Supreme Sacrifice?
New Zealand Chaplains and Churches
and the Construction of Death in the First World War.

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The First World War was the largest human disaster experienced by New Zealand with over 18,000 dead and more than 41,000 wounded. Unlike a sudden plane crash or the sinking of a boat, the war was an extended tragedy that went on for over four long years and more. The mounting lists of casualties brought home daily the cost of human suffering. And of course the suffering and tragedy did not end on the 11th November 1918. The war exhibition in this museum is called 'Scars on the heart'. New Zealand society was deeply scarred, by the deaths, the physical and psychological wounds carried by surviving soldiers, and the impact on their families.

Making Sense of Slaughter

How do we make sense of death on such a vast scale? That's been an ongoing project of the last one hundred years. As the historical industry around the centennial commemoration has shown, it is a project still attracting huge interest. Jay Winter, Yale Professor and one of the most distinguished authors about the memorialisation of 'the Great War', writes that 'Commemoration was a universal preoccupation after the 1914-18 war. The need to bring the dead home, to put the dead to rest, symbolically or physically, was pervasive.'[1] Whether we have finally put the dead to rest, given our continuing construction and reconstruction of memory and commemoration, is debatable.

The changing language we use to talk about death in the War is a pointer to our mercurial hold on memory. Paul Fussell, in his seminal book, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, has a section called 'The Progress Of Euphemism' in which he quotes the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George's view about the war: '"The whole thing is horrible ... and beyond human nature to bear, and I feel I can't go on any longer with the bloody business".' Lloyd George was convinced that the accurate description of the war, would lead people to insist on it being stopped. '"But"', as he acknowledged, '"of course they don't–and can't know. The correspondent's don't write and the censorship wouldn't pass the truth".' The suppression or 'inhibition' of truth on the one hand, and what Fussell identifies as 'the British tendency towards heroic grandiosity about all their wars' on the other,[2] led to what Winter calls, 'The banalization of violence'.[3] Writing about the fighting that took place in Belgium and France in 1916, including the Somme offensive, Winter describes how 'The battlefields became "killing fields" and only one word, "slaughter, accurately describes the extent of the killing, violence and destruction.'[4]

'Slaughter' is both a descriptive and emotive word to use about death. It conveys something of the horror, violence, carnage and butchery that war could produce. It cuts through the euphemistic language often used to sanitise death: 'the fallen', 'gone west', 'passed to the great beyond', 'the final roll call', 'passed out of the sight of men', 'laid down their manhood', laid down his life on the altar of the Empire, 'sleeping their long last sleep', 'made the supreme sacrifice'. Pierre Berton wrote that 'Nations must justify mass killing, if only to support the feelings of the bereaved and the sanity of the survivors'.[5] To justify and make

sense of the war, rhetoric, imagery, and memorialisation were often used. They in turn contributed to a mythologizing of death in war, something which often hid or muted the reality and remembrance of the slaughter which war entailed.

The Churches and War

A significant contributor to the rhetoric, imagery and memorialisation around war and death was the Christian Church. Some churches had a long history of involvement in justifying war, supplying chaplains, providing graves for soldiers, receiving and housing retired regimental battle colours, erecting memorials honouring the war dead. There were, however, contending voices, often minorities within the church or in small sects that critiqued and opposed war as contrary to the will of God and the way of Jesus; their voices were often suppressed or marginalised.

In this presentation I want to distinguish the voices of the chaplains who served overseas, from the voices of the church in New Zealand. Chaplains were significant in dealing with death at Gallipoli and on the Western Front, but this had little direct impact, I argue, on the construction of death in New Zealand society. In contrast, the church at home, along with the wider society, developed and used the concept of sacrifice to support the war, to provide pastoral solace to the bereaved, and to give meaning to death in war. I will conclude with some reflections on the churches, sacrifice, death and war in 2015.

In 1916, the vast proportion of New Zealand's population was identified as Christian. Over 91 percent were nominally Anglican, Presbyterian, Catholic or Methodist.[6] A report on the religion of New Zealand soldiers in 1917 indicated that of 70,455 who had gone to the front at that stage, some 89 per cent were identified with the four major churches.[7] Religious voices were much more prominent in New Zealand newspapers one hundred years ago, in contrast to their virtual absence today. Walter Wink, an American Biblical scholar, has written that 'Until modern times, virtually all warfare was explicitly religious. Even in modern secular societies, wars of national interest are given a patina of religious justification.'[8]

That religious justification is seen in particular in church newspapers from the declaration of war in August 1914 to its conclusion. While often claiming to be opposed to war in theory, or regretting that it was necessary, churches wholeheartedly endorsed the conflict and encouraged men to volunteer. The Revd J.W. Shaw wrote in the Presbyterian *Outlook*, two weeks after war was declared: 'We believe that Britain is in this war on the side of justice and honour and truth; and we believe, humbly and reverently, that God will sustain the right.'[9] Henry Cleary, Catholic Bishop of Auckland, declared the war 'as more than merely a just war or a patriotic duty; it was a sacred cause'.[10] An editorial in the Auckland Anglican *Church Gazette* issued the following call: 'The memory of all brave men who have been martyrs for the sacred cause of liberty calls us. England, the mother of us all, calls us in her hour of need to maintain her honour which is ours. Above all, God calls us to fight His battle for liberty, justice, mercy, truth, and we will send the answer back to Heaven: By God's grace we will.'[11] The *New Zealand Methodist Times* acknowledged that 'the Empire is called upon just now to make a tremendous sacrifice in defence of its honour and existence, and New Zealand has not unworthily given of its best to meet the demand. May God defend the right!'[12]

