefs and goals and, fascinatingly, even shared bigotries. He was noted as a "prominent" advocate for church union.[94] While Ruth's conflicts with Mannix have formed part of the evidence for entrenched sectarianism, especially over conscription, the whole of Ruth's ministry demonstrates the need for a more nuanced view. Presbyterians, Methodists, Baptists, and Congregationalists hosted fortnightly special services in rotation, topics including "The Challenge of the Present Crisis" and "The Kingdom of Heaven."[95] One

[86]CCMH, October 15, 1917, 7; November 5, 1917, 9; June 24, 1918, 10.

[87]CCMH, July 1, 1918, 3.

[88]CCMH, June 12, 1916, 3; August 13, 1917, 3; August 20, 1917, 3.

[89]CCMH, October 21, 1918, 10.

[90]Hogan, *Sectarian Strain*, 95–96; Piggin and Linder, *Fountain of Public Prosperity*, 579; Treloar, *Disruption of Evangelicalism*, 3–5.

[91]CCMH, July 20, 1914, 3.

[92]CCMH, June 22, 1914, 3.

[93]CCMH, May 3, 1915, 3; June 5, 1916, 10; February 19, 1917, 3.

[94]CCMH, March 27, 1916, 3; "Winter Addresses Begun," *Melbourne Herald*, June 3, 1918, 11; "Common Platform Seen," *Melbourne Herald*, June 24, 1918, 10; "New Programme in Hand," *Melbourne Herald*, May 3, 1915, 3.

[95]CCMH, September 3, 1917, 3.

Anglican preacher even daringly tackled his own denomination, criticizing the Anglican hierarchy for their mansions and palaces, instead of living simply.[96] A couple of reports noted that Australian Imperial Force (AIF) soldiers were intolerant of sectarianism, expecting the churches to lead the way in national unity, reinforcing the leadership role of religion in Australian society.[97]

Another recurrent theme magnified by the war was that of gender roles in the church. A number of sermons emphasized the need of men and manliness in the church, highlighting what Hilary Carey has called a failed attempt at "a masculine model of Christian life" to counter the perceived feminization of Christianity.[98] Preachers focussed on the manliness of Christ, and applied it to soldiers in the AIF, and to the church in general.[99] There was also discussion of women preachers in certain denominations. Theosophist talks were mostly presented by women, while several articles highlighted the effectiveness of Congregational, Methodist, Baptist, and Presbyterian women preachers, the latter the sacrament-administering wife of a Presbyterian minister.[100] A Congregationalist woman was praised as "a gifted speaker, and her pulpit addresses are always striking."[101] The gender of the preacher did not necessarily affect the gendered language then in common use: Theosophist Miss E. Wood happily spoke of reconstructing society to accept a brotherhood of man if a future war were to be avoided.[102]

The war also saw a shift in emphasis on the theme texts chosen. Where the New Testament had dominated in pre-war sermons, now the balance between Old and New was even. The Gospels remained the favored source from the New Testament, while the Psalms, Isaiah, and Joshua offered a range of more militant Old Testament texts from which to preach, alongside the apocalyptic books of Daniel and Revelation. There was a notable decline in texts cited as the sermon theme as the war progressed, the reporter overtly documenting "a sermon without a text" on "Worry Land" from a Church of Christ preacher in March 1917.[103] In 1918, no sermon texts found their way into the reporting of the column. Whether that was principally through the change in reporting sermons or because of an actual decline in the use of theme texts is not discernible from the evidence.

VI. Reporting of Sermons

Denominational coverage also shifted throughout the war. Reporting of Anglican services rose dramatically from the mid-teen percentages to the mid-twenties for most of the war, only suffering a dramatic collapse in 1918. The increase was almost certainly due to the Anglican church's unequivocal support for the war, which was not inevitably the case with the minor denominations. However, this was still well shy of representing the true proportion of Anglican preaching. Coverage of Catholic sermons collapsed almost entirely, probably because of the high-profile opposition to aspects of the war

[96]CCMH, November 20, 1916, 10.

