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Purgatory and Prayers for the Dead?

New Zealand Anglican Responses to Death during the First World War

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Abstract

This paper argues that the First World War represented a watershed in New Zealand Anglican theology. Evangelical Calvinism had deep roots in New Zealand Anglicanism, but in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Anglo-Catholicism became increasingly influential. The First World War, which caused so much death, accelerated this trend. Many Anglicans discarded their Protestant heritage by encouraging prayers for the departed and suggesting that one could earn salvation through dying for the Allied cause. The one exception was the Diocese of Nelson, where Evangelicalism had greater traction.

Introduction

The First World War was one of the most devastating conflicts in human history. On land, millions of soldiers were torn to pieces on the industrialised battlefields of Europe and the Middle East, and thousands more perished in other combat zones across the world. On the world's oceans, modern navies threw themselves into cataclysmic struggles in which whole squadrons could be virtually wiped out and entire ships' crews perish. In the air, dogfights led to many deaths among pilots, and area bombing – first by lumbering airships, and later by speedy aircraft – introduced new threats to civilian populations.

The length and lethality of the conflict had a dramatic impact on the British Empire, a major

participant in the war on the Allied side. The drive for soldiers and sailors was relentless, and casualty lists reached staggering proportions. In the United Kingdom, nearly five million men – 22% of the male population – joined the British Army, the most hard-pressed service, and over 700,000 became fatal casualties.¹ The situation was similar in the dominions. In Australia, nearly half the eligible male population enlisted.² Over 300,000 served overseas, a fifth of whom became casualties. New Zealand sent just over 100,000 servicemen overseas – 40% of its eligible male population – and approximately 60,000 became casualties.³

The spiritual impact of all this death and destruction was profound. In recent years, religious historians have worked hard to chart the war's theological impact on the British Empire's Christian churches. The bulk of research has focused on Presbyterianism and Anglicanism because of their large size and traditionally close ties to the state.⁴ Scholars have shown that the scale of death wrought a theological revolution. Both faith traditions have strong Calvinistic roots, as reflected in the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith and the Anglican Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion. These confessions teach that salvation is entirely the work of God, who mercifully imputes faith to chosen persons, and that because of Original Sin, human beings cannot merit their salvation through good works.⁵ Upon dying, the souls of the faithful go to heaven and the sinful go to hell, for there is no

Purgatory in which sinful souls might still work out their salvation.⁶ Consequently, prayers for the dead are unacceptable and inefficacious.⁷

Owing to concern about the salvation of their loved ones, many Anglicans and Presbyterians discarded the Calvinistic theology of their communions. They proclaimed that one could earn salvation by dying for the righteous Allied cause – in other words, by doing good works. They also avowed that those who die in a sinful condition go to Purgatory, often referred to as the ‘intermediate state’ so as not to sound too Roman Catholic, and that the prayers of the living can help these souls attain salvation. By the end of the war, Anglicans and Presbyterians who continued to identify as confessional Calvinists found themselves isolated and embattled.

Although the general contours of this paradigm shift are well known, more case studies are needed to show how the changes took place in individual places. New Zealand historiography has lagged behind in this regard: it was only in 2023 that detailed studies appeared of New Zealand Presbyterians at war and on the Home Front.⁸ This paper contributes to the scholarly literature by charting the experience of New Zealand Anglicanism. Owing to space constraints, it is preliminary in nature. It draws on printed primary sources, especially ecclesial newspapers, which reflect the official stance of each diocese.

The subject is fascinating, first, because the Church of the Province of New Zealand was the country’s largest denomination. It accounted for 42.90% of the population and a similar proportion of the Army during the war years.⁹ New Zealand Anglicans identified with the establishment and had close ties to the pre-war Armed Forces, most notably through their missionary units in the Territorial Army, the Regimental Institutes.¹⁰

In addition, the theological revolution was more extreme within Anglicanism than

Presbyterianism. The more radical Protestantism of the latter, summed up clearly and systematically in the Westminster Confession, makes it difficult to introduce and justify non-Calvinistic innovations. Those seeking to do so must bluntly oppose the Confession – for example, by passing declaratory acts in that formally qualify adherence to controversial points of doctrine.¹¹ For this reason, Presbyterians who accepted innovative beliefs and practices during the war recognised that they were going beyond the theological pale, as did their opponents. In contrast, the foundations of Anglican doctrine and practice are less clear-cut, a factor that makes it easier to introduce innovations. To grasp this point, discussion of Anglicanism’s complex spiritual character is necessary.