Churches and Society and the use of "Supreme Sacrifice"

In Papers Past, which 'contains more than three million pages of digitised New Zealand newspapers and periodicals' taken from 120 publications covering the years 1839 to 1948, it is possible to search for particular words or phrases. Up until the declaration of war in August 1914 there were only 117 recorded uses of 'supreme sacrifice'.[13] A number of these references are to the death of Jesus Christ and the salvation and redemption which the Easter events encapsulate.[14] There are also examples where 'supreme sacrifice' is used of individual acts of heroism, such as a miner losing his life trying to save his mate from drowning in rising sludge;[15] or a school teacher dying while trying to save a drowning schoolboy.[16] In some instances, 'supreme sacrifice' is used to praise soldiers who were killed in the South African War.[17] A 1913 review of a book called *Lonecraft*, about scouting, which had its origins with Baden Powell who served in that war, exhorted boys: 'To make the supreme sacrifice of all—the sacrifice of life itself if the call of your country or Empire should demand it.'[18] That use of 'supreme sacrifice' anticipated its application during the war.

Between the declaration of war in August 1914, and the Armistice in November 1918, the term 'supreme sacrifice' was used 4,887 times in the newspapers on Papers Past. That number is somewhat inflated by the duplication of copy in different papers. Examining the use of 'supreme sacrifice' for six monthly periods during the war, the highest total was between the 1 July and the 31 December 1917, with 1,180 uses. This period coincided with the third battle of Ypres and Passenchendale when New Zealand faced the greatest catastrophe during a single day in the war; 45 officers and 800 men were killed and more than 2,700 wounded within the space of a few hours on the 12 October 1917.[19] During and after the war, 'supreme sacrifice' was used in pulpit and public rhetoric as New Zealand society honoured its war dead and tried to give meaning to their deaths. In the two years following the war the phrase, 'supreme sacrifice', continued to be widely used in newspapers, but declined as the war receded.[20]

For the churches sacrificial language was central to their theology and expressed in their liturgy and worship. The death of Jesus on the cross was understood as the central act of God in redeeming sinful humanity. The resurrection was seen as the vindication of Jesus' sacrifice and as opening up the promise of eternal life to those who lived as his faithful followers. Denominations placed their own theological meaning on the sacrifice of Jesus. Catholics, for example, through the mass participated in the dramatic sacramental renewal of Jesus' sacrifice. For Protestants, the sacrifice of Jesus was seen as a salvific act requiring individuals to accept Jesus as their personal Saviour and Lord. Sacrifice was inextricably caught up with suffering, with the cross a powerful symbol of Jesus' death. In the form of the crucifix, with Jesus' body attached to the cross, there was a continual reminder of the suffering Christ. The empty cross for Protestants symbolised both suffering past and the hope of future redemption.

Philip Jenkins, in *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade*, points to the way in which 'The language of suffering, sacrifice and redemption thoroughly penetrated popular discourse about the war, in the works of essayists or poets, in newspapers, and in political speeches.'[21] Jenkins argues further, that in the context of the First World War, 'Western publics were far more closely attuned to Christian usage, and the explicitly religious use of sacrificial terminology was standard: it was much more than a mere euphemism.'[22]

New Zealand Chaplains in the First World War

The role of New Zealand chaplains in the First World War has received only modest scholarly attention. Chaplains' work evolved historically around the core functions of leading prayers and conducting burials; they were intimately involved with death. During the war they were part of the burial parties, taking the identification tags, keeping a record of the location of graves, conducting funerals and writing to relatives.

A total of 141 chaplains served overseas in the New Zealand Army. They were nominated by their own denomination and appointed by the Defence Department on a proportionate basis according to census figures. Chaplains were allocated on the basis of one chaplain for every 1,000 soldiers. As non-combatants, chaplains were given officer status but not rank, initially as captains, with promotion by seniority. Chaplains accumulated numerous roles. They acted as social workers, giving counselling; they were recreation officers, organising sport, concerts and social functions; they acted as censors for soldiers' letters. Contrary to the frequent claim that they did not go into the front line, there is considerable evidence indicating that many chaplains went into the trenches, distributing cigarettes, newspapers and taking out letters. The universal name, 'padre', distinguished chaplains from their denominational status, and in the context of battle, denominational distinctions frequently disappeared. Sometimes chaplains ministered to soldiers *in extremis* irrespective of denominational identity. Despite examples of chaplains who did not fit in, the very best of the chaplains became beloved by the men they served. For Field Marshall, Sir Douglas Haig, Commander in Chief, the vital role of the chaplain was '"in boosting morale".' '"A good chaplain"' Haig said, '"is as valuable as a good general".'[23]

Chaplains and Death in War

A study of fifty-three published letters, written by fourteen of the eighteen Methodist chaplains who served overseas, indicates that the pastoral motive shaped their ministry. Embedded within the army disciplinary structure, chaplains did not engage in critique either of the war or the strategy of generals. The reality and horror of death in war, however, was something they dealt with as much as anyone in the army. On Gallipoli, John Luxford, a Methodist and the Senior Chaplain with the New Zealand Expeditionary Force, wrote in mid-May 1915 of having to 'to read or recite the burial service in the grave, kneeling with the dead bodies, because of the bullets flying around'.[24] He acknowledged though that as a chaplain, 'it is part of my duty to send all the encouraging news I can'.[25] His early letters from Gallipoli described the battlefield 'as an Inferno in one sense, and a comradeship in another'. Luxford, writing for the *New Zealand Methodist Times*, recognised that 'Doubtless New Zealand has wept tears of bitter sorrow because of the loss of her brave sons, but she must rejoice for their bravery, endurance and patriotism. She has helped to cement the Empire with her best blood!'[26] Blood sacrificed was justified by the cause of Empire. In June 1915 Luxford referred to 'the pilgrimages of pain' he had seen, writing that 'Many of the cases are indescribable, too sad to give details'.[27] Telling about a burial party at night, working then because of the dangers of snipers, he described the dead bodies as 'composed and determined' with 'No sign of pain but a smile that was heroic' while at the same time recognising 'the dull cold agony of bereavement' that 'relatives far away' would suffer.[28] Comfort, reassurance, idealisation, heroism are mixed with compassion; there is a question as to how far Luxford was describing the dead for the sake of the living.

