

Anna Brennan
1879-1962
Feminism and Catholicism in Context

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Statement of Authorship and Sources

This thesis contains no material that has been extracted in whole or in part from a thesis that I have submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

Signed:

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Abbreviations

CWC	Catholic Women's Club
CWSG	Catholic Women's Social Guild
CWSS	Catholic Women's Suffrage Society
NCWA	National Council of Women of Australia
NCWV	National Council of Women of Victoria

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Abstract

The historical analysis of any individual life is augmented by an incorporation of the complexity of identity formation and representation. Using an intersectional framework and with reference to various insights from some of the recent scholarship on historical biographies, this thesis focuses on the life of one Australian woman, Anna Brennan (1879-1962). Brennan was a pioneering lawyer in Victoria and an ardent advocate for the rights of women. The central issue that is examined in this thesis is how Brennan's personal commitment to Catholicism propelled her advocacy in this domain. A significant feature of Brennan's life was her active involvement and leadership in many clubs and organisations for women, within and beyond the Catholic community. Besides her extensive engagement in legal and social welfare issues, Brennan was also known for her literary ability and her promotion of the arts. It is suggested in this thesis, that the close examination of the influence of Catholicism in Brennan's life supports an argument for investigating the significance of religion from an intersectional standpoint. This study of Brennan's life will assist in highlighting the leadership of lay women in the Catholic Church in Australia, providing a role model who successfully navigated the gendered historical context of twentieth century Australian society and culture.

Introduction

Individuals may meander, stumble or leap across the stage of life but what a person's story signifies often depends on how they are represented, interpreted and analysed.¹ Using an intersectional framework, this thesis examines the life of one Australian woman, Anna Teresa Brennan: 1879-1962. Brennan, who practised as a lawyer for just over fifty years, was a Catholic woman committed to the rights of all women. Catholicism was not just one strand of her identity but as this thesis will demonstrate it was her “still point of the turning world” which galvanised her engagement in social issues especially with regard to women's rights.² It will be argued that she embraced her religion in such a holistic way that intellectually and spiritually she was able to harmonise and integrate her personal zeal and the collective energy of the post suffrage women's movement within her religious worldview. Likewise, she actively assimilated her avid interest and engagement in the world of literature and the arts within her Catholic paradigm.

Brennan had a clearly identified and highly articulated sense of the specific contribution that Catholic lay women could make to addressing social welfare issues. She was propelled by her conviction that women's rights were bound to their dignity which emanated from being made in the image and likeness of God.³ This core belief gave expression to her sense of a personal call to reform society so that all people would be treated as was befitting of their human dignity. Brennan was a woman of her times but she is also a woman for these times.

The central issue that this thesis sets out to examine is the integration of Brennan's life as a Catholic lay woman and her involvement in social concerns, especially those that affected women. It will be suggested that there was such a high degree of consonance between Brennan's religious worldview and her commitment to active citizenship that it is more apt to speak of unification rather than integration. Through her leadership Brennan demonstrated how Catholic women could exercise their citizenship without evoking a dualism between the needs of the world and the role of the Church. This sense

¹ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. George Hunter (UK: Penguin Books, 1967; Penguin Classics, 2015), 5.5.24-29, 85.

² This reference to the “still point” is from T. S. Eliot, “Burnt Norton” *The Complete Poems and Plays of T.S. Eliot* (London: Faber and Faber, 2004), II, 173.

³ “Miss Anna Brennan Says: The Feminist Demands Not Only Rights, But Responsibilities,” *Tribune*, August 11, 1955, 1. The biblical reference that is foundational for Brennan is Genesis 1:27.

of positively engaging with the wider world enabled Brennan to confidently commit to social reform agendas alongside like-minded individuals and groups. Brennan became well known for her literary interests and abilities and her writing provided her with a means of communicating her views, especially with regard to women's rights, to a broad cross section of society. As an Australian woman who lived through the attainment of the franchise for women, two economic depressions, two world wars, and was alive and active as a Catholic from the proclamation of *Rerum Novarum* in 1891 to the eve of the Second Vatican Council, her life experience was rich and varied.⁴

Brennan was born in 1879, at Emu Creek, near Bendigo in Victoria, the last of thirteen children of Michael and Mary Brennan. She died in 1962.⁵ It was within the energy field of the women's suffrage and post suffrage milieu that Brennan embarked upon her professional career and her engagement in social reform. This thesis investigates those factors which shaped her identity as a committed Catholic lay woman, lawyer and advocate for equal rights for women. Just as the women's movement did not flow from one buoyant freedom to another so Brennan's life reflects the energy and the strains of change.

This study of her life is premised on the need to reflect the interconnectedness of her experience by not consigning her religious conviction to the artificial construction of a notional private domain. Not only is this to prevent collusion with an epistemology which reinforces a dichotomous or binary analysis, but also to promote a representation of women's lives that is holistic. In this context some of the recent scholarship on intersectionality provides a strong theoretical basis for analysing the many different elements of Brennan's identity. It also enables due regard to be given to the significance of religion in historical analysis and avoids negating its importance by understatement.

⁴ When references to suffrage are made in this thesis it is noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia had to wait until 1967 to obtain full constitutional recognition of their citizenship. See also Ann McGrath, "'Beneath the Skin': Australian Citizenship, Rights and Aboriginal Women," in *Women and the State: Australian Perspectives*, ed. Renate Howe *Journal of Australian Studies* 17, no. 37 (Bundoora: La Trobe University Press, 1993), 99-114.

⁵ Ruth Campbell and Margaret Morgen, 'Brennan, Anna Teresa (1879-1962)' Australian Dictionary of Biography, (ADB) National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed online at: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brennan-anna-teresa-5344/text9035> published first in hardcopy 1979; and Kevin Ryan, 'Brennan, Francis (Frank) 1873-1950' Australian Dictionary of Biography, (ADB) National Centre of Biography, Australian National University, accessed online at: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/brennan-francis-frank-5347/text9041> published in hardcopy 1979.

From a methodological perspective, some of the pertinent research on the issues associated with the writing of a historical biography, has also been drawn on.

In exploring the methodological and theoretical issues that have emerged in the writing of this thesis the image of the gleaner has provided an apt metaphor for the process of gathering and sifting information required when writing on a subject who has not left a substantial personal archive. One of the definitions of gleaners is that they are those who come after a field has been harvested and gather the remnants. Understandably many writers have referred to gleaning with regard to the process of gathering information. There are three specific aspects of this metaphor of the gleaner to which I would like to refer to with regard to this thesis.

Firstly, the subject of a historical biography has lived his or her life and in that sense their experience constitutes the original storehouse of meaning. Whatever fragments are gathered later can only provide a partial insight into the subject of a study, their life and times. This is to acknowledge that there is no attempt to assume that what is produced in this thesis constitutes a complete picture of the subject or her involvement in the wider community.

Secondly, the particular intent of the gleaner in searching through a specific field debunks the illusion of scientific detachment. I have initiated a study about the life of a woman who is of interest to me and one that I hope will be of interest to others. This very first moment of selection conveys that there is already intersubjectivity between Brennan, the text, the reader and myself.⁶ As someone who has chosen to write about the life and times of another person, I cannot assume the empirical authority that might be attributed to a double blind randomised experiment. The authority I want to claim does not rest on quasi objectivity but from a ready acceptance of what Liz Stanley has referred to as the “provisionality of knowledge production”.⁷

Thirdly, gleaners make choices about the potentiality of even the smallest of findings. Inherent in this is an appreciation that what is actually gathered up by a historian involves

⁶ Judy Long, *Telling Women's Lives: Subject/Narrator/Reader/Text* Feminist Crosscurrents (New York: New York University Press, 1999), 3-8.