The Ambiguity of Anglicanism

The Scottish Reformation was led by zealous theologians such as John Knox and Andrew Melville, who purged the Church of Scotland of Roman Catholic beliefs, practices, and ecclesial structures regardless of considerations of *Realpolitik*. In contrast, the English Reformation emphasised political stability and theological concordance. It adopted Calvinist theology while preserving many Catholic practices and ecclesial structures. Consequently, Anglicans have always divided into three distinct camps: High-Church Anglicans emphasise the Catholic heritage; Low-Church Anglicans stress the Protestant heritage; and Broad-Church Anglicans pursue a *via media*. Anglicanism’s diversity is embodied in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, its core liturgical document. The Prayer Book contains much to gratify a Calvinist’s heart, including the Thirty-Nine Articles. However, it also contains modified Catholic rituals, such as the Morning and Evening Prayers, which make no provision for Protestant preaching.¹² Significantly for this study, there are even vestigial prayers for the dead. For example, the Collect for the Burial of the Dead states, ‘We

meekly beseech thee, O Father ... that when we shall depart this life, we may rest in him, as our hope is this our brother doth.’ This ambiguity makes theological concordance difficult because each camp can point to the same doctrinal standards in support of their position.

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Evangelical Revival won many Low-Church Anglicans over to Evangelicalism. Although far from monolithic, Evangelicals are distinguished by their missionary fervour and their stress on a born-again conversion experience.¹³ Most Anglican Evangelicals in this period were Calvinists. Then, from the 1840s, Anglo-Catholicism became influential among High-Church Anglicans. It was also not monolithic. Some adherents were preoccupied with doctrine; others, the Ritualists, focused more on practices. Among the latter group, some were content with the 1662 Prayer Book, while others wanted to abandon it for purer Catholic liturgies. Despite their diversity, all Anglo-Catholics avowed that Anglicanism should discard Protestantism. By the early nineteenth century, Anglo-Catholics had made substantial inroads into global Anglicanism.¹⁴ They had forced Evangelicals onto the defensive and were rendering normative practices and beliefs – the legitimacy of religious orders, for instance – that only a few generations before would have been decried as appallingly papistical.

These theological developments help explain: 1) Why many Anglicans so readily discarded Protestantism during the war; and 2) How they justified their actions in light of Anglicanism’s Protestant heritage. Alan Wilkinson notes that during the war, Anglo-Catholics neared ‘the peak of their influence and coherence’.¹⁵ Several bishops, including Arthur Winnington-Ingram of London, were advanced Anglo-Catholics and the archbishop of Canterbury, Randall Davidson, was a moderate Anglo-Catholic.

As casualties mounted, Evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics reacted differently. Calvinists were wary of pronouncing someone saved unless there was evidence of a profession of faith before death, such as the last words spoken to a chaplain or testimony in a recent letter. This profession was essential for showing that the fallen man had received God’s grace. Moreover, because Calvinists believe that salvation is worked out in this life, praying for the fallen made no sense. Anglo-Catholic and Broad-Church Anglicans were less circumspect. They tried to comfort the bereaved and honour the fallen by teaching that through intercessory prayers, dead soldiers and sailors could be helped into heaven, no matter how impious they had been.

Before the war, prayers for the dead were rare outside Anglo-Catholic circles. As Bishop J. P. Maud of Kensington – a suffragan of Winnington-Ingram – complained in August 1915, Anglicans utter platitudes about the faithful departed but still ‘mostly shudder at the idea of “prayers for the dead”’.¹⁶ Despite Maud’s pessimism, the practice was becoming widespread. At an official memorial service held for fallen Anzacs in St. Paul’s Cathedral that year, no less a figure than Archbishop Davidson proclaimed that those who died unreconciled to God could still achieve salvation, and that the prayers of the living can help. ‘They need, as we shall need, forgiveness and cleansing and new opportunity, and they are in their Father’s keeping’.¹⁷ By 1918, full-blown Requiem Masses were a common sight in parish churches.¹⁸ Church leaders often justified the practice by appealing to the ambiguity of the Prayer Book. They highlighted the existence of vestigial prayers for the departed and argued that Article 22 does not condemn the doctrine of Purgatory, but only the ‘Romish’ interpretation of it.

Passionate Anglo-Catholics such as Winnington-Ingram asserted that combatants could earn

salvation through dying for the Allied cause, even if there was no evidence of a profession of faith.¹⁹ They also supported the reservation of the Eucharist in combat zones so that Anglo-Catholic chaplains could better dispense the Sacrament and inspire soldiers to piety. Article 25 had condemned sacramental reservation, not least because it was associated with the Roman Catholic practice of Eucharistic adoration: 'The Sacraments were not ordained of Christ to be gazed upon, or to be carried about, but that we should duly use them.' Eucharistic adoration hinted at Transubstantiation, a Roman doctrine that Article 28 describes as 'repugnant to the plain words of Scripture'.