In contrast to Luxford's public letters, his private daily diary recorded in graphic detail some of the horrors he saw. Describing his work at Gallipoli conducting services on the 24 May, during the armistice when both sides buried their dead in no-man's land, Luxford referred to how 'It was gruesome. The burial party had to cover their nostrils and smoke. Every few minutes we washed our hands with disinfectant.... I never saw decomposition so repulsive.... For the sake of friends I must never describe the scene.'[29] On 9 of August Luxford was at Chunuk Bair trying to minister to the wounded and dying. He wrote how 'About a dozen men fell within five yards of where I was.... One man was killed, another shot in the chest and is dying. One poor fellow shot in the spine.... It was heart rending to hear their cries.... the Battalions we sent out are practically annihilated. I must pray that God in his mercy may come to our aid.... The men are dead tired. I never saw men in such a state of collapse. It is pitiable.' Later that afternoon Luxford was shot in the leg, evacuated, and his leg was amputated. After being dangerously ill he recovered and went to England where he served out his war as chaplain at the large New Zealand hospital at Walton-on-Thames.[30]

The Methodist chaplains in their published letters make few references to soldiers' deaths in terms of sacrifice; they do not use the description 'supreme sacrifice', although there are two references, one to 'the great sacrifice'[31] and the other to the 'gallant sacrifice'.[32] The chaplains often talked of death both in collective and individual ways. A.A. Bensley, a Methodist minister in the ranks, later a chaplain at Trentham, evocatively described Passchendaele as 'the land of desolation; it is the dark valley; it is the slough of despond; it is the habitation of death, the clammy haunt of shadows and shapes.'[33] Leslie Neale, another Methodist chaplain, who was badly wounded at Passchendaele, named fourteen Methodist soldiers who were killed recently. He writes poignantly, 'How lamentably our church has suffered in recent ghastly engagements! My own heart is exceeding sad. A great many of us who have been "out there" have an altered perspective, in looking at death, from that of people at home.... To see how brave, good men one moment face issues squarely and contentedly, and then next moment are freed from the strain and weariness and all the hampering circumstances of humanity—makes one think, and think, and think.'[34] Neale does not go on to reveal his inner thoughts. As Kathryn Hunter has observed, 'the battlefields of France systematically destroyed any residual ideas of the "good Christian death".'[35]

Coming from churches which deified duty, and justified war as according to the will of God, chaplains faced the overwhelming horror of death and injury. Not surprisingly they failed to articulate a satisfactory theological response. One New Zealand soldier wrote in his diary after the death of his best friend: '"Why all these prayers, both sides pray hard and it must be big joke to somebody [*sic*]".'[36] Chaplains were much more comfortable with their practical, pastoral and liturgical ministry rather than trying to make sense of death in war. An Anglican soldier reflected, how '"The fearful waste of life, the suffering that the wounded have to undergo—all these things seen face to face would make one's life a torture, a misery, if you thought about them".'[37] In the face of death, many soldiers seemed to have accepted a simple fatalism; if a bullet had their name on it, that would be their fate.

For the chaplains there were major differences between the ministry they offered behind the front and on the battlefield. The compulsory formal Brigade worship, the voluntary evening and communion services, contrasted with the snatched prayers in the trenches, services in ruined buildings with artillery bombardments going on and the burial services conducted under fire. The Catholic chaplain, James Macmenamin was killed by an artillery shell at Messines in 1917, conducting a funeral.

Richard Schweizer, in *The Cross and the Trenches* has argued that Catholicism's acceptance of mystery, and the inexplicable, equipped them better than other denominations to cope with wartime. The 'emphasis on the Sacraments of Extreme Unction and Penance, the Act of Confession, and the concept of absolution' provided Catholics with 'ritualistic vehicles for both assuaging the guilt of soldiers' over killing others in combat, 'and preparing mortally wounded soldiers for their own deaths'.[38] Gordon Harper, a Catholic soldier from Christchurch, writing to his mother from Gallipoli, described attending Mass, with 'a distinct spirit of its own pervading it throughout, as it always does when everyone is on the edge of things'. He reassured her, that 'It is even arranged that we can receive Absolution as we pass the priest as we are going forward to attack', reporting that the chaplain, Father Patrick Dore, told him, 'that few Catholics have yet died without being anointed first'.[39]

The chaplains' ministry also extended beyond the dead and wounded soldiers to their families. Through the letters they wrote to grieving relatives they sought to bring them comfort and reassurance. Five such letters written by William Grant, a Presbyterian chaplain, killed at Gallipoli while seeking to minister to allied and Turkish wounded soldiers were published posthumously.[40] The letters were typical of those written by chaplains with a formulaic pattern:

- the praise of the man who was killed – 'Your gallant son' (pp. 62, 63, 65), or 'your dear son "played the man" and nobly did his duty' (p.65);
- a sanitised description of the soldier's death – 'He lay where he had fallen, partially on his side, with his face to the foe like a good soldier' (p.63);
- affirmation of the cause for which the soldier died – 'You may well be proud in your grief, that your boy found death fighting in defence of the Empire, and in a sense, the liberties of humanity. He has paid the full price of the patriot, but we feel sure that his sacrifice, and that of others of his comrades will not be in vain' (p.63);
- the offering of solace and consolation – 'He sleeps peacefully yonder at the back of our trenches amid all the din of war. From the spot you get a view of entrancing beauty' (p.64);
- the offering of a scriptural text, a benediction or blessing – 'May He "who healeth the broken in heart and bindeth up their wounds" comfort everyone who mourns' (p.62).