⁷ Liz Stanley, “How Do We Know about Past Lives? Methodological and Epistemological Matters Involving Prince Philip, the Russian Revolution, Emily Wilding Davison, My Mum and the Absent Sue,” in *Women's Lives into Print: The Theory, Practice and Writing of Feminist Auto/Biography*, ed. Pauline Polkey (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1999), 10.

decisions about the inclusion and exclusion of certain source materials and corresponding issues and events. The writer of a text is always engaged in decision making that is influential because the constancy of this process of decision making totally shapes the version of a life that is presented.⁸ Therefore, the gleanings and how I have chosen to interpret them cannot be substituted for the storehouse itself.

Brennan has been included in the *Australian Dictionary of Biography* and in several anthologies but a detailed examination of her life has not been undertaken to date.⁹ She was well known in the wider community for her public stance on women's issues.¹⁰ An obituary in 1963 stated that "Anna's interest was ever directed towards women's activities and status."¹¹ How she maintained this focus for fifty years is a central focus of this thesis. Its specific contribution to the existing scholarship, is to explore the significance of Brennan's identity as a Catholic lay woman, her organisational affiliations and her engagement in the public domain. Brennan was very interested in literature and she demonstrated a flair for writing. An analysis of some of Brennan's writings has been incorporated into this study especially those passages that shed some light on her views about women's status in society.

I would like to acknowledge the influence of Sally Kennedy's scholarship in her doctoral thesis and the text which arose from it.¹² Her extensive investigation of five Catholic women's organisations in Australia, has informed and shaped my thinking on this topic on many levels. There are obviously differences in the scope and depth between this thesis and Kennedy's seminal work. Only two organisations that Brennan was very involved

⁸ Ann Oakley, "The Social Science of Biographical Life Writing: Some Methodological and Ethical Issues," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 13, no. 5 (2010): 428.

⁹ The following are some anthologies that include an entry for Anna Brennan. Heather Radi, ed. *200 Australian Women. A Redress Anthology* (Broadway, NSW: Women's Redress Press, 1988), 114-115; Juliet Flesch and Peter McPhee, *150 Years: 150 Stories: Brief Biographies of One Hundred and Fifty Remarkable People Associated with the University of Melbourne* (Melbourne: Department of History; University of Melbourne, 2003), 25; and Edmund Campion, *Great Australian Catholics* (Richmond, Vic.: Aurora Books/ David Lovell Publishing, 1997), 59-61. See also the Australian Women's Archives Project: The Australian Women's Register, (National Foundation for Australian Women and The University of Melbourne), www.womenaustralia.info/index.html.

¹⁰ "Girl Articled To Her Mother," *Central Queensland Herald*, July 20, 1939, 28.

¹¹ Alice Blackall, "Anna Brennan ...the Valiant Woman," *Horizon*, February 1, 1963, 3.

¹² Sally Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism: Catholic Women's Struggles for Self-Expression*, (Studies in the Christian Movement; no. 9. Manly, NSW: Blackburn, Vic.: St Patrick's College; Distributed by Dove Communications, 1985). See also Sally Kennedy, "Catholic Women in Action: The Nature and Functioning of Five Lay Catholic Women's Organisations in Sydney and Melbourne circa 1920-1950," (PhD Thesis, University of New South Wales, 1983).

with have been examined in detail by Kennedy. These are the Catholic Women's Social Guild and the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance.¹³ Kennedy outlines Brennan's influence in each of them and her research has provided an invaluable reference point from which to examine her life in more detail. The specific purpose of this study is to examine how as an individual Brennan traversed the terrain of the women's movement whilst also engaging as an active citizen of both her faith community and the wider society.

Much of the background information about the Brennan family, that is noted in this study, has been derived from Kevin Ryan's research on the lawyer and parliamentarian, Frank Brennan, who was Anna Brennan's brother.¹⁴ The first chapter of this thesis provides an introduction to Brennan's life with reference to her family background, her choice of a career in law and some references to her literary endeavours. The feminist quest to ensure women's rightful and meaningful inclusion in history provides an initial context for situating this study. The importance of intersectionality as a theoretical framework is outlined with an emphasis on how women's agency can be given voice through their religious affiliation. The creativity and tensions associated with historical biographies is discussed with close reference to the requirements of a reflexivity that goes beyond obligatory declarations of association or identification. This chapter will also contain a review of the relevant literature.

The second chapter contextualises Brennan's status as a woman who remained single and how aspects of her family life provided a supportive structure for her entry into and long-term career as a lawyer. This detailed exploration of Brennan's single status is referenced to a Catholic appreciation of vocational choice and how Brennan's professional life as a lawyer was connected to her commitment to the promotion of greater equality for women.

Chapter three discusses how Brennan's commitment to social action was consonant with a religious paradigm that endorsed such action as contained in the papal encyclical *Rerum*

¹³ The St Joan's Social and Political Alliance was also referred to as St Joan's or the Alliance. After it became established in a number of countries it was known as the St Joan's International Alliance. The Victorian section of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance will be referred to in this thesis as St Joan's (Vic.) unless the full title is used or it is evident that the Victorian section of the Alliance is being referred to.

¹⁴ Ryan, *ADB*; Kevin Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," (M.A. Thesis: La Trobe University, 1978); and Kevin Ryan, *Papers of Kevin Ryan, 1976-1978*, National Library of Australia, [manuscript] MS 6291.

Novarum. The specific influences in Brennan's life, as a result of her active participation in the Catholic community in Melbourne are noted, as they indicate how an engagement in social concerns was promoted. The founding charism of the Catholic Women's Social Guild was supportive of Catholic women participating actively in social issues. Therefore, particular reference is made to Brennan's involvement in this Guild from 1916-1920, which is discussed to illustrate some of the paradigmatic elements of her views. Close reference is made to a paper presented by Brennan in 1917 titled the "Need of University Training for Women," as this exhortation to Catholic women sheds much light on how she perceived their role in the wider community. Brennan's decision to resign from the Catholic Women's Social Guild in 1920 is discussed as an example of how agency can operate across many dimensions.

There are several parts contained in the fourth chapter. Firstly, Brennan's associational connections indicate that her concern about women's rights was a constant focus of her engagement in social issues. Several examples of Brennan's literary work are referred to in this chapter reflecting the emphasis that she placed on the dignity and rights of women as well as her critical stance towards some of the "modern" writers of her time. The chapter explores how her writing illustrates a Catholic stance regarding the role of literature in shaping social mores.

Brennan was very aware of the inherent inequality and the difficulties that married women encountered in having to assume the nationality of their husband. Advocating for reform, so that married women did not lose the right to their own nationality upon marriage, was an issue that concerned women's organisations in Australia and beyond for much of the twentieth century. This chapter examines Brennan's involvement in this matter as it highlights her stance on women's equality and adult autonomy, her specific contribution as a lawyer and her connection to women's issues internationally.

The last section of chapter four concentrates on Brennan's connection to St Joan's Social and Political Alliance from 1930 until her death in 1962. This demonstrates how her commitment to women's rights and her religious worldview, were especially well aligned through her association with this organisation. From an intersectional perspective it is the annotation of Brennan's specific experience, especially with regard to her involvement in St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, which nuances her identity as a lay Catholic

woman. Paradoxically, it is through an examination of the particularities, that a holistic representation of someone's life can be developed.

The conclusion of this thesis provides an overview of the main findings that have arisen from this intersectional analysis of Brennan's life with an emphasis on the unification of her Catholicism and her quest to strive for greater equality for women. This study supports the understanding that any representation of another person can only provide slivers of insight into the complexity of someone else's context and experience. Whilst components of identity merge into one another, it is possible to detect the significance of certain core beliefs within an individual which can shape the whole narrative of a life. As the conclusion of this thesis outlines, Brennan's Catholicism and her concern for women's equality, interleave in her personal and professional life with a sustained degree of consonance.