These developments scandalised Evangelicals, but they could do little to stop them. People's grief was too widespread, and their passions too strong. Only two Evangelical bishops, Francis Chavasse of Liverpool and Edmund Knox of Manchester, protested to Davidson when, in 1917, the Church authorised its first form of prayers for the dead.²⁰ When Knox forbade such intercessions in his diocese, his cathedral clergy rebelled.²¹ Some Evangelicals came under the influence of the new ideas, and others acquiesced out of intimidation. Bishop Handley Moule of Durham, for instance, grudgingly allowed for intercessions for the fallen despite his dislike of Requiem Masses.²² He also risked blurring the Calvinist understanding of salvation by suggesting that, while combatants could not earn salvation through dying for the Allied cause, God appreciated their sacrifice and was attentive to their sufferings.²³

This Anglo-Catholic paradigm shift changed the face of the English Church. Wartime beliefs and practices became ingrained, as reflected in the post-war attempt to introduce a new catholicised Prayer Book, complete with intercessions for the dead and generous provision for sacramental reservation.²⁴ In 1927 and 1928, highly placed Protestant politicians squashed state support for

the new Prayer Book.²⁵ However, Anglo-Catholicism remained potent, and the revised Prayer Book, though unofficial, became a staple feature in many parish churches.

Pre-war Divisions within the New Zealand Church

In contrast to the wealth of research on the Church of England, there has been little treatment of the New Zealand Church. Allan K. Davidson and Peter Lineham, in their general accounts of wartime religion, could devote little space to Anglicanism specifically.²⁶ The standard study of New Zealand society's response to death, *The Sorrow and the Pride* by Chris Maclean and Jock Phillips, barely discusses religion.²⁷ A recent study of the development of Anzac Day, by John A. Moses and George F. Davis, highlights that prayers for the dead divided Australasian Anglicans and that this impacted commemorations.²⁸ However, Moses and Davis focus more on Australia than New Zealand, and they do not discuss theological debates in sufficient detail.

The key to understanding the New Zealand Church's experience is to remember that it was subject to the same influences as the Church of England. This is because the heritage of the New Zealand Church was predominantly English, and because it was reliant on the Mother Church for clergy and funds. The first Anglicans in New Zealand were Evangelicals associated with the Church Missionary Society.²⁹ They established their first mission station in 1814. However, Anglo-Catholic influences seeped into the country following George Augustus Selwyn's appointment as bishop of New Zealand in 1840. Selwyn was a High-Churchman sympathetic to the Oxford Movement.³⁰ As new generations of English clergymen arrived in New Zealand, they brought more radical Anglo-Catholic beliefs with them. Many laypeople remained stubbornly Low Church, and the most assertive railed against

reforms that they decried as popish (see below for examples).³¹ Nevertheless, Anglo-Catholicism made significant inroads, albeit unevenly because of the predilections of individual bishops and lower clergy, as well as the isolationist tendencies of each diocese.

Anglo-Catholicism was strongest in the Diocese of Dunedin. Its first bishop, Samuel Tarratt Nevill, was a Prayer-Book Catholic increasingly amenable to Ritualism. A formidable character, he aggressively catholicised the diocese after his arrival in 1871. Anglo-Catholic clerics such as Algernon Kerkham were imported, and their Evangelical counterparts such as Lorenzo Moore were bullied into leaving. Services became more ostentatious, and Catholic theology was endorsed.³² In 1888, Evangelicals fought back against Kerkham's Ritualist practices at St. John's, Roslyn. However, parishioners sympathetic to Kerkham obstructed the Evangelicals, and Nevill's unbending will ensured the continuance of Anglo-Catholic reforms.³³ Nevill even sanctioned a female religious order and joined in worship with local Eastern Orthodox Christians.³⁴ When war broke out, Nevill – now an old man – was still bishop of Dunedin, and he was also the primate of the New Zealand Church.

Christchurch was arguably the second-most Anglo-Catholic diocese by 1914. Its first bishop, Henry Harper, was a friend of Selwyn who, like him, sympathised with the Oxford Movement.³⁵ At the behest of disgruntled Low-Church Anglicans, he condemned extreme practices during the Kaiapoi Ritualist controversy in 1877. Nevertheless, he did so reluctantly, and thereby permitted Anglo-Catholicism's survival.³⁶ His successor, Churchill Julius, led Christchurch during the war years. He was a passionate Anglo-Catholic who, among other things, instituted a female religious order and permitted an advanced Ritualist subculture to develop.³⁷ During the war, he was drawn into a Ritualist

controversy at the advanced Anglo-Catholic parish of St. Michael's, Christchurch. Reminiscent of Harper, he reluctantly censured only the most extreme practices, such as extravagant Eucharistic reservation.³⁸

Three other dioceses – Auckland, Wellington, and Waiapu – were also moving in an Anglo-Catholic direction, though more gradually. Despite several prominent Low-Churchmen among its leadership in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Auckland had accepted some facets of Anglo-Catholicism, such as a female religious order.³⁹ This sparked a Ritualist controversy that, while significant, failed to stem catholicising trends. Auckland's wartime bishop was Alfred Walter Averill, a moderate Anglo-Catholic and former vicar of St. Michael's, Christchurch. He sought to maintain equilibrium between theological factions, but as we shall see, his Anglo-Catholic convictions belied this desire during the war. Wellington and Waiapu were led by Broad Churchmen sympathetic to moderate Anglo-Catholicism. William Sedgwick of Waiapu had previously been canon of Christchurch Cathedral and had participated in church life at St. Michael's.⁴⁰ Thomas Sprott of Wellington, for his part, had a distinct interest in ritual.⁴¹

