

# Remembrance Day:

## then and now

Tom Frame

With the passing of all but a literal handful of the last Australians who fought in the Great War of 1914–18, ‘Remembrance Day’ has lost its human face and some of its poignancy. But this has not diminished its importance. The conflict left a deep scar on the young nation and few Australian families were untouched by grief. On my appointment as Anglican Bishop to the ADF in June 2001, I inherited a large collection of liturgies including a ‘Service of Thanksgiving for the Cessation of Hostilities and Commemoration of the Sons of the Church who have Fallen in the War’. It was produced by the Diocese of Sydney and authorised for use in November 1918.

The liturgy expressed sentiments of gratitude for ‘the gradual worldwide triumph of the cause of righteousness’ and a petition that Australians would be made ‘more worthy of the sacrifices made on our behalf’. It is almost as if the war reflected a holy cause that ennobled military service and rescued all the death and destruction from pointlessness and futility. While some sense had to be made of the carnage, how did the Churches interpret the Great War and assess its moral standing? And what comparisons and contrasts can be drawn from Church attitudes towards the recent war in Iraq?

The reasons for the British Churches, and by extension those in Australia, being enthusiastic about the 1914–18 war are the subject of spirited scholarly debate. In *The Last Crusade: The Church of England in the First World War*, Albert Marrin has argued that towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Anglican Church in Britain saw itself as the ‘guardian, the protector, the educator and the exponent of the national conscience’. The Church was effectively a check on the exercise of temporal rule (meaning politics). As the Church possessed a high view of the State’s right to impose obligation on individuals and a low view of ‘anti-social behaviour’, ‘Anglican opinion was almost unanimous in rejecting pacifism’. Alan Wilkinson, in *The Church of England in the First World War*, cites a number

of attacks by Churchmen on ‘wrong-headed pacifists’ and ‘the false teaching of pacifism’. But what the studies of Marrin and Wilkinson failed to identify was a spiritual dimension to their support for the war.

In his study entitled *God, Germany and Britain in the Great War: A study in Clerical Nationalism*, A.J. Hoover hinted that the Churches might have seen the war as a means of opposing the notion that God had blessed German militarism. ‘Germans have had no difficulty at all in fitting war into God’s world order. God has used war for thousands of years to accomplish his will’. He shows that German pastors were fond of preaching from Scripture passages that implied that God controlled the world through warfare. There is no evidence of any explicit German teaching on the morality of military service. However, in a more general sense, the German Churches believed that because Christ and the Bible were not openly against war they could not be against military service. But Hoover is not able to show any direct connection between the tacit support of the German Church for militarism and the attitude of the British Churches towards the war.

John Moses first identified the connection in 1987. He was able to show in relation to Anglican attitudes in Britain that the Great War was seen as a struggle between conflicting religious notions of the nature of the State. Whereas German Lutheran theology had envisaged that the German state and its military power was the means by which God would influence world affairs, British Anglicanism upheld, as Marrin has shown, the role of the State as the national conscience.

This is a persuasive argument because it separates the purposes for which the governments in London and Berlin resorted to war from the basis on which the Churches took such an active role. The Anglican Church was not, of course, obliged to see the war as the Imperial government saw it. If the spread of German apostasy could only be opposed by the war, the Anglican Church had reason enough for supporting the war. More recently, John Moses has tried to show that similar perceptions

of the Great War were held in Australia. Citing the role of Canon David Garland, an Anglican priest in the Diocese of Brisbane who coordinated the first ecumenical Anzac Day liturgies, Moses has argued that Anglican support was based on the premise that 'there could be no compromise with Prussianism'. Moses' work represents a challenge to the widespread notion that Australian Churchmen who were enthusiastic about the war were simply 'blimpish Empire patriot[s]'.

The churches greeted the Armistice in 1918 with thankfulness to God whom they believed had vindicated the righteousness of the Allied cause. In the years that followed, the churches proclaimed the dawning of a new civilisation. Western society had been taken to the edge of a moral abyss and Church leaders were appalled by what they had seen. They also hoped that the German people had appreciated the consequences of what they had unleashed in 1914. A determination to avoid any repeat marked the next decade. While there was widespread support for the League of Nations and the principle of arbitrating international disputes, the organisation was denied the means of enforcing its resolutions. This meant the League was effectively powerless to prevent the spread of left- and right-wing totalitarianism and the aggressive warfare these regimes waged against their neighbours. By 1939, another world war was inevitable.

There are four readily discernible differences in religious attitudes towards the Great War and the 2003 Iraq war. First, there is widespread suspicion of government (as distinct from political parties) and a general lack of trust in public institutions. Whereas the press and people were prepared to take on trust intelligence assessments of threats to Australia's security and to accept official explanations of the need for military action in 1914, they now expect the intrusion of economic self-interest in resorts to force and suspect that political parties will seek electoral advantage from participation in armed conflict. By way of illustration, it was alleged that the Iraq war was purely about Western access to Arab oil reserves while the Howard Government apparently sought the electoral advantage of 'incumbency' during a time of international hostility.

Second, those against whom Australians fought in 1914–18 were considered aggressive and brutal. They could only be stopped through the legitimate use of discriminate force. Once the war was over, Germany needed to be punished and denied the means of waging warfare. Since then, a more optimistic view of the capacity of individuals and states to act morally has developed alongside a more confident attitude towards the prospects of non-violent conflict resolution. Despite the twentieth century providing abundant evidence of persistent human depravity in

continuing instances of genocide and ethnic cleansing, there is a widely held belief that the evolution of international law and the establishment of forums to resolve disputes will advance human civilisation and eventually make military force redundant.