Chapter 1

A life with many intersecting skeins

Family background

Although the context and circumstances of their emigration were different, both of Brennan's Irish born parents arrived in Australia in 1853.¹⁵ They were married in Melbourne in 1856 and went on to establish a family home and farm in Emu Creek.¹⁶ The Brennan family were to become well known in the municipality for their engagement in civic matters. Three members of the Brennan family served as Shire Secretary for Strathfieldsaye from 1882 until 1977. Michael Brennan (Anna's father) was the first, followed by his son Richard and then Margaret Brennan, who was Richard's daughter.¹⁷ In 1874 the local community acknowledged Michael Brennan's services to the region by giving him a gift of 150 sovereigns.¹⁸ The coverage that was given by the local newspaper, to his death and funeral in 1902, speaks of his active engagement in civic life for many years.¹⁹

Alongside their participation in civic duties, the Brennan family exhibited a strong commitment to education. Brennan's mother was taught by the Ursuline Sisters in Ireland to the age of 14 or 15 and she was very keen for her children to be well educated.²⁰ Over many years Michael Brennan had worked very hard for the establishment and development of the local Sedgwick primary school.²¹ The value of education would have been inculcated in the children in the family by their awareness of their father's efforts for the development of the local school.

¹⁵ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 2-3; "Sad Fatality at Emu Creek," *Bendigo Advertiser*, August 19, 1902, 3; and "Mr John Joseph Brennan," *Argus*, July 23, 1946, 4.

¹⁶ Ryan, *ADB*.

¹⁷ Tim Hewat, *Bridge over Troubled Waters: A History of the Shire of Strathfieldsaye* (South Melbourne: The Macmillan Company of Australia, 1983), 7, 50, 86, 92.

¹⁸ Hewat, 51.

¹⁹ "Sad Fatality at Emu Creek," *Bendigo Advertiser*, 19 August, 1902, 3; and "The Emu Creek Fatality," *Bendigo Advertiser*, August 21, 1902, 2.

²⁰ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 3, 8.

²¹ Hewat, 51. See also James Frederick, *No. 935 Sedgwick Primary School*. 1990. (A History Compiled by Mr James Frederick: Head Teacher 1989-1900.) (No page numbers available.). Accessed online 26 June 2016 at: http://sedgwickcommunity.org.au/reference/sedgwick_primary_school.pdf

Besides his other civic commitments, Brennan's father also served as a justice of the peace in the district.²² Perhaps this provided a model for several of his children who pursued careers in Melbourne and became well known for their success in law, politics and journalism. By the time Brennan gained admission into the University of Melbourne there was a well-established second family home in the city. None of the daughters in the family married and Brennan was the only female sibling to undertake university studies.²³

Brennan's early faith development was fostered in a family that was deeply committed to Catholicism.²⁴ Upon his death her father was referred to as a "staunch" Catholic²⁵ but the family was not isolated in a Catholic enclave. Brennan was not educated in a Catholic school. In the record of an interview in 1911, she states that she attended the local State school for her primary education and then St Andrew's College, Bendigo, for her secondary years.²⁶ St Andrew's College was a private school that was established in 1879 to provide the type of education that was offered by academically prestigious schools in Melbourne. It was not under the auspice of any Church group but the property belonged to St Andrew's Presbyterian Church.²⁷ Brennan commented positively on her experience of "co-education" at St Andrew's College in Bendigo and observes how her experience influenced her views on the benefits of this style of education.²⁸ In 1903 she matriculated having passed in "Latin, algebra, English, arithmetic and French (honors)."²⁹ Brennan's self-motivation is evident in her testament that even as a school student she was determined to undertake a profession.³⁰ By the time she entered university, Brennan would have developed confidence in her ability to succeed scholastically, outside the protections and confines of a single sex cohort. Her experience of learning in a co-educational context may also have equipped her to cope with the marginal status of women in higher education when she undertook her university studies.

²² "Killed by a Falling Tree," *Geelong Advertiser*, August 20, 1902, 1.

²³ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 289-298. (Listed as Appendix A)

²⁴ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 7.

²⁵ "The Emu Creek Fatality," *Bendigo Advertiser*, August 21, 1902, 2.

²⁶ "Miss Anna Brennan," *Southern Sphere*, September 1, 1911, 34.

²⁷ Barbara Fary, "Secondary Education in Bendigo 1851-1912," *Melbourne Studies in Education* 9, no. 1 (1966): 171.

²⁸ "Miss Anna Brennan," *Southern Sphere*, September 1, 1911, 34.

²⁹ "Matriculation Results," *Bendigo Advertiser*, June 18, 1903, 2.

³⁰ Miss Anna Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9. I was initially alerted to this article in R.J.W. Selleck, *The Shop: The University of Melbourne 1850-1939* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2003), 576.

Although their schooling and activities were initially centred in the Bendigo area, the Brennans also became notable members of the Catholic community in Melbourne.³¹ This was a community within which there was a noticeable cohort of lay people who were well educated and very interested in the issues of the day.³² By the first few years of Anna Brennan's professional life, the social standing and status of the family in this community was well established. This is apparent in an account of Frank Brennan's marriage to Sheila O'Donnell in 1914. The description of the ceremony and the content of the speeches at the wedding indicate how strongly connected both the bride and bridegroom's family were amongst the Catholic community in Melbourne.³³

Career choice

Brennan's feminism was probably first signalled by her decision to undertake the necessary university studies to become a professional woman. Although there is no doubt that Brennan was a pioneering legal woman, her entry into the profession was in the context of a family structure that was empowering and affirming of her capabilities.³⁴ The siblings undertook to support each other financially during their undergraduate years.³⁵ The benefits of family support were evident in Brennan's capacity to meet the costs of her university studies.³⁶ The prior establishment of various members of the family in the legal profession also greatly assisted her professionally. She began her career as a lawyer in the firm Brennan and Rundle.³⁷ Frank Brennan went on to establish the firm called Brennan and Co., and Anna Brennan became a partner in this firm and worked there for all of her professional life.³⁸ There do not appear to be any letters or diaries written by Brennan that could shed light on her personal reflections on her life as a student or her

³¹ Patrick Morgan, *Melbourne Before Mannix: Catholics in Public Life 1880-1920* (Ballan, Vic.: Connor Court, 2012), 130-132.

³² Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia: A History* (West Melbourne: Thomas Nelson, 1977), 300; and Morgan, *Melbourne Before Mannix*, 94.

³³ "The Brennan-O'Donnell Wedding," *Advocate*, January 10, 1914, 32-33.

³⁴ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 9. Ryan notes here the cohesion and mutual support evident in the Brennan family.

³⁵ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 17; and Campbell and Morgen, *ADB*.

³⁶ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 17 at note 9. With regard to the type of costs involved see Farley Kelly, *Degrees of Liberation: A Short History of Women in the University of Melbourne* (Parkville, Vic.: The Women Graduates Centenary Committee, University of Melbourne, 1985), 17.

³⁷ Campbell and Morgen, *ADB*.

³⁸ "Miss Anna Brennan," *Law Institute Journal* 37, no. 2 (1963): 61; and "Items of General Interest," *Advocate*, October 25, 1923, 20.

long career in the law. Although, it is helpful to read, how at an early stage of her career, Brennan represents her interest in the law.