The one exception to the Anglo-Catholic trend was Nelson. Its second bishop, Andrew Suter, was a committed Evangelical. Suter led the diocese from 1866 to 1891, long enough to impute Evangelical flavour to its original Low-Church ethos. Nelson became the Evangelical stronghold of the New Zealand Church, the sole diocese in which Anglo-Catholic reforms made little headway.⁴² Until recently, it has been taken for granted that Nelson retained a potent Evangelical character up to the present day. Nevertheless, Peter Carrell notes that Suter's successors, including the wartime bishop, William Sadlier, were moderates who were less assertive than Suter in fighting Anglo-Catholicism. Instead, their Evangelicalism was

directed towards pastoral work and missionary endeavours.⁴³ Stuart Lange concurs, noting that the Evangelicalism of Nelson Anglicans was more tacit than explicit, especially among those unfamiliar with Anglicanism as practised elsewhere in the country.⁴⁴

Dunedin's Reaction to Wartime Death

During the war, the Diocese of Dunedin, already forcefully Anglo-Catholic, was the foremost champion of prayers for the dead and salvation through service. Curiously, Nevill wrote little in favour of these beliefs, perhaps because of his age and his time constraints as primate. However, he led a highly popularised Requiem Mass for fallen Otago soldiers in August 1915, which indicates his theological loyalties.⁴⁵ William Fitchett, the clerical editor of the diocesan newspaper, the *Church Envoy*, was the leading defender of catholicisation. He triumphantly proclaimed in October 1915 that the 'appalling loss of life' vindicated the Anglo-Catholic belief in intercessory prayers for the dead, since it makes Christians 'feel we *must* make some appeal to the Great Father'.⁴⁶ To counter Low-Church objections, he provided testimony from Scripture and the Prayer Book to show that they are the Church's 'lawful heritage'.⁴⁷ In May 1918, for example, he argued that Article 22 'does not condemn the doctrine of Purgatory, but only ... the Romish doctrine'.⁴⁸

Fitchett also endorsed the concept of salvation through service. In June 1915, as New Zealand troops were being decimated at Gallipoli, he quoted the Belgian Cardinal Désiré-Joseph Mercier. As the spiritual leader of invaded Belgium, Mercier was widely respected throughout the British Empire despite his Roman Catholicism. Mercier had proclaimed that Christ crowns any 'brave man who has consciously given his life in defence of his country's honour'.⁴⁹ Fitchett described Mercier's pastoral as 'By far the noblest Christian utterance of past

years'.⁵⁰ It is difficult to ascertain how this belief was received at the parish level, but it is likely that many Anglicans found it comforting.

Certainly, prayers for the dead became popular. In advanced Anglo-Catholic parishes, such as St. Paul's Cathedral and St. Peter's, Caversham, there were frequent Requiem Masses.⁵¹ In many other parishes, there were less ostentatious memorial services. For example, one 'quite full' service at St. Mary's Orphanage, Dunedin, included prayers for the dead in October 1917.⁵² The exigencies of war also bolstered Anglo-Catholic support for reserving Holy Communion. Most notably, in June 1918, a member of St. Paul's Cathedral serving overseas – we are not told the name – wrote to Canon E. R. Nevill that his experience at the Front had persuaded him that the practice must become routine. 'What we want is to have the Sacrament reserved in the Church, like the R. C.'s have, so that they [Anglican Christians] can go in any time and know that Christ is present in His Church to comfort them'.⁵³

The Situation in Christchurch, Wellington, Waiapu, and Auckland

Christchurch, Wellington, Waiapu, and Auckland also saw widespread support for prayers for the dead and salvation through service. Because they had been travelling down the Anglo-Catholic path more slowly and circumspectly than Dunedin, their pronouncements were fewer and less triumphalist. For example, there was little positive talk about reserving Holy Communion, whether in New Zealand or overseas. As previously noted, Bishop Julius even censured the Anglo-Catholic vicar of St. Michael's, Charles Perry, for becoming too excessive in his reservation of the Sacrament.⁵⁴

Nevertheless, all these dioceses endorsed prayers for the departed. With its sizable Anglo-Catholic subculture, Christchurch was especially diligent. In 1915, the diocesan newspaper, the

Church News, approvingly cited Archbishop Davidson's moderate plea for prayers for the dead. Davidson remarked that Reformation Anglicanism had de-emphasised them only because Roman Catholic 'extravagances' had brought them into disrepute in the sixteenth century.⁵⁵ Anglicanism was mature and astute enough now to endorse 'the absolutely trustful prayer' for departed souls, especially in this time of crisis.⁵⁶ Julius followed the same line. Indeed, he adapted a Russian Orthodox litany for memorial services.⁵⁷ Evidence from parish notes reveals that prayers for the dead were held in parishes beyond the Anglo-Catholic stronghold of St. Michael's, such as in Waikari and Geraldine.⁵⁸