We see in Grant's approach the pastoral concern that shaped the chaplains' attitudes towards death. Ronald Watson, a Presbyterian chaplain, wrote in June 1917, after two months in France: 'So far as my small experience goes – war is HELL.'[41] Eleven months later Watson presented a more nuanced view, when he wrote about 'a lonely grave with its white cross' as 'a reminder of the present tragedy. I am afraid one becomes almost a trifle callous over here.... Once a chap was greatly upset, when death forced itself on him.... Faced so often by death, one comes to think more lightly of it.' Watson turned to his understanding of the 'Christian hope' of life beyond death as a form of consolation.[42] Writing about Methodism in England and the challenge chaplains of all denominations faced in making sense of death, Michael Hughes says that chaplains 'were reluctant, even on their return home, to provide neat theological reflections on their time in the field. The dissonance between what they had experienced, and the faith they proclaimed, seemed so vast that there was, at least for some, something almost hopeless about trying to reduce it to neat formulae.'[43]

The Churches in New Zealand and Death in the First World War

For the churches and their ministers in New Zealand, providing consolation and comfort to the thousands who had a relative killed or injured in war provided an unprecedented challenge. Normal funereal rituals were not possible. There was no body or grave around which a family could gather and grieve. From the start of the conflict, churches with their rhetoric about war as a good cause, even God's cause, were now faced with making sense for themselves and for society of the results of carnage. Pat Jalland, writing on changing ways of death in Australia, argued that 'The First World War was a turning point in the cultural history of death and bereavement in Australia, as it was in Britain.'[44] The same seems to have been the case in New Zealand, although little research has been done in this area. The whole society was, to borrow a phrase from Joy Damousi writing about Europe, 'plunged into a[n extended] period of bereavement'.[45]

The churches contributed significantly to the construction of meaning around death in the First World War. When soldiers and their chaplains returned to New Zealand they found that society's remembrance of the war dead was already in place. The overwhelming silence of returned soldiers about the war, can in part be explained by the dissonance between their experience of its horrors and reality, and the war mythology already created in New Zealand and reinforced by the use of sanitised and sacralised concepts, such as 'supreme sacrifice'. For soldiers to share their experience of the war, in all its diversity, including: – drunkenness, prostitution, boredom, heroism, cowardice, terrible injuries and slaughter – was to question, and potentially unravel the meaning society had already invested into making sense of war and death.

I want now to examine three aspects of the part churches played in helping both individuals and the community deal with private and public grief: the use of the concept of supreme sacrifice; the promise of salvation to those killed in war, and prayers for the dead.

1. The Church and Supreme Sacrifice

A.W. Averill, Anglican Bishop of Auckland, was among the leading churchmen in New Zealand who articulated the concept of sacrifice in response to death in the war. Preaching at a Mothers' Union service in December 1915, Averill pointed to the Cross as 'the supreme expression of love and sacrifice'. He then spoke of how a mother's sacrifice 'for the highest welfare of her children is the most beautiful and God-like thing in the world'. 'Joy' and 'honour' were the mother's reward for helping 'her boy to live a noble life, and—if need be—to die a noble death!..."like English gentlemen".'[46] As Damousi points out, it was 'women who assumed the burden of mourning in many communities', with a belief that they had a 'special part to play in mourning their dead sons'.[47] Averill developed further the concept of the soldiers' and parental sacrifice, in a Synod service held in the Town Hall in November 1916, held in memory of those who had 'fallen' in the war: 'if the boys had shown something of the sacrifice of Christ,' Averill said, 'the parents had also in part entered into the sacrifice of the Father who gave His son to die for us.'[48]

Preaching at the first commemoration of the Anzac landing at Gallipoli, Monsignor Gillan at St Patrick's Cathedral in Auckland, spoke about 'the great sacrifice' made by New Zealand lads, who 'did their duty with unswerving loyalty and devotion, with a sure faith in God that

led them to face death unflinchingly'. He linked the soldiers' deaths with the message of Easter, 'death being swallowed up in victory', promising that 'night would surely give way to the dawn of the Resurrection'.[49] Pulpit rhetoric like this was often enmeshed in the greater pastoral concern of comforting the bereaved with little thought as to its wider theological implications. The death in Auckland of the chaplain Patrick Dore from an injury sustained at Gallipoli, was celebrated in the diocesan newspaper, by comparing his death and suffering with Jesus' death on the Cross: 'Father Dore hung resignedly and long upon the cross of suffering to which he was nailed by flying Turkish iron on Gallipoli.... Death came to him--not Death the Destroyer, but Death the Deliverer, Death the Key-bearer of the Kingdom of Life and Light and Joy.'[50]