Third, there has been a clear resurgence of interest in and adherence to pacifism. The Reverend Tim Costello claimed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* ('A churchman cannot serve two masters', 4 June 2003) that the Church was indeed pacifist. In a letter to the editor, I took issue with this unhistorical assertion.

From the time of St Augustine when the Church properly accepted a share of responsibility for preserving temporal peace and protecting civil order, the majority of Christians have acknowledged that force may be required to restrain evil and restore justice both within a nation and between neighbouring states.

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While resorts to force by either the police or the military are always regrettable, failure to deal with lawlessness and

oppression is just as repugnant. In such matters the choice is rarely between good and evil but between bad and worse. The followers of Jesus must, therefore, struggle with the tensions and the obligations created by his reminder that they were in the world but not of it. No one has clean hands.

Fourth, there is an increasing unwillingness to accept the loss of life involved in the application of force. Between 1914 and 1918, 59,000 Australian men were killed and many more permanently wounded in body, mind and spirit. In World War II, the death toll was 34,000. Since 1945, less than 1,000 Australian men and women have been lost in active service. Sergeant Andrew Russell was the sole battle fatality in Afghanistan and no-one has died in Iraq as yet and hopefully none will. This has not prevented some Church leaders arguing that one Australian death in either campaign would be one too many.

In the past, Australians have shown a willingness to oppose tyranny and totalitarianism whatever the cost. But what of Australia's present readiness to accept the consequences of using force to uphold moral values and protect human rights? To date, deployments to Somalia, Cambodia, East Timor and the Solomon Islands for these purposes have not been challenged in terms of the human cost. But one suspects that a handful of Australian casualties might expose the extent of this nation's self-interest and the shallowness of its commitment to preventing human rights abuses committed by oppressive and illegitimate governments.

It is frequently claimed that religion is the cause of more war than any other single factor. While I would dispute this on factual grounds, I am inclined to the view that an informed Christian perspective of the kind offered during the Great War can and does deliver a certain stance on a range of issues relating to the war and its conduct.

Christian notions of the dignity of individual human persons and the sanctified nature of life are integral to notions of social harmony and prescriptions for the proper exercise and limits of political authority. In terms of analytical method, a consciously Christian ethical outlook would, for instance, insist that we consider these concerns in the context of broad community discourse, both within the Church and in public conversations, as the nation state is a contingent entity lacking specific divine sanction for its actions.

The simplistic, over-confident, and naïve assertions and accusations of many Christian ‘commentators’, before and during the Iraq war, hurt the Church, the community and the ADF. They would do well to ponder the more thoughtful analyses of those who understood the individual and institutional evil that led to the warfare that was waged on a national scale after 1914. That same evil has yet to be banished from the human heart. ♦

*Dr Tom Frame is the Anglican Bishop to the ADF and a prominent naval and church historian. This article is a modified version of an address delivered by him at the Anzac Memorial Chapel of St Paul, Duntroon, to mark ‘Defence Sunday 2003’ (the Sunday closest to Remembrance Day). Dr Frame’s next book, ‘Living by the Sword? The Ethics of Armed Intervention’, will be published by the University of NSW Press on Anzac Day 2004.*

## association update

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### Vale Lawrie Clark

As we noted in the Spring 2003 issue of *Defender*, this year brought the passing of the last survivor of our three founders, the redoubtable Jim Harding. As the Association finishes its 28th year we record the passing of our first national president, Colonel L.G. (Lawrie) Clark, MC, on 07 November 2003.

Lawrie joined the ADA in its earliest days in the mid 1970s because he had a deep commitment to Australia’s national security. His leadership skills were soon put to good use in the original State branch in Western Australia. When the ADA went fully national in 1981, Lawrie stepped up from the presidency of the Western Australia branch to be our first national president. He was a source of much sage advice on the national council and held the presidency until 1989 when he was forced to retire only through ill health.

Although Lawrie’s ill health plagued him for the next 14 years he remained a staunch supporter of the ADA and was a particularly close reader of *Defender*. At Jim Harding’s funeral in July this year, although not at all well, Lawrie insisted on representing the Association and saluting Jim’s passing. This dedication to duty, in practice, form and spirit, was typical of Lawrie’s approach to life.

An outstanding junior infantry leader in Korea, he later served in Vietnam, including with the Australian Army Training Team (AATTV). He was officer commanding 1st Special Air Service Company, Royal

Australian Regiment, from 12 September 1960 to 23 June 1963, and later commanding officer of the Special Air Service Regiment (SASR) from 13 December 1969 until 25 January 1972.

Lawrie’s other community commitments were extensive. He was a dedicated member of Rotary and a long-time staunch member of Legacy, the SAS Association and the AATTV Association. He also served as a councillor for the shire of Busselton.

His funeral at Karrakatta Cemetery in Perth on 13 November 2003 was attended by a very large group of family, friends, Army comrades and admirers, and included a representative of the Governor-General, a close friend. The SASR saw him off in fine style, both at the funeral service and at the celebration of his life held later at the SAS Association House at Campbell Barracks, Swanbourne.

The Association was represented at Lawrie’s funeral by his successor as President of the Western Australia branch, Noel Monks, and by other longstanding members including Joan Dowson, Andrew Fraser Hobday and Kevin Bovill. The Association has also passed its condolences on to Lawrie’s wife, Pat, and family.

Our continuing tribute to Lawrie is the work of the Australia Defence Association and the cause he championed, as our National President for nearly a decade and as a dedicated member for another two. ♦