In Wellington, Sprott authorised prayers for the fallen in late 1915.⁵⁹ Wellington parishes did not report praying for the dead as much as Christchurch's, but it is likely that several did so without reporting it, and instances that were reported were well attended.⁶⁰ The Waiapu diocesan newspaper, the *Waiapu Church Gazette*, included intercessory prayers for the slain as early as February 1915, and they became a regular element in the newspaper's prayer section.⁶¹ The clerical editor, Matthew Butterfield, proclaimed that in this time of trial, 'the instinct which prompts remembrance of the departed in prayer will not be suppressed' any longer by Protestants.⁶² Like his Christchurch counterpart, Butterfield cited Davidson in support.⁶³ Parish notes reveal that many ordinary Anglicans in Waiapu uttered intercessory prayers, though intercessory services were less commonly reported than in Dunedin or Christchurch.⁶⁴

In Auckland, Averill published an editorial in August 1915 that echoed Davidson's moderate Anglo-Catholic plea. He argued that it is right and just to pray for those 'in the realm of waiting souls'.⁶⁵ He advocated diocese-wide intercessory services to mark the first anniversary of the war.

Several parishes held memorial services throughout the conflict, which likely included intercessions for the fallen.⁶⁶ Other parishes were more forthright. The Church of the Epiphany, Newton, for example, held a regular Requiem.⁶⁷

Belief in salvation through service also gained traction. The Christchurch *Church News* often discussed the subject. In July 1915, an editorial expressed incredulity at the prospect of God refusing salvation to those who had died for a righteous cause: 'No sane person can believe that.'⁶⁸ Another editorial, reflecting on the casualty lists following the cataclysmic battles of 1917, repeated this conviction.⁶⁹ In October 1915, H. T. Knight, a Wellington clergyman, avowed that the soldier who sacrifices himself for such a noble cause 'has not lost his life, but saved it, and gone to the God Who is our Eternal Home'.⁷⁰ Statements such as these in parish notes suggests that a number of laypeople concurred.⁷¹ Auckland's *Church Gazette*, for its part, contained poetry advancing this perspective.⁷² In Waiapu, the editor of the diocesan newspaper, Archdeacon D. Ruddock, cited the moral plea of Bishop Somerset Walpole of Edinburgh, who had once served in the Diocese of Auckland: 'Is it possible, the bishop asks, that when a man ... makes the supreme sacrifice of life, that there is a sudden stop?'⁷³ Divine love and divine justice, Somerset Walpole stated, argue against this viewpoint. As in Wellington, there is some evidence for this belief at the parish level: in January 1917, for example, it was taken for granted that a fallen combatant known to one parish had been welcomed into heaven, though there was no evidence given that this person had made a profession of faith.⁷⁴

Low-Church Opposition in These Five Dioceses

Remarkably, Low-Church Anglicans rarely criticised these innovations publicly. Diocesan newspapers contain a scattering of general

complaints about the abandonment of Protestant principles.⁷⁵ It seems that there were only two critical letters to the editor that were motivated primarily by opposition to prayers for the dead. The first was published in Dunedin in early 1918. The layman A. A. Pollok of Invercargill, a local leader in the Church of England Men's Society, a Broad-Church organisation, complained about prayers for the dead.⁷⁶ He noted that the practice was foreign to the Protestant Anglicanism of his youth and that Article 22's rejection of an intermediate state rendered it unlawful and purposeless. Fitchett countered Pollok's objections, typically, by emphasising that prayers for the dead were a venerable part of church tradition and that Article 22 condemned only the Roman interpretation of Purgatory. The second was published in Auckland in June 1918. The correspondent 'Anglican Churchman' lambasted Averill for encouraging prayers for the departed. 'The War, with its fearful harvest of death, cannot change our Thirty-nine Articles of Religion or Prayer Book teaching'.⁷⁷ One struggles to find letters to the editor that were concerned principally with attacking the concept of salvation through battle, but these Protestant stalwarts no doubt opposed this idea as well.

The dearth of public criticism is curious. Fitchett conceded that 'a large number' of sincere Anglicans in New Zealand were uncomfortable with the Anglo-Catholic surge.⁷⁸ One might argue that Anglo-Catholic gatekeepers tended to avoid publishing criticisms. Fitchett, after all, disparaged 'the hideous Calvinistic superstition' that motivated Low-Church Anglicans such as Pollok.⁷⁹ However, even in the secular press – a time-honoured vehicle through which disgruntled church members could lambast their leaders – protests were sparse. To be fair, at least one newspaper, the *Auckland Star*, refused to enter into theological controversy.⁸⁰ Nevertheless, newspapers that did permit

argumentation contain few Low-Church Anglican criticisms. In August 1916, for instance, 'Ex-Anglican', who writes as if they had left Anglicanism for a more securely Protestant denomination, argued that Anglicans who supported 'anti-Protestant customs' such as prayers for the dead were a disgrace and should, as a matter of honesty, become Roman Catholics.⁸¹ In November 1915, 'Inquirer' – an author so polite and formal as to suggest facetiousness – asked Bishop Julius what an official Anglican prayer for the dead might look like. 'You see, sir, the Anglican Church has never taught her children that prayers for the dead are necessary, and now when poor sore hearts need heartsease and refreshment there is nothing to turn to.'⁸²

One can only conclude that most dissenters kept silent as a matter of patriotic duty, or because they were resigned to doctrinal drift within the New Zealand Church.