In the *New Zealand Methodist Times* and the *New Zealand Baptist*, 'supreme sacrifice' was used frequently in the obituaries for soldiers killed in the war. Like chaplains' letters to grieving relatives, these obituaries followed a formulaic pattern, often ending with euphemistic references to death and quoting uplifting or consoling verses of scripture, hymns or poetry. Sergeant Leonard Hirst, killed at Messines in June 1917, is described as having 'paid the supreme sacrifice on the altar of Imperial service'.[51] Lieutenant Aldwyn Gordon, a Methodist minister serving in the ranks, died of wounds in August 1918, and was remembered for giving 'his life in the supreme sacrifice for a righteous cause'.[52] Horace Kendon, killed at Messines, reminded his obituary writer in the *New Zealand Baptist* of Calvary and 'of a great deed that was done on the slope of a hill where the Supreme sacrifice was paid for the redemption of the world, and I think that the One who suffered there sees to-day this little band of Christian heroes not as we see, the graves upon the hillside in Belgium, but as radiant with life in that city whose light our Lord is'.[53]

Some Methodists and Baptists in particular grew increasingly uncomfortable with the way in which language around sacrifice was increasingly stretched beyond what they traditionally conceived was Jesus' Supreme Sacrifice. W.J. Williams, editor of the *New Zealand Methodist Times*, who had four sons volunteer, one of whom was killed, was exercised in September 1915 by the way in which the text from John 15.13, 'Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends', was 'An Overworked Text'. While he recognised the 'supreme sacrifice' that some were making, he pointed out that the words of Jesus were a call to discipleship as shown by the following verse: 'Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you'. Williams was concerned that for Muslims, death in battle 'wiped out all past offences'. He did not want to assimilate that belief with Christianity. At the same time, Williams struggled to hold together the 'nobility' of soldiers' 'sacrifice' with the essence of his evangelical faith.[54] Fifteen months later in December 1916, Williams referred to the 'hundreds of thousands of cases' where 'the supreme sacrifice has been consummated'. He now used the text, 'Greater love hath no man than this' as Jesus' 'benediction on such a sacrifice', claiming that millions of men were 'discovering the truth of what Christ taught by example and precept, that the best use that can be made of life for the benefit of others is to give it away'.[55] Williams it seems had given in to bringing comfort to the living by identifying soldiers' death with the sacrifice of Jesus.

2. The promise of salvation to those killed in war

For Anglicans and Catholics, the promise of salvation to those killed in war, irrespective of their beliefs or how they lived, was widely accepted. Death in war was seen by some as a form of martyrdom and heaven as a reward for suffering. An extreme example appeared in the Christchurch Anglican newspaper in July 1915, where in response to what the editor

called ‘the harvest of death’, he extolled the call of duty, country and comradeship as a call from God. Taking Jesus’ words, that ‘he who would save his own life shall lose it’, the writer described the soldiers’ deaths as ‘no waste of life’. Having passed God’s ‘great test’ the dead soldiers ‘were now proved worthy to enter on new duties’. Sombre mourning was not called for, but those grieving were to ‘think of our brave soldiers marching on, in advance of us, mustering in the greater world that comes next to this. What greeting of comrades there!... They are not sadly looking back, unless it may be that we make them sad.’[56] The writer’s imagination led to flights of rhetorical fancy that far exceeded traditional Christian teaching. Bishop Averill, speaking of those killed in war, told his Synod service in 1916, that they ‘had given their levies for the noblest of all causes’ and ‘received their birthday into the Eternal life promised by God’.[57] Pastoral concern it seems often trumped theological rigidity.

The promise of heaven to soldiers killed in war was, however, rejected by the editor of the Salvation Army’s *War Cry* in 1915. ‘Christ died for us’, he asserted, ‘but in a very different sense to what a soldier can die for his country, and yet some would inform our men that they are as Christ was. This is daubing with untempered mortar, and creating false hopes.’[58] Joseph Kemp, the feisty minister of the Auckland Baptist Tabernacle, in 1920 dismissed without reservation, what he called, ‘the new creed ... of the battlefield’ of the ‘“self-redeemed”’. ‘Unless the everlasting barriers between right and wrong are to be disregarded, no sinful man’, he declared, ‘can be treated as righteous other than by being sheltered “neath the cleansing Blood of the Lamb of God”.’[59] Churches were in conflict over their understanding of sacrifice and the reward of life after death for soldiers killed in war.

3. Prayers for the dead

The Auckland Catholic paper in October 1918 stated that, ‘To the souls of many sorrowful outside our fold, the war is ... gradually bringing home more of the inner significance of the familiar, immemorial Catholic doctrine of the Communion of the Saints.’ For Catholics, the writer declared, ‘death is not a break in our existence.... Earth and heaven are very near’ and it was possible to clasp hands with ‘all our kith and kin of Christ’s mystical body-beyond the filmy shadow we call Death.’[60] The *New Zealand Tablet* encouraged Catholics to ‘Pray ... for the souls of your slain’ as ‘prayers may help our dead’.[61]

Alan Wilkinson noted that in England, ‘In 1914 public prayer for the dead was uncommon in the Church of England; by the end of the war it had become widespread.’[62] In 1917 a church bookseller in Auckland was advertising in the Anglican monthly, Alfred Plummer’s book, *Consolation in Bereavement through prayers for the departed* and R.E. Hutton’s, *The Life Beyond: Thoughts on the Intermediate State*.[63] In the order of service of thanksgiving for the restoration of peace used in the Anglican Diocese of Waiapu, the prayer for the Church Militant commended ‘the souls of our dear brothers fallen in the war’ into God’s hands, praying that they would be washed ‘in the blood of that immaculate Lamb’, that ‘whatsoever defilements they may have contracted, through the lusts of the flesh or the wiles of Satan’ would be purged away so they could be ‘presented pure and without spot before thee, through the merits of Jesus Christ’.[64] Prayers for the dead identified the sacrifice of soldiers with the sacrifice of Jesus and offered hope of forgiveness, and eternal salvation, irrespective of the soldiers’ beliefs or way of life.