“I think,” she remarks, “that there is a very real need for women lawyers, though, perhaps, not such a crying need as for women doctors. My thoughts first turned towards medicine as a peculiarly feminine profession, and the best avenue through which to help my own sex, but it turned out not to be my forte, perhaps because I was too anxious, too nervous over the practical work—at least that was what Professor Allen thought. I had no trouble whatever in the study of law. It is called “dry,” but I found it full of the intensest interest, historical and human, and every detail of the course most attractive.”³⁹

Brennan’s reference to initially choosing a career, which would be of direct benefit to other women, is illuminating with regard to her sense of female solidarity. She makes it clear that she does not share the view of those who see the law as being “dry”. When interviewed by a reporter in 1961, having been in the law for 50 years, her view remained unchanged: “Miss Brennan still thinks, after 50 years, that the law is a good profession for a girl, ‘if she has the bent, the feeling of abstract ideas’.”⁴⁰ What is important in this context is that Brennan did not make any assumption about what might be more suitable for “a girl”, from a gendered perspective, but linked career choice with the aptitude or gifts of the individual. A similar view can be inferred, from Brennan’s affirmation in 1938 that economics was another area of study that could be of interest to younger women.⁴¹

Early in her legal career Brennan was clear that she did not want to assume the more public and combative role of a barrister.⁴² This is interesting given that she was to demonstrate confidence and artful debating strategies in the many public meetings that she addressed. It also means that Brennan’s connection with those seeking her legal assistance was focused on the interaction between herself and her clients in her role as a

³⁹ “Miss Anna Brennan,” *Southern Sphere*, September 1, 1911, 34.

⁴⁰ “Woman Celebrates 50 Years in Law,” *Age*, August 1, 1961.

⁴¹ “Women Urge Fight for Democracy,” *Argus* February 3, 1938, 7. This encouragement for women to study economics was made whilst Brennan was supporting a vote of thanks, during the Women’s International Conference, to the economist Sir Josiah Stamp.

⁴² “Modern Portia,” *Weekly Times*, December 27, 1913, 12.

solicitor. Her energies were not directed towards appearing in court as a barrister and this meant that for just over fifty years she had a very proximate connection and awareness of the difficulties faced by those seeking legal assistance. As most of Brennan's work was concerned with assisting individuals as a solicitor, it has not been possible to amass a body of case files or court records, which could indicate her stance on certain legal and social issues. There are entries in newspaper articles where Brennan makes a point about a social concern by referring to legal cases that she has encountered in her role as a solicitor. These are helpful in highlighting her stance on certain issues but there does not appear to be a collection of legal papers available that could provide a detailed insight into her jurisprudence.

Early networks within and beyond the Catholic community

A notable aspect of Brennan's life was her decision to become involved in a range of clubs and associations. This is a very important feature of her experience as it reflects the breadth of her networking, circle of contacts and influence. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four but it is mentioned here as it was a significant aspect of how she established herself amongst women's groups in Melbourne, early in her career. The Princess Ida Club at the University of Melbourne and the Lyceum Club (Melbourne) were two very significant clubs to which she was connected.⁴³ In 1912, Brennan was one of the Princess Ida Club delegates to the National Council of Women (NCW) and she was to remain connected to the NCW throughout her life.⁴⁴ She was also connected to the Lyceum Club from its establishment in 1912. She was one of an initial group of three women who served as trustees for the Lyceum and was the President from 1940-1942.⁴⁵

Brennan was present at the "first general meeting" of the Women Graduates' Association in Victoria in 1921.⁴⁶ Likewise, Brennan was active in the Legal Women's Association

⁴³ University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne University, Princess Ida Club 1895-1915, 1963.0030, Unit 1, Minute Book 1908-1913. These minutes provide examples of Brennan's involvement in the club. For the Lyceum Club see Janette Bomford, *Circles of Friendship: The Centenary History of the Lyceum Club Melbourne* (Melbourne, Vic.: The Lyceum Club; North Melbourne, Vic.: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2012), 33. Unless noted otherwise references to the Lyceum Club in this thesis refer to the Melbourne Lyceum Club.

⁴⁴ University of Melbourne Archives, Melbourne University, Princess Ida Club 1895-1915, 1963.0030, Unit 1, Minute Book 1908-1913, Committee Meeting September 11, 1912. Unless indicated otherwise, any reference to the National Council of Women is to the Victorian section.

⁴⁵ Janette Bomford, *Circles of Friendship: The Centenary History of the Lyceum Club Melbourne*, 33, 348.

⁴⁶ "Women Graduates Meet," *Australasian*, April 30, 1921, 32.

of Victoria through which she and the other pioneer women in the legal profession established their own supportive network.⁴⁷ She was also immersed in many aspects of life within the Catholic community. Of specific interest is her membership of the Newman Society,⁴⁸ the Catholic Women's Club,⁴⁹ the Catholic Women's Social Guild, St Joan's Political and Social Alliance⁵⁰ and the Century Club.⁵¹ Judith Brett has suggested that prior to World War II the participation in "voluntary associations" provided people with the skills needed to become active citizens on a broader scale.⁵² Brennan's connection to many clubs and associations can be understood in these terms.

Literary interests

Brennan was connected to other women in Melbourne who had a keen interest in writing and journalism. It was an association that she really valued.⁵³ She was a member of a group called the "Press Gang" which met at the Lyceum Club.⁵⁴ The connections resulted in their being able to support each other in their feminist concerns. Brennan is often remembered because of her pioneer status as a female lawyer but her advocacy for women's rights extended beyond the law and was embedded in the focus of her writings. From her university days onwards Brennan wrote for a range of magazines, journals and newspapers within and beyond the Catholic community. Brennan's literary interests and abilities were well known by women in her network by the 1930s.⁵⁵

In 1921, Irene Frances Taylor (Frances Taylor) established a woman's magazine called *Woman's World*.⁵⁶ This was to become a perfect medium for Brennan to connect and advocate. Jackie Dickenson has identified the "target audience" of this publication as being "like Taylor and her woman friends: a new type of woman, well educated,

⁴⁷ "Legal Women Meet," *Argus*, April 10, 1935, 15. For reference to a similar group which was established at an earlier date see "Women's Law Society," *Weekly Times*, September 5, 1914, 10.

⁴⁸ "The Newman Society," *Advocate*, December 30, 1911, 28.

⁴⁹ Morgan, *Melbourne Before Mannix*, 132, 140.

⁵⁰ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 13-14, 102-103.

⁵¹ "Centre of Catholic Culture: Century Club Formed," *Advocate*, September 6, 1934, 12.

⁵² Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 64.

⁵³ "Woman Barrister," *News* (Adelaide), July 22, 1930, 5.

⁵⁴ Joan Gillison, *A History of the Lyceum Club: Melbourne* (Melbourne: The Lyceum Club; Melbourne: McKellar Press, 1975), 58-59. See also Jackie Dickenson, *Australian Women in Advertising in the Twentieth Century*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 29.

⁵⁵ "What Women are Talking About," *Woman's World*, August 1, 1930, 12.

⁵⁶ *Woman's World*, December 1, 1921, 5. The journal was referred to by longer and shorter titles. For consistency and clarity it will be referred to in this thesis as *Woman's World*.

ambitious and resolutely middle class.”⁵⁷ In the first editorial the magazine was described as follows: “It is controlled by no association or society; it is non-sectarian, non-political. Its ideal is, first and always, to provide the intelligent Australian woman with an up-to-date newspaper dealing with the latest developments in the world of women.”⁵⁸ Through *Woman’s World*, Brennan found a voice and an audience to promote her views on industrial conditions for girls and women, her concerns about the influence of Freudian ideas, her critical assessment of certain modern literature, and other related matters.⁵⁹ Her advocacy for a type of literature that would be restorative and formative for society is clear in her 1937 appraisal of some of the ideas of T. S. Eliot.⁶⁰

Brennan’s depth of knowledge and ability to call on historical accounts and literary references is also apparent in her writing. For example, in a passage that she wrote for the *Argus* newspaper in 1936, she provides an overview of various eras in British history as if the reader is able to assimilate her account into a working knowledge of the various events that she refers to. This is undertaken whilst reflecting on the calamities that have transpired over the lifetime of a shard of flint.⁶¹ This passage is typical of the range of skills that Brennan displayed across her lifetime but it also indicates the interest that she took in matters outside her immediate sphere of influence. Her ability to combine a vivid sense of history whilst relaying her experience of a visit to Chequers in England also reflects the interdisciplinary nature of her expertise.⁶²

Not just an ardent activist

Even outside her intellectual, professional and club-based networks, Brennan was very much engaged in the social and cultural events of her times. She enjoyed a camping holiday, on a trip to Canberra in 1927, to see members of the Royal Family.⁶³ It is not a young girl who undertook this adventure but a woman in her forties with many years of professional life as a lawyer already behind her. It certainly does not speak of one who was aloof or conceited about her status in the community. Brennan’s wit and humour are

⁵⁷ Dickenson, *Australian Women in Advertising in the Twentieth Century*, 28.