The Situation in Nelson

Despite the dearth of Anglican protest, there was one area of the New Zealand Church where the aforementioned innovations made little headway: the Diocese of Nelson. As noted earlier, Nelson's Evangelical character has been qualified in recent years because Suter's successors lacked his assertiveness. There is some truth to this viewpoint in that neither Sadlier nor other diocesan notables appear to have militantly campaigned against doctrinal drift as Bishops Chavasse and Knox did in England. The *Nelson Diocesan Magazine*, for example, featured no such criticisms during the war years. At the same time, Nelson stood aloof from the trends affecting the other dioceses. It seems to have been united in this respect, since one struggles to find evidence of public dissent from the prevailing diocesan viewpoint.

The *Nelson Diocesan Magazine* was punctilious in reporting the names of its fallen soldiers and

sailors. Prayers for the dead barely featured in four years' worth of content. The emphasis was always on commemorating the life and sacrifice of the fallen and praying for the bereaved. In August 1915, for instance, 'Much sympathy' was expressed for the parents of a fallen officer, but no prayers were mentioned for his soul.⁸³ Further examples are legion.⁸⁴ Early in the war, the *Nelson Diocesan Magazine* reprinted part of a service at Westminster Abbey that contained a prayer for the fallen, but this did not stimulate an increase in the practice among Nelson Anglicans.⁸⁵ A litany published in the next issue contained no prayers for the fallen; the closest it got was a prayer for God to have mercy on 'all who are drawing near to the hour of death'.⁸⁶ The absence of intercessions for the departed in editorials and parish reports suggests that it never became as widespread or acceptable as elsewhere in New Zealand during the war years.

Nor was there much focus on salvation through battle. When discussing the salvation of the fallen, the necessity of faith in Christ was almost invariably stressed. In June 1918, for instance, Bishop Sadlier preached on a united Protestant Day of Intercession in Nelson. His focus was on the living, and specifically the need for those on the Home Front to pray that their loved ones serving overseas trust in Christ. His comments on the dead made clear that God alone saves, and he prayed to those who grieve 'that you may have strength to bear the pain [of loss] and lay your burden on your Saviour'.⁸⁷ Earlier, in September 1917, Archdeacon John Kempthorne held a prominent memorial service for fallen Anglicans. After solemnly praising the men's devotion to duty and offering his sympathies to the bereaved, he 'unfolded the Christian hope of a glorious resurrection from the dead for all those who have fallen asleep in the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ'.⁸⁸

One exception to this Evangelical perspective was a small commemoration for a beloved

church member in July 1917. In addition to the usual 'heartfelt sympathy', the notice briefly encouraged the bereaved to take heart in 'the assurance that in many a humble school [of thought within the Church] it will be found that "he, being dead, yet speaketh"'.⁸⁹ This small message was out of harmony with other diocesan statements. Its circumspect tone, moreover, suggests that the author recognised that this viewpoint was not common in Nelson. All this shows that while Evangelicalism in Nelson lacked combativeness, it was nevertheless widespread and deeply felt.

Wartime and Post-war Commemorations

These internal Anglican disagreements had a bearing on New Zealand society at large, above all with respect to public remembrance. Declaration Day, the anniversary of the entry into war, was solemnly commemorated during the conflict. Anzac Day, the anniversary of the Gallipoli landings, remains a hallowed national holiday to the present. War memorials became a common feature of the New Zealand landscape. Owing to its large size and historic establishment ties, the New Zealand Church was intimately involved in these commemorations. Many war memorials were erected in churches, and clergy have always been prominent in Anzac Day services.