For strict Evangelical Protestants, prayers for the dead and any hint of an intermediate state were anathema. J.J. North, editor of the *New Zealand Baptist*, noted for his anti-Catholic rhetoric, denounced prayers for the dead ‘as Popish and utterly Christless’. In his view, they

diminished the need for repentance and allowed for an 'easy religion' without consequences. The dead, for North, were 'beyond the reach of our efforts, beyond the succour of our prayers'.[65]

Evangelicals, however, were challenged by the war in ways which contributed after the conflict to the increasing polarisation between emerging fundamentalism on the one hand, and a more liberal to approach Christianity on the other. A Methodist meeting in France of two chaplains and seven ministers serving in the ranks anticipated that changing attitude. They declared their 'loyalty to evangelical doctrine', but also acknowledged 'a broadening of view and growth in charity'.[66]

Something of the battle between old school revivalist Methodists, concerned about individual conversion on the one hand, and renewing liberal voices, concerned about the social relevance of Methodism on the other, began to be heard in the columns of the *New Zealand Methodist* in 1919 under the heading, 'The Church and the Returned Soldier'. W.E. Leadley, a layman who served at Gallipoli, articulated a liberal voice, wanting the post-war Methodist message to help returned soldiers see 'Christ not as an awful Judge, who consigns the wicked to everlasting fire and the righteous to a special little heaven of their own, but as their Comrade and their Friend'.[67]

One of Leadley's critical respondents, F.H. Christian, denounced Leadley for failing to preach 'the gospel of Jesus Christ' with 'Not one word about the necessary acceptance of the sacrifice made for us on Calvary.'[68] Leadley came back and accused Christian of living 'in his narrow theological dugout for the past four and half years', remaining 'untouched, or unmoved by the Great War.' For Leadley, 'the splendid sacrifices' of the war had been seen by God who 'would reunite in love once more those whom He had separated for a little while' in death.[69] Christian and other correspondents came back and attacked Leadley for scrapping eternal punishment, redemption and Scripture Doctrines. In the letter closing the correspondence, Leadley referred to those who held onto the old doctrines resulting in 'fear of death and punishment hereafter'. These people for Leadley failed 'utterly to realise that the war has taken away' for soldiers 'all fear of death'. For him, 'no sacrifice in God's universe is ever made in vain'. A doctrine that told a 'brokenhearted mother' that she would never see her boy again 'because he did not believe a particular creed, or was not a member of any particular Church' needed to be scrapped.[70]

Philip Jenkins, reflecting on sacrifice in war as a salvific act, concluded that for the public, 'Military valor trumped all other virtues, including faith, and conveyed something like heroic sanctity. Church leaders demurred but were in a difficult position because they did not want to appear to be minimizing military heroism.'[71] For some, the substitutionary theory of the atonement, Jesus death on the cross for the sins of humanity, was called into question, while for others it was to be defended at all cost. Sacrificial language was co-opted and secularised by the public to validate death in war; it was stretched by some Christians into a form of creeping universalism, salvation in this case by dying in the cause of Empire; for other traditionalist Christians there was only one supreme sacrifice, that of Jesus on the cross.

Conclusion

The First World War brought huge challenges to New Zealand churches and society as they attempted to make sense of death, injury and pain on such a vast scale. A nagging issue

which war rhetoric and the use of sacrificial language in particular raises, is how far does rhetoric and remembrance not only honour the dead, but also sanitise and justify war, enabling war to be prosecuted without being questioned.

The processes of remembrance and the reconstruction of death and war are never-ending as the centennial commemorations indicate. Going back to chaplains and churches and critically examining their use of the concept of sacrifice one hundred years ago, is part of a process of demythologising death, and seeing how the foundational memory was constructed so that it can be deconstructed. I have argued that the chaplains and the churches allowed both their identification with the war, as blessed by God, and their pastoral concerns for grieving families, to shape their rhetoric and theology.

What was largely missing in the churches during the First World War was the prophetic voice. The prophetic voice tells the emperor he has no clothes, challenges governments to follow alternative pathways of peace and justice, confronts the vast armaments industry which sustains and encourages war, challenges ideologies such as militarism for supporting regimes based on weapons and fear. It is perhaps a supreme irony that during the First World War, men like Archibald Baxter and Mark Briggs, who had no strong church connection and who were absolutists in opposing war, were given field punishment number one, referred to as 'crucifixion' in an attempt to make them fight. The symbol of supreme sacrifice was used to punish advocates for the way of peace, leaving the question: "Whose way was closest to the way of Jesus?"

Ormond Burton, soldier in the First World War and then New Zealand's leading pacifist during the Second World War, wrote in 1935: "The condemnation of war lies not in the sacrifice of life, but in the fact that the sacrifice is wasted as far as the attaining of any good is concerned.... to be availing sacrifice must be directed into profitable channels.... The primary aim of a combatant is not to offer himself as a sacrifice but to destroy his opponent with the minimum of loss to himself."[72]

Sacrificial language was exploited by the church and the public to make sense of slaughter and carnage. Ambiguous and euphemistic usage of language clouded the reality of death – "the glorious dead" – "their name liveth forever more". That was also true of the use of symbols in memorialising the dead. Sir Edward Lutyen's 'Great Stone', the centre piece for cemeteries created by the Imperial War Graves Commission, served for some as '"an altar"' representing '"one idea of the ... sacrifice"' which '"The Empire made of its youth, in the great cause for which it sent them forth".' But for Sir Frederick Kenyon, biblical and classical scholar, Lutyen's Stone did not '"represent the idea of self-sacrifice"', arguing that '"For this the one essential symbol is the cross".'[73] The result was the design of what came to be called the 'Cross of Sacrifice'. This was placed together with Lutyen's Great Stone in European war cemeteries. Ironically, the Cross of Sacrifice had a bronze long sword fastened on its front, carrying the ambiguity of Jesus' death, along with a weapon of war.[74] Syncretism, the merging of mixed religious, theological and cultural symbols or ideas, was inextricably caught up in the process of memorialising war and making sense of death.