⁵⁸ “Editorial,” *Woman’s World*, December 1, 1921, 5.

⁵⁹ The entries written by Brennan for *Woman’s World*, which are cited in this thesis, are listed in the relevant section of the Bibliography.

⁶⁰ Brennan, “Notes by the Way: After Strange Gods,” *Woman’s World*, July 1, 1937, 16, 17, 49, 50.

⁶¹ Brennan, “A Piece of Flint,” *Argus*, April 11, 1936, 6.

⁶² Brennan, “A Day at Chequers,” *Woman’s World*, May 1, 1931, 23, 47.

⁶³ “‘Mrs Jim’ Rings Up,” *News Adelaide*, (Sporting Edition) May 4, 1926, 6.

often commented on when references are made to her public appearances. This lightness of tone is also evident in a talk that she gave in 1923 where she is quoted as follows: “She had heard it said, many years ago, that one reason why lady lawyers did not readily marry was that they courted too much.”⁶⁴ Although Brennan often asserted herself strongly she seemed to be very adept at using certain oratorical skills to good effect. Rather than lambast an audience, she could engage a self-deprecatory style, in order to make a point without appearing to be openly confrontational. In 1916, when she was speaking about the need for Catholic women to engage in social reform, she gently chides those who would suggest that women like her might be more usefully occupied in looking after a husband.⁶⁵

Grief and loss across her lifetime

Another aspect of Brennan’s life that helps to build a more comprehensive account of her experiences, is the impact of death and the losses that she encountered. There are several dimensions to this. Given that Brennan’s parents had come to Australia, following the terrible impact of the famine in Ireland, the long shadow of collective grief would have been a component of the family metanarrative. Prior to Brennan’s birth in 1879, her parents had already experienced the death of two children. A new-born called Mary died in 1860 and a young boy called James died in the year before Anna’s birth.⁶⁶ In her lifetime Brennan had to deal with the death of nine siblings. The exposure to societal trauma and tragedy, which resulted from living through the impact of two world wars, two economic depressions, and the influenza epidemic in 1919, was a significant component of her life. There is no doubt that also in her work as a lawyer she would have encountered many people who experienced much loss and deprivation. Although she knew the benefits of education and social standing she was very aware of the harsh face of poverty and other forms of suffering.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ “Catholic Women’s Club,” *Advocate*, October 4, 1923, 11.

⁶⁵ “Catholic Women’s Social Guild: Inaugural Meeting in the Cathedral Hall,” *Advocate*, October 7, 1916, 26.

⁶⁶ Ryan, “Frank Brennan: A Political Biography,” 290-291. James lived from 1864-1878.

⁶⁷ “Neglected Children,” *Argus*, April 17, 1923, 10.

Feminism

There are many complex strands to Brennan's identity. In order to establish a means of situating her life within a broader framework this thesis uses key insights from feminism and intersectionality. This includes some of the emerging issues in the writing of biographical histories and how the process of representation needs to integrate the complexity of identity, subjectivities, and the equally complex interface between an individual and every changing social reality.

One aspect of this complex scenario is the need to redress the prior ellipsis of Australian Catholic lay women in Australian women's history. This aim, to understand women's experience as the cornerstone of how they are represented, links this study to the expansive goals of feminism. However, an unwieldy canvas can be painted by applying the broad brush of feminism to this particular study as Brennan herself had many facets of her identity that did not relate to the politics of many contemporary feminists. In this thesis, when references are made to Brennan as a feminist or to her feminism, it is in the context of her appreciation of women's equality, which was grounded in her religious belief that women and men were created equally as human beings.⁶⁸

Given the prevailing norms of previous eras women could be included in history in an assumed manner. They were assumed to be present but usually not considered individuated or of enough significance to be written about in their own right. But as Sara Alpern and others have noted: "When the particular becomes female, the universal can no longer be male."⁶⁹ Therefore, in situating this research within the wider framework of feminism, the emphasis is on the importance of locating the experience and role of women in historical accounts. Historical analysis from a feminist perspective is not just the study of women, as if they were a homogenous group, but rather a study of women as they have acted in their various socially constructed and gendered roles. The appreciation that the

⁶⁸ "Challenge to Women," *Age*, October 30, 1937, 19.

⁶⁹ Sara Alpern, Joyce Antler, Elisabeth Israels Perry, and Ingrid Winther Scobie, eds. "Introduction," *The Challenge of Feminist Biography: Writing the Lives of Modern American Women* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 6. See also Zinsser, "Feminist Biography: A Contradiction in Terms?" *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 50, no. 1 (2009): 45.

use of the term “women” cannot be used to totally denote one single entity of persons is not a new insight.⁷⁰

The evolving discourse with regard to gender and feminism reflects the complexities associated with the application of categories. There are many layers to how people identify themselves and are signified by others. Therefore, reference to gender in a definitive sense can be too limiting.⁷¹ In this regard it is important to interrogate notions about gender and identity.⁷² Brennan’s Irish Catholic heritage and her sense of the potentiality of women’s rights in Australia must both be considered as highly influential. Additionally, her professional life, associational connections and life as a single Catholic woman, are all components of the specific way that she connected and reacted to the world of her times.

There are many different ways that the feminist voice can be detected but this has not always been evident in the writing of women’s history. In an effort to redress the exclusion in Australian history, of many aspects of women’s experience, some feminist historians in the latter half of the twentieth century began the task of writing women back into the narrative.⁷³ Besides writing women into historical accounts, feminist historians have also seen the importance of widening the scope of the women who were to be the subjects of biographical writing.⁷⁴ There can be a “political” component involved in feminist history as it is not just about rectifying previous exclusions of women but also depicting the specific injustices that women encountered.⁷⁵ It is possible to see how women have been excluded in the metanarratives of history and it is also possible to note their exclusion within specific branches of history. Catholic lay women do not feature very much in the histories of the Catholic Church in Australia, as the emphasis has mostly

⁷⁰ Valerie Sanders, “First Wave Feminism,” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2001), 18-19.

⁷¹ Sophia Phoca, “Feminism and Gender,” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2001), 55-65; and Carole McCann and Kim Seung-Kyung, “Introduction, Section 1: Groundings and Movements,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, 2nd edition, eds. Carole McCann and Kim Seung-Kyung (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17.

⁷² Joan Scott, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 5 (1986): 1053-1075.

⁷³ Joy Damousi, “Feminist Biography,” in *Tracing Past Lives*, ed. Richard Broome (Carlton: History Institute Victoria, 1995), 34.

⁷⁴ Zinsser, “Feminist Biography: A Contradiction in Terms?” 43.

⁷⁵ Damousi, “Feminist Biography,” 34.

been on the role of male Church leaders, the issues related to Catholic education and organisational development.⁷⁶

Brennan's life is not necessarily representative of other women in her times even that of other Catholic lay women. The benefits of suffrage, higher education, meaningful employment and strong familial ties that Brennan experienced, were obviously not normative for all women in her lifetime. It is important from a feminist standpoint that the promotion of Brennan's life, does not serve to negate the experience of other women. Nevertheless, the promotion of Brennan's commitment to women's rights assists in developing a greater insight into how one woman navigated elements of the women's movement within her various spheres of influence.