This last point is significant. Moses and Davis have demonstrated that Anzac Day, though often regarded as a secular affair, has religious origins. The brainchild of Canon David Garland, a passionate Anglo-Catholic based in Brisbane, Anzac Day was designed to be an ecumenical event in which every patriot, regardless of religious conviction, could participate sincerely and fruitfully.⁹⁰ One contentious point was prayers for the dead. Roman Catholics approved of the practice but were forbidden from joining in inter-church worship. Anglicans were bitterly divided on the matter, and most other Protestant

denominations rejected them.⁹¹ Garland's tactful solution was the one- or two-minute silence, a period during which people could honour the dead according to their consciences without offending anyone else.⁹²

The post-war period lies outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, because Moses and Davis provide few details regarding how Anglicans in New Zealand responded to wartime commemorations, a few remarks are prudent here. All Anglican dioceses in New Zealand held special services on Anzac Day and Declaration Day. Most held well-publicised intercessory services for the fallen, in line with their belief in prayers for the dead. For example, Nevill held a Requiem Mass in Dunedin to mark the first Declaration Day in August 1915, and Averill and other Auckland Anglicans held special Anzac Day services from 1916 that included intercessions for the departed and affirmations of salvation through good works.⁹³ Averill even stated, without properly elucidating the role of faith in Christianity and the fact that some Anzacs were not Christian, 'We are confident that these brave men have not finished their lives – they have rather been called into God's advance company for higher service.'⁹⁴

Nelson was the exception. Nelson Anglicans did not treat remembrance ceremonies as a time to intercede for the dead or to presume their place in heaven because of their service. Rather, they commemorated the lives of the departed, honoured their wartime sacrifice, and prayed for the bereaved. For example, the *Nelson Diocesan Magazine* in September 1916 carried a mammoth article calling for the building of a national Anzac war memorial.⁹⁵ It avowed that the building should conduce to remembrance of those who had given their lives, but it said nothing about intercessions for them. Nor, for that matter, did it argue that their self-sacrifice had won them eternal salvation. One struggles to

find reports of Requiem Masses in the diocesan newspaper or secular periodicals.

Post-war Anglo-Catholic Dominance

The post-war experience of the Anglican Church also lies outside the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, one must note that the war expanded and intensified Anglo-Catholic influence within all dioceses except Nelson. While this influence had been growing before the war, there were still many Low-Church Anglicans who remained wedded to their Protestant heritage.⁹⁶ The war swept much of this opposition aside because it made Anglo-Catholic practices such as prayers for the dead seem relevant and fitting in a time of deep spiritual crisis. Most Anglicans adopted them or at least acquiesced in them. Only a select few publicly protested. This normalisation of Anglo-Catholic beliefs and practices paved the way for further Anglo-Catholic reforms in all dioceses except Nelson.

In consequence, Low-Church Anglicans found themselves marginalised. Evangelical clergy in particular faced an uphill battle. One example is William Orange, a leading Anglican Evangelical in the post-war period. Shortly before the conflict began, he felt stifled in the Diocese of Christchurch's Anglo-Catholic milieu, and he considered leaving Anglicanism for the Open Brethren.⁹⁷ After resolving to remain Anglican, he trained for the ministry at College House, where he was harassed and censured by his principal, who had little appreciation for Evangelicalism.⁹⁸ Orange spent the rest of his ministry chafing against Christchurch's dominant Anglo-Catholic culture. The Diocese of Nelson, while secure in its own faith, was for this reason rather isolated in the post-war years. This is best symbolised by the fact that in 1943, Bishop Percival W. Stephenson of Nelson was scheduled to preach at St. Stephen's Presbyterian Church, Dunedin, in connection with the Evangelical Inter-Varsity

Fellowship.⁹⁹ However, the bishop of Dunedin at that time was none other than William Fitchett, the staunchly Anglo-Catholic wartime editor of the *Church Envoy*. He did not want Evangelicalism in his diocese and declined Stephenson permission to preach.

Conclusion

This paper has explained New Zealand Anglicanism's differing responses to death in the First World War. The pre-war years witnessed the rise of Anglo-Catholicism at the expense of Evangelicalism. The war enabled Anglo-Catholic beliefs and practices to proliferate in five of New Zealand's six dioceses, which contributed to the further growth of Anglo-Catholicism in the post-war years. The New Zealand context was, in other words, very similar to the English. The most noteworthy difference is that while New Zealand Evangelicals stalwartly upheld their principles, there was no assertive protest against innovations of the calibre of Bishops Chavasse

and Knox in England. This may be traced to the moderateness of Nelson Evangelicalism and the weakness of Evangelicalism elsewhere in the country.

Although this paper has charted new ground in the field of New Zealand religious history, much work remains to be done. The shortness of this study necessitated a reliance on printed primary sources. Archival research has the potential to elucidate with greater nuance the views of individual dioceses and church leaders, as well as ordinary worshippers in the pew. Likewise, the theological impact of the war on New Zealand Anglican chaplains – the largest chaplaincy contingent ministering to the largest denomination in the Army – is deserving of in-depth treatment. It is hoped that this paper will stimulate further research, so that the New Zealand Anglican experience will be as well charted as the Presbyterian.

Endnotes

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² Christopher Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War* (Auckland: Oratia Books, 2016), 308.

³ *Ibid.*, 307–308.

⁴ Among the most important studies are Snape, *God and the British Soldier*; Edward Madigan, *Faith Under Fire: Anglican Army Chaplains and the Great War* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War*, 2nd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); Daniel Reynaud, *Anzac Spirituality: The First AIF Soldiers Speak* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2018); Robert D. Linder, *The Long Tragedy: Australian Evangelical Christians and the Great War, 1914–1918* (Adelaide: Openbook Publishers, 2000).