[97]CCMH, July 2, 1917, 3; August 12, 1918, 10.

[98]Hilary M. Carey, *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religions* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 117.

[99]CCMH, January 26, 1914, 7; July 26, 1915, 3; February 28, 1916, 3; July 17, 1916, 3; May 7, 1917, 3; May 14, 1917, 3.

[100]CCMH, August 21, 1916, 9; March 19, 1917, 3.

[101]CCMH, July 9, 1917, 3.

[102]CCMH, March 11, 1918, 3.

[103]CCMH, March 19, 1917, 3.

from Mannix, which epitomized widespread Protestant suspicions about Catholic disloyalty to the empire. Avoiding Mannix's sermons may also have represented an attempt to dampen the fires of sectarianism.

However, the reporter's fascination with minor denominations and fringe religious groups continued. Seventh-day Adventists were the most favored sect, receiving coverage of four, five, and seven percent in 1915, 1916, and 1918 despite making up just 0.001 percent of the religious population.[104] Other disproportionately favored groups included the Theosophists, Unitarians, the Australian Church, the Society of Friends (Quakers), and the Reorganised Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. "The war saw a major increase in unorthodox religious practices such as spiritualism, occultism, and theosophy," Chavura, Gascoigne, and Tregenza argue, a point well illustrated by the *Herald*'s religion reporter.[105] While representing the mainstream in religion even less than before, the reporter's coverage highlighted an important change in Melbourne's wartime spiritual life.

In 1918, the nature of the coverage shifted dramatically. The column shrank dramatically in size, often occupying less than half a page. In particular, the feature sermon article, which had been intermittent over the previous two years, disappeared entirely, and sermon topics were only incidentally recorded in short reports in the "Around the Churches" section. Just thirty sermons were noted in the column, mostly from minor and alternative religious groups. Furthermore, the usual weekly appearance of the column was disrupted; it was entirely absent over the first few weeks of the year, then occasionally missing, and later displaced to pages nine to eleven by a new motoring column on page three. The column continued in reduced form sporadically into 1919, before disappearing. The *Herald*'s reduction of religious coverage came later than that of several other papers, which had dropped their church column at the start of the war: the *Sydney Mail* stopped "A Sunday reading" after July 15, 1914, and the *Adelaide Daily Herald* ran its "Church Men and Matters" on page three of the magazine section, which was discontinued once the war began, thus also ending the church coverage. Gladwin's research shows that newspaper mentions of sermons peaked in the 1910s; given the decline in coverage during the war years, sermon mentions must have been exceptionally high in the early years of the decade.[106] Yet the change in coverage suggests a major shift in public opinion in Melbourne: preaching was no longer given the prominent profile it had once enjoyed, shrinking the reach of a powerful religious voice.

Coverage of sermons may have changed dramatically by the end of the war but reports on the effectiveness of preachers and on the power of religion in people's lives remained constant. Of Methodist J. Trathan, the sermon report noted that "As a preacher he possesses great gifts, and succeeds in attracting large congregations of men as well as women."[107] The former Anglican bishop of Ballarat preached "an impressive sermon to a large congregation," while T. E. Ruth, "one of the keenest of patriots," preached to "vast congregations" in his auditorium services, who seemed "to warmly appreciate his frank handling of great subjects."[108]

[104]Data interpreted from *Census of the Commonwealth of Australia taken for the night between the 2nd and 3rd April, 1911, Volume II, Part VI Religions*, 827.

[105]Chavura, Gascoigne and Tregenza, *Reason, Religion and the Australian Polity*, 164.

[106]Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 10.

[107]CCMH, May 3, 1915, 3.

[108]CCMH, January 10, 1916, 3; November 20, 1916, 10.

The *Herald* "Churches and Congregations" column evidences a vigorous, wide-ranging, and diverse religious response to the war. In Melbourne at least, church leaders strove to present a religious interpretation of the war, albeit from different standpoints. They evidently felt that it was their responsibility to do so and the *Herald* (at least until 1918) felt a corresponding responsibility to publicize it. Even with inadequate representation from Anglican and Catholic preachers, the religious response was demonstrably more substantial than what has previously been imagined.