Connections and Contrasts: One Hundred Years After

One hundred years on from the First World War, what impact does the church's role in helping construct meaning around death still have?

1. Sacrifice is still a powerful concept, and 'supreme sacrifice' is still used to describe the deaths of those killed in combat. I would suggest though that the concept has lost a great deal of the direct Christian meaning which shaped its origin, development and the way that it was originally used. The church during and after the war contributed to the secularisation of its own language and theology around sacrifice.

2. The use of euphemisms around death and war in part generated during the First World War and blessed by the church, have taken on a life of their own. The reality of war continues to be sanitised by euphemisms, what one critic has described as 'novocaine for the conscience'.[75] For a recent example, think of the use of "collateral damage" to justify the bombing of the hospital run by Doctors without Borders in Kunduz. Deconstructing euphemisms used about war is an essential way of seeing the emperor with no clothes.

3. The claiming of God's blessing for the sacrifices of the First World War raises the powerful question of theodicy – how did a good God allow such horrible suffering? If God was on the allied side and brought victory, why the hell did he take so long and demand so many sacrifices?

4. The memorialisation and the mythologies around the First World War remain powerful. They still bear residual Christian symbols and rhetoric which have lost a great deal of contact with their origin. For example, the hymns sung at Anzac Day services are vestigial echoes of a past which no longer have the same resonances which impacted on previous generations. But the continuing re-creation of memories around war, and death in war, for political, nationalistic and personal reasons, sometimes as an expression of individuals desire to encounter their forebears, points to the powerful impact that death in the First World War continues to have on New Zealand society.

5. For the churches, the First World War highlights the continuing tensions between, on the one hand, being captured by the needs of providing pastoral care to people and acting as chaplain to the nation, and on the other the difficulty in exercising a genuinely prophetic ministry that challenges the accepted conventions and aims at bringing about redemption in society.

At a German war cemetery near the airfield at Maleme on Crete, where New Zealand soldiers fought in the Second World War, there is a plaque with the words of the Nobel peace laureate, Albert Schweitzer; 'The soldiers' graves are the greatest preachers of peace'; and the words: 'The dead of this cemetery admonish to peace'. There has been so much death and suffering, slaughter and sacrifice produced by war; the continuing, never ending challenge is how do we learn the ways of peace?

[1] Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.28.

[2] Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, New York: Sterling [1975], p.218.

[3] Jay Winter, 'The Great War Today', http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/historian/hist_winter_23_today.html

[4] Jay Winter, 'Slaughter', http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/chapters/ch2_overview.html

[5] Pierre Berton, *Vimy*, Toronto: Anchor Canada, 1986, cited in Adrian Gregory, *The Silence of Memory: Armistice Day 1919-1946*, Oxford / Providence: Berg, 1994, p.8.

[6] Only 4,184 or 0.38 percent self-identified as having no religion, while a further 2.3% objected to state their religion. A.K. Davidson and P.J. Lineham, *Transplanted Christianity: Documents Illustrating New Zealand Church History*, Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, 1989, p.246.

[7] Only 30 soldiers were Freethinkers, 47 were Agnostics, 19 were Atheists, 10 were Rationalists; 6.4 percent had not stated their religion. *Church Gazette*, 1 October 1917, p.193.

[8] Walter Wink, 'The Myth of Redemptive Violence', in *The Destructive Power of Religion: Violence in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam*, Volume 3, Models and Cases of Violence in Religion, J. Harold Ellens, ed., Westport, Connecticut / London, Praeger, 2004, p.265.

[9] *Outlook*, 18 August 1914, p.3.

[10] *New Zealand Tablet*, 20 August 1914, cited in Hugh Laracy, 'Priests, People and Patriotism: New Zealand Catholics and War, 1914-1918', *Australasian Catholic Record*, Vol. 70, No.1 (1993), pp.17, 16-18. The editor Tthe Catholic publication, the *New Zealand Tablet*, noted in August 1914, the 'unanimity of feeling and sentiment throughout every portion of the Empire in regard to the Mother Country's action and attitude'.

[11] *Church Gazette*, 1 October 1914, p.183.

[12] *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 3 October 1914, p.8. In the view of H.H. Driver, the editor of the *New Zealand Baptist* in September 1914, 'Never before has Britain waged war with purer motives and nobler aims. She may safely make her appeal to the righteous Lord ... to vindicate her and her Allies in this tremendous conflict.' *New Zealand Baptist*, September 1914, p.172.

[13] Papers Past, 'supreme sacrifice', http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=q&hs=1&r=1&results=1&t=2&txq=supreme+sacrifice&pbq=&dafdq=&dafmq=&dafyq=&datdq=05&datmq=08&datyq=1914&tyq=&o=10&sf=&ssnip=&x=43&y=12&e=-------10--1----2supreme+sacrifice--, accessed 6 October 2015.

[14] 'GOOD FRIDAY AND EASTER', *New Zealand Herald*, Volume XL, Issue 12242, 11 April 1903, p.1; 'THE CHURCHES", Dominion, Volume 1, Issue 289, 31 August 1908, p.8; 'PETONE UNITED MISSION', *Dominion*, Volume 3, Issue 878, 26 July 1910, p.4.

