



Anzac Day Origins

Canon DJ Garland and Trans-Tasman Commemoration

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There is an idea abroad that European Australia, being founded in 1788, is a post-Enlightenment society, and therefore thoroughly secular. Of course the state, being a democracy, is necessarily secular, but the society, from its beginnings, is not. A further extension of this attitude is the commonly-repeated assertion of journalists that some cleric's or other's public pronouncement is an assault on the separation of church and state. It is true that we have no established church or religion, and a no-establishment clause in our constitution. Strong judicial opinion, however, affirms that Australasians do not have a legal doctrine of 'the separation of church and state' and each assertion of this alleged principle is a reflex borrowing from a much trumpeted American doctrine. What is rarely explained nowadays is that the American doctrine was in fact devised by Christians (initially Baptists) in defence of religion. The separation was not to keep religion out of politics, but to safeguard religious worship from both the state and any established church. It is not too surprising, under the barrage of assertion from newly-proselytising fundamentalist atheists, that this doctrine should be stood on its head.

In any case, the claim that Australia was settled as a secular society is evidently false. There was strong missionary input into its settlement, the opening of the continent (for whites) took place through explorers who acknowledged being under biblical instruction to seek 'promised lands' (albeit mistakenly groping under false ideas of a terra nullius), the Commonwealth was

established under the blessing of 'Almighty God' (an acknowledgement in the Preamble of the Constitution required by many religious people before ratification) and much of the legislation tending towards equality and social welfare was inspired by religious teaching. Many of our institutions are inherited from religious instruction.

The tendency to secularise the commemoration of the war dead through Anzac Day is, as John Moses and George Davis demonstrate, a distortion of its original purpose and a deviation from its history. The architect of commemoration, Canon David Garland, was an Anglican priest who made an enduring mark on public life by insisting on a regular and appropriate ceremony. His contribution to what has become a state institution was welcome participation in public life from an outspoken and energetic cleric. Fortunately, the first author of the present volume is also an outspoken and vitally well-informed cleric, the Reverend Professor John Moses, an Australian who has studied in Germany for many years where among other things he specialised in the historiography of the First World War. Here he sets the record straight about Australia's participation in the First World War. When it is suggested by others that Anzac is a jingoistic, masculinist and bombastic celebration of an unnecessary engagement in defence, there is more of a hint of the protests against other wars, such as Vietnam and Iraq, that Australia may not have been wise to prosecute. Those critical of Australia's participation in the Great War say that it was remote from our shores and that the Germans may not have been interested in our country. We recall the ironic line in the film 'Gallipoli' where a character surveys the vast emptiness of a tract of Western Australia and says 'they are welcome to it'.

John Moses places German war aims in a broad context: competition for imperial territory with France, Belgium and Britain; a philosophy that warlike struggle is the mark of the true human; an open contempt for liberalism and democracy; a myth that national greatness is proved by unlimited expansion. The Kaiser was the head of a state historically organised for military expansion as the perceived will of God. By 1914 that state had developed global ambitions. The furor teutonicus required a globalised response. In any case, Germany's occupation of New Guinea and Samoa were not too distant from our shores.

This is a timely study launched amid much argument about the tenor of Australia's political and military history. Moses and Davis tell the tale of a fruitful cooperation between church and state in the honouring of those who gave their lives, and the public yet spiritual act of repentance for the very condition of war. It deserves to be read and reflected upon, and I am honoured to be able to commend it. [Graham Maddox](#)