Brennan's determination to assert women's rights is often apparent in the forensic and sometimes humorous approach that she would take to reviewing books that she thought did not promote the equality or dignity of women. In reviewing a text written by a "Professor of Jurisprudence and Economics" on "Feminism", Brennan was adamant that the use of spurious scientific methods to infer that women were less intelligent than men, by a man not even qualified to engage with the topic, had to be robustly challenged. Her condemnation is evident when she suggests that even her review of the book should be placed in the section of the magazine devoted to cooking and reduced to a single word: "Tripe".⁷⁷

The biblical foundation for women's equality

A foundational aspect of feminist scholarship, which has been integrated into certain strands of feminist theology, is an affirmation of the significance of asserting the importance of an equality which "assumes that each person comes to the relationship as a complete human being."⁷⁸ This is very much in accord with how Brennan seemed to view the rights of women to full equality in all spheres of life. She was not shy in challenging anyone in authority especially when there was a matter in the public domain

⁷⁶ Walter Ebsworth, *Pioneer Catholic Victoria* (Melbourne: The Polding Press, 1973); and D. F. Bourke, *A History of the Catholic Church in Victoria* (The Catholic Bishops of Victoria, 1988), are both examples of this emphasis.

⁷⁷ Brennan, "'Feminism' A Review of Professor Weith Knudsen's Book," *Woman's World*, July 1, 1928, 397.

⁷⁸ Susan Abraham, Elena Procario-Foley, eds. "Preface," in *Frontiers in Catholic Feminist Theology: Shoulder to Shoulder*, eds. Susan Abraham, Elena Procario-Foley (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2009), 3.

which demonstrated a lack of equality of opportunity for women. In 1928, Brennan was critical of the efforts of the Director of Education to block the appointment of a suitably qualified woman, (Julia Flynn) to a senior position in the Department. In her rebuttal of the Director's stance she indicated that justice and the biblical account of creation in Genesis makes it clear that women and men are equal. Hence women should not be hindered in the advancement of their professional lives simply because they are women.⁷⁹

At the annual meeting of the National Council of Women of Victoria in 1937, when speaking on the role of "Women in the Modern State", Brennan anchored her claim for women's equality by referring again to the creation account in Genesis.⁸⁰ The essential point from her perspective was that if God made women and men equal, no human system should try to alter this equality. Brennan's reliance on a biblical text could be rightfully challenged as having no greater authority than any other text or philosophy. The issue from the perspective of this thesis is not that a reference to Genesis can serve as a trump card but that it provided for Brennan a core justification for her promotion of women's rights and one that would have both related to and challenged many fellow Christians.

Explaining in 1955 how the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance was a feminist organisation within the Catholic Church Brennan said:

A feminist seeks to secure political, educational, social and economic equality between men and women. The basis of this equality is that men and women are alike created by God in His image. They are not created superior and inferior—a ruling class and a serving class—but each possesses of the human attributes: body and soul, mind, conscience and free will.⁸¹

There are three important elements contained in this statement. Firstly, for Brennan feminism was not just ideological but required action to secure equality for women.

⁷⁹ Brennan, "'50% Efficient' The Director of Education v. Victorian Women," *Woman's World*, September 1, 1928, 523. Julia Flynn is not mentioned by Brennan in this article, but the obstacles to promotion within the Education Department, that Flynn faced in 1928, were well known by women in Victoria. See also Majorie Theobald, "Women, Leadership and Gender Politics in the Interwar Years: the Case of Julia Flynn," *History of Education: Journal of the History of Education Society* 29, no. 1 (2000): 63-77.

⁸⁰ "Challenge to Women," *Age*, October 30, 1937, 19.

⁸¹ "Miss Anna Brennan Says: The Feminist Demands Not Only Rights, But Responsibilities," *Tribune*, August 11, 1955, 1.

Secondly, the foundation for Brennan's sense of equality originates from her primary belief in God and in an assertion of God's creative action of making men and women in His own image. Thirdly, men and women are not placed in subordination one to another but both are endowed equally with human capacity. I would suggest that each one of these three elements propelled Brennan to stress the importance of women's rights. Her assertion of these rights does not seem to be constructed on anything attributed to women in an essentialist sense but on the basis of their status as equal human beings.⁸² Brennan is also keen to argue that attributes such as being intuitive, maternal or having inherent capacities in matters affecting women and children are not ascribed to women universally. It is the individual woman that Brennan asserts has particular qualities; men and women alike can demonstrate vice or virtue.⁸³

Brennan was not unique as a Catholic woman in her appreciation of the foundational importance of women's equality. Writing on feminism and Catholicism in 1951, in the Catholic newspaper the *Advocate*, Catherine Kaye made the point that: "On this fundamental equality Catholic teaching always has been unequivocal."⁸⁴ Although Kaye adopts a tone that would not necessarily be in accord with how Brennan promoted women's rights her reference to the Catholic teaching on equality is resonant with Brennan's viewpoint.

Brennan believed that the inability of women to promote their fundamental equality was due to processes of socialisation and the impact of "oppression."⁸⁵ By asserting this argument, she indicates a strong appreciation of how the context of women's experience is a determinant of whether or not their status as equal human beings is actualised. Brennan was keenly aware that the impact of socialisation needed to be separated from women's primary status as human beings whose right to equality derived from their humanity and should not be reduced by how that humanity was socially constructed.

Within a complex historical analysis on the doctrine of the *imago Dei*, the Vatican's International Theological Commission has stated: "The Bible lends no support to the notion of a natural superiority of the masculine over the feminine sex. Their differences

⁸² "Challenge to Women," *Age*, October 30, 1937, 19.

⁸³ Brennan, "Notes by the Way," *Woman's World*, March 1, 1935, 8, 42.

⁸⁴ Catherine Kaye, "The Catholic Outlook on Feminism," *Advocate*, July 12, 1951, 13.

⁸⁵ "Challenge to Women," *Age*, October 30, 1937, 19.

notwithstanding, the two sexes enjoy an inherent equality.”⁸⁶ It is acknowledged that there are many levels of biblical and theological discourse on this topic that are beyond the scope of this thesis. What is being affirmed is the essential orthodoxy of Brennan’s stance about women’s equality emanating from her religious paradigm. This orthodoxy is evident in a recent Apostolic Exhortation from Pope Francis where he states:

The equal dignity of men and women makes us rejoice to see old forms of discrimination disappear, and within families there is a growing reciprocity. If certain forms of feminism have arisen which we must consider inadequate, we must nonetheless see in the women’s movement the working of the Spirit for a clearer recognition of the dignity and rights of women.⁸⁷

In instances where women were essentially assuming a servile role, where there was no demonstration of equality, such as in having to adopt the nationality of a husband, Brennan’s religious paradigm provided a strong justification for activism. Her nephew, Niall Brennan wrote: “In an age when the Victorian way of life for a woman was highly discriminatory, Anna marched out and demanded her rights as a human being.”⁸⁸ A small section of a letter that Brennan wrote to Niall Brennan in 1952 indicates that she tenaciously held the view across her lifetime, within the paradigm of her religious worldview, that women’s equality and autonomy were intrinsic to their status as human beings.⁸⁹ This stance, Frank Brennan’s biographer argues, was a “combination of feminism and Catholicism.”⁹⁰

⁸⁶ International Theological Commission, “Communion and Stewardship: Human Persons Created in the Image of God,” n.36, 2004. Accessed online on 19 January 2017 at: www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/cti_documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20040723_communion-stewardship_en.html

⁸⁷ Pope Francis, *Amoris Laetitia*: Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation (Strathfield: St Pauls Publications, 2016), n. 54.