[15] 'THE SUPREME SACRIFICE', *Evening Star*, Issue 14548, 24 April 1911, p. 2.

[16] 'THE SUPREME SACRIFICE', *Southland Times*, Issue 17688, 27 June 1914, p.6.

[17] 'FROM WAR TO PEACE', *Northern Advocate* 6 February 1911, p.3.

[18] 'THE TEACHING OF THE BOOK', *Ashburton Guardian*, Volume XXXIII, Issue 8701, 29 October 1913, p.6.

[19] 'NZ's 'blackest day' at Passchendaele', URL: http://www.nzhistory.net.nz/845-nz-soldiers-die-in-botched-attack-at-bellevue-spur-passchendaele-on-western-front, (Ministry for Culture and Heritage), updated 17-Sep-2015, accessed 6 October 2015.

[20] The uses of 'supreme sacrifice' in New Zealand newspapers recorded on Papers Past, accessed 6 October 2015.

Uses of 'Supreme Sacrifice'	**Year**
117	up to 1914
75	1914
352	1915
891	1916
1907	1917

1911	1918
1519	1919
765	1920
189	1921
151	1922
130	1923

[21] Philip Jenkin, *The Great and Holy War: How World War I Became a Religious Crusade*, New York: Harper One, 2014, p.100.
[22] ibid., p.101.
[23] Gary Mead, *The Good Soldier: The Biography of Douglas Haig*, London: Atlantic Books, 2007, p.236.
[24] *New Zealand Methodist Times* (NZMT), 24 July 1915, p.10.
[25] NZMT, 7 August 1915, p.10.
[26] NZMT, 24 July 1915, p.10.
[27] NZMT, 7 August 1915, p.10.
[28] NZMT, 4 September 1915, p.10.
[29] John A. Luxford, World War I Diaries, 24 May 1915. I am grateful to Bob Luxford for supplying me with a digital copy of his grandfather's diary.
[30] ibid., 9 August 1915.
[31] NZMT, 4 August 1917, p.5.
[32] NZMT, 29 March 1919, p.7.
[33] NZMT, 19 January 1918, p.4.
[34] NZMT, 13 April 1918, p.4.
[35] Kathryn Hunter, '"Sleep on dear Ernie, your battles are o'er': A Glimpse of a Mourning Community, Invercargill, New Zealand, 1914-1925', *War History*, 14.1, (2007), 42.
[36] Hunter, p.49.
[37] Richard Schweitzer, *The Cross and the Trenches: Religious Faith and Doubt among British and American Great War Soldiers*, Westport, Connecticut / London: Praeger, 2003, p.174.
[38] ibid.
[39] Jock Phillips, ed. *Brothers in Arms: Gordon & Robin Harper in the Great War*, [Wellington]: NZHistoryJock, 2015, p.80.
[40] William Grant, *In Memoriam: Chaplain-Major William Grant*, Gisborne: Herald Office, 1915, reprinted Gisborne: Te Rau Print, 2015.
[41] Nigel M. Watson, ed., *Letters from a Padre: A Record of the War Service of Ronsald S. Watson M.C.*, private publication
[42] ibid., p.28
[43] Michael Hughes, "Methodism and the Challenges of the First World War', *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society*, 60.1, February 2015, p.10.
[44] Pat Jalland, 'Death and bereavement in the First World War: the Australian experience', *Endeavour*, 38.2, 2014, p.70. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.endeavour.2014.05.005
[45] Jay Damousi, 'Bereavement Practices', in Jay Winter, ed. *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume II Civil Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p.361.
[46] *Church Gazette*, 1 January 1916, pp.12-13.
[47] Damousi, p.360.
[48] *Church Gazette*, 1 November 1916.
[49] *New Zealand Herald*, 26 April 1916.
[50] *The Month*, 15 August 1918, p.3.

[51] NZMT, 15 September 1917, p.14.
[52] NZMT, 28 September 1918, p.3.
[53] NZB, November 1917, p.166.
[54] NZMT, 18 September 1915, p.8.
[55] NZMT, 23 December 1916, p.8
[56] *Church News*, 1 July 1915, p.2.
[57] *Church Gazette*, 1 November 1916.
[58] *War Cry*, 19 June 1915, p.4.
[59] *New Zealand Baptist*, October 1920, p.147.
[60] *The Month*, 15 August 1918, p.5.
[61] *New Zealand Tablet*, 2 May 1918, p.19.
[62] Alan Wilkinson, *The Church of England and the First World War*, London: SPCK, 1978, p.176.
[63] *Church Gazette*, 1 August 1917, p.146.
[64] Diocese of Waiapu, *Form of Service of Thanksgiving for the Restoration of Peace*, AG 349-10-10, Hocken Library, Dunedin.
[65] *New Zealand Baptist*, March 1916, pp. 50, 52.
[66] *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 18 August 1917. p.4.
[67] *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 18 January 1919.
[68] *New Zealand Methodist Times*, 1 February 1919, p.5.
[69] *NZMT*, 1 March 1919, p.14.
[70] *NZMT,* 12 April 1919, p.13.
[71] Jenkin, *The Great and Holy War*, p.106.
[72] Ormond Burton, *The Silent Division. New Zealanders at the Front: 1914-1919*, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1935, p.323.
[73] David Crane, *Empires of the Dead: How One Man's Vision led to the Creation of WWI's War Graves*, London: William Collins, 2013, pp.127-28.
[74] 'Cross of Sacrifice', https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cross_of_Sacrifice accessed 9 October 2015.
[75] http://vizettes.com/kt/american_empire/pages/euphemisms-glossary.htm