⁵ Westminster Confession, Chapters 10–16; Thirty-Nine Articles, Articles 9–17.

⁶ Westminster Confession, Chapter 32; Thirty-Nine Articles, Article 22.

⁷ For a concise exposition of the Calvinist perspective, see Isaac Jolly, *What of our Dead? Shall We Pray for Them?* (Auckland: Auckland Sunday School Union, 1916). Jolly was a Scottish Presbyterian theologian based in New Zealand.

⁸ Martin George Holmes, "Assessing the First World War's Spiritual Impact on Scottish Presbyterianism in the Diaspora: The Case of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand," *Scottish Church History* 52, no. 2 (October 2023):

131–154; Martin George Holmes, “New Zealand Evangelical Clergy in the First World War: The Presbyterian Experience,” *Lucas: An Evangelical History Review* 3, no. 2 (December 2023): 25–51.

⁹ Holmes, “New Zealand Evangelical Clergy,” 31.

¹⁰ Martin George Holmes, “Rise and Fall of the Brotherhood of St Andrew in the Anglican Diocese of Dunedin: Charting the American Influence in New Zealand’s Religious History,” *Journal of Religious History* 47, no. 1 (March 2023): 41–45.

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¹⁴ For a good overview, see John Shelton Reed, *Glorious Battle: The Cultural Politics of Victorian Anglo-Catholicism* (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War* (London: SPCK, 1978), 8.

¹⁶ “Half-Hours in the Study,” *Church Gazette*, 2 August 1915, 128. For further discussion, see Michael Snape, “Civilians, Soldiers and Perceptions of the Afterlife in Britain during the First World War,” *Studies in Church History* 45 (2009): 377.

¹⁷ “In Memoriam,” *Waiapu Church Gazette*, 1 September 1915, 35.

¹⁸ Wilkinson, *The Church of England*, 177.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 177–178.

²¹ Snape, “Perceptions,” 379.

²² Wilkinson, *The Church of England*, 177.

²³ *Ibid.*, 295–296.

²⁴ Alan Jacobs, *The Book of Common Prayer: A Biography* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2013), 164.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 163–164.

²⁶ Allan Davidson, “New Zealand Churches and Death in the First World War,” in *New Zealand’s Great War: New Zealand, the Allies and the First World War*, eds. John Crawford and Ian McGibbon (Auckland: Exisle, 2007), 447–466; Peter Lineham, “The Rising Price of Rendering to Caesar,” in *New Zealand Society at War, 1914–1918*, ed. Steven Loveridge (Wellington: Victoria University Press, 2016), 190–205.

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²⁸ John A. Moses and George F. Davis, *Anzac Day Origins: Canon D. J. Garland and Trans-Tasman Commemoration* (Canberra: Barton Books, 2013), 31, 169.

²⁹ For a detailed history of these first years, see Michael Corboy, *Between God and a Hard Place: A Re-examination of Church Missionary Society Evangelisation of Māori, 1814–1840* (O’Corrbui, 2022).

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- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 134–187.
- ³⁸ *Ibid.*, 203–211.
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- ⁴⁴ Stuart M. Lange, *A Rising Tide: Evangelical Christianity in New Zealand, 1930–65* (Dunedin: Otago University Press, 2013), 70.
- ⁴⁵ "Requiem for the Fallen," *Otago Witness*, 4 August 1915, 11.
- ⁴⁶ "Prayer for the Departed," *Church Envoy*, 15 October 1915, 311. Emphasis in original.
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁴⁸ "Two Questions," *Church Envoy*, 15 May 1918, 110.
- ⁴⁹ "Current Notes," *Church Envoy*, 1 June 1915, 181.
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- ⁵¹ "Requiem for the Fallen," *Otago Witness*, 4 August 1915, 11; "S. Peter's, Caversham," *Church Envoy*, 15 July 1915, 239.
- ⁵² "Day of Perpetual Intercession," *Church Envoy*, 15 October 1917, 252.
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- ⁸⁸ "Greymouth," *Nelson Diocesan Magazine*, 1 October 1917, 14.
- ⁸⁹ "Corporal Rollinson – Promoted!" *Nelson Diocesan Magazine*, 1 July 1917, 3. The quotation here is from Hebrews 11:4 (King James Version).
- ⁹⁰ Moses and Davis, *Anzac Day Origins*, 258.
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- ⁹² *Ibid.*, 169.
- ⁹³ For example, see "Requiem for the Fallen," *Otago Witness*, 4 August 1915, 11; "Pukekohe," *Church Gazette*, 1 June 1917, 117; "Anglican Commemoration," *Auckland Star*, 25 April 1916, 6.
- ⁹⁴ "Anglican Commemoration," *Auckland Star*, 25 April 1916, 6.
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- ⁹⁷ Lange, *A Rising Tide*, 69.
- ⁹⁸ *Ibid.*
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