⁸⁸ Niall Brennan, “Feminism, women’s lib and so on,” *Advocate*, July 20, 1978, 9.

⁸⁹ Ryan, “Frank Brennan: A Political Biography,” 298.

⁹⁰ Ryan, “Frank Brennan: A Political Biography,” 298. This comment was made by Ryan with reference to a short extract from a letter by Anna Brennan to Niall Brennan on 26 September 1952.

Brennan was very aware of the struggles that women underwent to obtain certain rights in the past and she was critical of those women who did not self-identify as feminists but were the beneficiaries of greater opportunity. Writing in 1955 she declared:

When sometimes today I hear women, educated women, professional women, public women, saying light-heartedly, ‘I am not a feminist’, I would like to reply, ‘You are a little ungrateful, there is not one thing you have, your education, your salary, your freedom to use these things as you think fit, but has been handed to you by feminists, living and dead.’⁹¹

If one looks at certain papal pronouncements, the view of women promoted in the Catholic Church, was not always encouraging of the type of equality and social engagement, that Brennan seemed to promote.⁹² This apparent dissonance adds leverage to the importance of analysing women’s experience in a highly specific context. It is important that certain views on women’s role in society are not mistaken for what women actually did.⁹³ The situation beyond Australia is of interest in this regard. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Catholic women in some countries were actively involved in promoting a more expansive role and rights for women in society. Catholic women’s groups existed in Belgium, Italy, Austria, Ireland, Spain and France. These groups had a significant membership base.⁹⁴

In 1948, Brennan cited a reference to women, which she noted had only recently been made during an address to “organised women”, by Pope Pius XII: “Your own special role is to strive to make women more conscious of her sacred rights and duties; her influence on public opinion either in the course of daily relationships or on public bodies and on legislation, by the effective use of her privileges as a citizen.”⁹⁵ Given that she did not

⁹¹ “Miss Anna Brennan Says: The Feminist Demands Not Only Rights, But Responsibilities,” *Tribune*, August 11, 1955, 1.

⁹² Richard Camp, “From Passive Subordination to Complementary Partnership: The Papal Conception of a Woman’s Place in Church and Society since 1878,” *Catholic Historical Review* 76, no. 3 (1990): 506-525.

⁹³ This is in accord with Kennedy’s thesis about the Catholic lay women’s organisations that she studied.

⁹⁴ Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950: A Political History* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000), 198-199.

⁹⁵ Brennan, “Vision of Fr. Lockington, Founder of Catholic Women’s Social Guild,” *Advocate*, November 4, 1948, 16. Pope Pius XII made a statement in 1947 expressing this viewpoint. Pope Pius XII, “Papal Directives for the Woman of Today,” (*Allocution to the Congress of the*

seem to make many references to papal statements, Brennan's decision to make reference to the one cited here, is indicative of what she wanted to promote with regard to the Church's support for the role of Catholic women as citizens. It also reflects Brennan's capacity to draw on the wisdom of her own tradition to assert her support for Catholic lay women to be active in public life as Catholics and as women.

Intersectionality

Some of the recent scholarship on intersectionality provides a framework for investigating the impact of Catholicism in Brennan's life in more detail with reference both to her own subjectivity and representations of her in the wider community. It provides a theoretical basis for honouring the various strands of Brennan's experience as it enables the multifaceted and variant dimensions of identity, to be held in concord with the changing nature of social reality. In particular, intersectionality provides a mechanism for giving due accord to religious affiliation, in concurrence with other elements of identity such as gender, race, ethnicity, and class. This is specifically relevant with regard to an investigation of Brennan's life, as her fidelity to Catholicism, was a principal component of her identity. It would not be satisfactory to refer to Catholicism simply as one descriptor of Brennan's identity but rather as the central paradigm of her life. From a theoretical perspective it is helpful to explore some elements of intersectionality as a means of appreciating the manifold nature of identity and how this can be connected to Brennan's life experience.

The awareness that gender, as an overarching classification, could not fully represent how all women experienced subjugation, has had a significant impact on feminist scholarship.⁹⁶ Even if the word intersectionality was not used, there was a prior recognition in feminist studies, of the many categories that shape identity.⁹⁷ Kimberlé Crenshaw utilised the idea of intersectionality, to articulate the impact of multiple levels

International Union of Catholic Women's Leagues, Rome, Italy, September 11, 1947). Accessed online 13 September 2018 at: www.ewtn.com/library/PAPALDOC/P12WOMAN.HTM The quote given by Brennan is a slightly different translation of the text referred to here.

⁹⁶ Anna Carastathis, "The Concept of Intersectionality in Feminist Theory," *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 5 (2014): 304.

⁹⁷ Leslie McCall, "The Complexity of Intersectionality," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 30, no. 3 (2005): 1771 at note 1; and Nina Lykke, *Feminist Studies: A Guide to Intersectional Theory. Methodology and Writing* (New York: Routledge, 2010), 75-76.

of discrimination in her analysis of aspects of the American legal system.⁹⁸ She also challenged feminist thinking that projected a homogeneity across women's experience which by an assumption of commonality, and transference of dominance, perpetuated patterns of exclusion.⁹⁹ It has been suggested that intersectionality is primarily a way of engaging in analysis and as such is shaped by specific contexts and the range of power dynamics that are operative.¹⁰⁰ There are many strands in the interchanges between identity and societal interaction and as such fixed categorisations of dominance or subservience do not adequately reflect the complexity of how power is asserted or resisted.¹⁰¹ Intersectionality has attracted a great deal of attention across a wide range of academic disciplines, with its potential to be expansive, accounting in part, for its popularity.¹⁰² An evaluation of the rise of intersectionality as a theory and an assertion of the need to maintain a critical faculty regarding its use, is evident in the relevant academic literature.¹⁰³

Initially the parameters of intersectional analysis were intended to focus on the principal structural causes of disparity.¹⁰⁴ However, as it provides a means of dealing with many interlocking realities, intersectionality is supportive of a feminist analysis that readily integrates the density and the incongruities that emerge in any focused analysis of social systems and how individuals navigate them.¹⁰⁵ In her investigation into the many aspects of identity in the life of the American activist for women's rights, Anna Howard Shaw, Trisha Franzen makes reference to how Crenshaw's insights on intersectionality can be applied. In particular she observes that intersectionality provides a means of incorporating

⁹⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1989 (1989):139-168.

⁹⁹ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex, 152-157.

¹⁰⁰ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 38, no. 4 (2013): 795.

¹⁰¹ Jennifer C. Nash, "Re-thinking Intersectionality," *Feminist Review* no. 89 (2008): 10-11.

¹⁰² Kathy Davis, "Intersectionality as Buzzword: A Sociology of Science Perspective on What Makes a Feminist Theory Successful," *Feminist Theory* 9, no. 1 (2008): 69.

¹⁰³ See for example: Maria Carbin and Sara Edenheim, "The Intersectional Turn in Feminist Theory: A Dream of a Common Language?" *European Journal of Women's Studies* 20, no. 3 (2013): 233-248.

¹⁰⁴ Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications and Praxis," 797.