VII. Conclusion

Some general histories of Australia at war paint with broad brush strokes the interaction of war and faith.[109] While many of their overall conclusions are sound enough, this article adds considerable detail and nuance. It moderates, if not overturns, the gloomier conclusions of McKernan over clerical passivity, declining overall church attendance, and neglect of both theology and of a searching moral enquiry into the war, while adding local detail to Treloar's work on contemporary global evangelicalism.[110] There were substantial attempts from Melbourne's preachers to present a religious interpretation of the war and to turn it to religious purposes. And what happened in Melbourne very likely had its analogues across the Commonwealth, and indeed the British Empire. This is a significant qualifier to the neglect of the religious dimension of the war in most Australian historiography of the war and indicates that religion in general and preaching in particular should be given more emphasis when discussing shifting public opinion on the home front during the war. It also paves the way for similar studies, both in Australia and in other countries, to improve our understanding of religion and war.

There can be no doubt that the war re-energized preaching, providing a focal point for the multiple concerns of the churches. Wartime sermons appear to have accentuated the "persistent voice of religion in the streets, houses and ears," speaking into Gladwin's list on the importance of preaching to "national and imperial identity; . . . on Australian religious life including popular religious expression such as revivalism and holiness traditions, theology, churchmanship and missionary impulses; and on issues of secularisation."[111]

Based on the sermons preached, all aspects of church life seem to have been invigorated by the war: spiritual and moral renewal, evangelism, theology, church attendance, and national and imperial loyalty, while fuelling contradictory movements around ecumenism and sectarianism, though ecumenism seems to have been more often the message from the pulpit, with sectarianism common in non-pulpit settings. The war prompted a synthesis of most of these issues and facilitated bringing every sphere of life into the spiritual realm. At the same time, questions of theodicy fuelled interest in sects and non-Christian spirituality. Holiness and spiritual renewal were no longer just an individual matter – they were of critical national and imperial urgency. The increase in doctrinal sermons was a correlative of evangelistic efforts, which produced impressive results in conversions. Prophecy aroused greater interest because of its perceived topicality, and was often a center point of evangelism. The

[109]Connor, Stanley and Yule, *The War at Home*, 188–190; Graeme Davison, "Religion," in *The Cambridge History of Australia, Volume 2: The Commonwealth of Australia*, eds. Alison Bashford and Stuart Macintyre (Port Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 223–225.

[110]McKernan, *Australian Churches at War*, 173–177; Treloar, *Disruption of Evangelicalism*, 153–168.

[111]Gibson, "British Sermon 1689–1901," 26; Gladwin, "Preaching and Australian Public Life," 12.

war heightened awareness of the need for religion to appeal to men, as well as accommodating some discussion around the effectiveness of women in the pulpit.

In terms of reporting, the *Herald* column demonstrated an increasing fascination for the non-conformist, the marginal, and the new. While it was unrepresentative of the religious majority of Melbourne, the bulk of the wartime sermons it reported would not have been out of place across many denominations. But following a trend in society toward more exotic beliefs, by 1918, the focus in sermon reporting was around the religious fringes. The decline in sermon reporting, beginning in 1916, accelerated sharply in 1918, and the regular page three spot for church news was eventually devoted to a newer god, the car. Ironically then, the war years saw both a resurgence of the importance and influence of preaching, and the first intimations of its waning as a public voice, a trend that would continue into the years that followed.

This study of preaching in Melbourne during the war poses several challenges to a widespread historiography. Notions of Australian secularity are contextualized by demonstrating that preaching attracted large live audiences as well as a high degree of press coverage during the war, indicating the centrality of faith to many wartime Melbournians. The nature and degree of sectarianism is also challenged by a clearer picture of ecumenical preaching, and by recognizing that many preachers sought to separate the pulpit from contentious politics, though they were willing to be heard on the latter in other public forums. The degree to which these conclusions hold up across other cities in Australia, and across the British Empire, awaits further study.

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