¹⁰⁵ Davis, "Intersectionality as Buzzword," 79.

different elements of identity, not just as a listing, but with reference to how these elements are connected and evolve in relationship to each other.¹⁰⁶

It is possible to acknowledge the specific context of intersectionality's genesis and to extend the field of inquiry, without losing the essence of its contribution. It has been noted that marginalisation does not need to be the only determinant of whether intersectionality can be used theoretically to investigate the complex dynamics operative within social systems.¹⁰⁷ Crenshaw herself asserts that given the overarching dynamics of power, intersectionality was not conceptualised in a static sense.¹⁰⁸ Considering that intersectionality was premised on providing for greater inclusivity it would seem reasonable to extend the catchment of its theoretical net.¹⁰⁹ This is particularly relevant in promoting the case for religion to be more fully incorporated, as a strand of analysis, within an intersectional framework. Jakeet Singh has pointed out that as intersectionality is premised on an appreciation of the many constituent elements of experience it would seem appropriate for religion to be more prominent in intersectional studies.¹¹⁰

The term religion can refer to personal devotional practice right through to the operation and management of institutional entities.¹¹¹ The difference between the definition of religion and the concept of religion is very important as an appreciation of the latter can arise from contextual analysis beyond notional abstractions.¹¹² Also, as a field of inquiry, religion needs to be exposed to the demands of deconstruction and not isolated from other

¹⁰⁶ Trisha Franzen, "Singular Leadership: Anna Howard Shaw, Single Women and the US Woman Suffrage Movement," *Women's History Review* 17, no. 3 (2008): 432.

¹⁰⁷ Hae Yeon Choo and Myra Marx Ferree, "Practicing Intersectionality in Sociological Research: A Critical Analysis of Inclusions, Interactions, and Institutions in the Study of Inequalities," *Sociological Theory* 28, no. 2 (2010): 133.

¹⁰⁸ Kimberlé Crenshaw, "Postscript," in *Framing Intersectionality: Debates on a Multi-Faceted Concept in Gender Studies*, eds. Helma Lutz, Maria Teresa Herrera Vivar and Linda Supik (Farnham, GB: Ashgate, 2012), 230-231.

¹⁰⁹ Devon W. Carbado et.al., "Intersectionality: Mapping the Movements of a Theory," *Du Bois Review: Social Science Research on Race* 10, no. 2 (2013): 305-306.

¹¹⁰ Jakeet Singh, "Religious Agency and the Limits of Intersectionality," *Hypatia* 30, no. 4 (2015): 657-658.

¹¹¹ Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan, "Introduction: Beyond the 'Religious Turn'? Past, Present and Future Perspectives in Gender History," in *Sex, Gender and the Sacred: Reconfiguring Religion in Gender History*: eds. Joanna de Groot and Sue Morgan, Gender and History Special Issue Book Series, (Chichester, England: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 1.

¹¹² Linda Woodhead, "Five Concepts of Religion," *International Review of Sociology* 21, no. 1 (2011): 121-122.

spheres of analysis.¹¹³ Regardless of the level of an individual's church attendance, the world view and total cultural ambience that is developed around a religion, highlights how important it is that religion is included in an examination of identity.¹¹⁴ In her study of the Anglican Mothers' Union in Sydney, for example, Anne O'Brien has commented on the importance of paying attention to the role of religion in this regard.¹¹⁵

Any investigation of how gender is constructed is incomplete if attention is not paid to the influence of religion. This is not necessarily with regard just to individual allegiance but with reference to the broader sociological impact of religion. Therefore, what is understood by both "gender" and "religion" needs to be subjected to an appreciation of how reality can be constructed and the challenge to the supremacy of a perceived objectivity.¹¹⁶ As there is a high degree of connection or "embeddedness" between religion and gender, the complexity of this mutually impacting process needs to be acknowledged.¹¹⁷ The discussion about the significance of religion in Sojourner Truth's speech ('Ain't I a woman?) reflects the import of acknowledging the connections and tensions around the whole subject of religion in certain aspects of feminist discourse.¹¹⁸ Therefore, being alert to the many ways that gender and religion are enmeshed is significant in analysing the place of religion in an intersectional analysis.

When the dominant discourse emphasises a secular construct of society, religion can be relegated to the periphery of academic analysis.¹¹⁹ A separation within a discipline can

¹¹³ Tina Beattie, "Religious Identity and the Ethics of Representation: the Study of Religion and Gender in the Secular Academy," in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (London: Continuum, 2005), 65, 68.

¹¹⁴ Judith Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 55.

¹¹⁵ Anne O'Brien, "Militant Mothers: Faith, Power, and Identity in the Mothers' Union in Sydney, 1896-1950," *Women's History Review* 9, no. 1 (2000): 36.

¹¹⁶ Anna-Katharina Höpflinger, Anne Lavanchy, and Janine Dahinden, "Introduction: Linking Gender and Religion," *Women's Studies* 41, no. 6 (2012): 624-625.

¹¹⁷ Ursula King, "General Introduction: Gender-Critical Turns in the Study of Religion," in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (London: Continuum, 2005), 3, 8.

¹¹⁸ Katrine Smiet, "Post/Secular Truths: Sojourner Truth and the Intersections of Gender, Race and Religion," *European Journal of Women's Studies* 22, no. 1 (2015): 7-21. The attribution to Sojourner Truth of the actual words in this title is contested. See Mary Beard, *Women and Power: A Manifesto*, (London: Profile Books, 2017), 24, 25. This contestation does not negate the essence of Smiet's argument about religion.

¹¹⁹ Sue Morgan, "Rethinking Religion in Gender History: Historiographical and Methodological Reflections," in *Gender, Religion and Diversity: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Ursula King and Tina Beattie (London: Continuum, 2005), 115.

also emerge so that there is a division between “secular” and “religious” feminisms.¹²⁰ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza has observed how the study of feminism has been limited by the perception that religion is outside the scope of the purely rational and is viewed primarily as an oppressive agent.¹²¹ As a result, the capacity for religion to be seen as a force for change has not been fully incorporated into feminist scholarship.¹²² With reference to Niamh Reilly’s insights, Fiorenza notes that the limitations of the binary of “secularism-religion” have been challenged from a postmodern stance.¹²³ This has led to certain scholars recognising a need for “rethinking secularism as a normative feminist principle.”¹²⁴ That Luce Irigaray has been able to work from within a religious framework to construct a new transformative feminist paradigm demonstrates that religion and feminism do not need to be polarised or dichotomised.¹²⁵ The absence of attention given to religion in women’s experience is shifting in what is referred to as the “postsecular turn.”¹²⁶ The involvement of women in so many aspects of religion globally, means that feminist scholarship needs to examine religion critically, but it also needs to acknowledge that religion is a highly valued component of the lived experience of many women.¹²⁷

From an intersectional standpoint, religion can be incorporated as an element of identity and in this sense intersectionality provides a mechanism for widening the field of feminist analysis. It can be argued that by limiting the definition of religion too narrowly, the critical element of personal experience is overlooked. The institutional, hierarchical and dogmatic components of religion are some of the more apparent faces of religion in a public sense but they cannot contain all the dimensions of faith and belief on a personal level. The understanding that spirituality is nurtured by many factors is of particular relevance when investigating the importance and significance of religion in the lives of

¹²⁰ Dawn Llewellyn and Marta Trzebiatowska, “Secular and Religious Feminisms: A Future of Disconnection?” *Feminist Theology* 21, no. 3 (2013): 244-245.

¹²¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, *Transforming Vision: Explorations in Feminist The*logy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 12. (The word theology is written as the*logy in this text.)

¹²² Fiorenza, *Transforming Vision*, 12, 144.

¹²³ Fiorenza, *Transforming Vision*, 12.

¹²⁴ Niamh Reilly, “Rethinking the Interplay of Feminism and Secularism in a Neo-Secular Age,” *Feminist Review* no. 97 (2011): 8.

¹²⁵ Alison Jasper, “Feminism and Religion,” in *The Routledge Companion to Feminism and Postfeminism*, ed. Sarah Gamble (London: Routledge, 2001), 158-167. See 165-166 for the reference to Irigaray.

¹²⁶ Singh, “Religious Agency and the Limits of Intersectionality,” 658; and Rosi Braidotti, “In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism,” *Theory, Culture and Society* 25, no. 6 (2008): 1, 24.

¹²⁷ Fiorenza, *Transforming Vision*, 28.

women.¹²⁸ This is not to project a certain pious stereotype on to women but it is a means of widening the field of religious affiliation, so that the personal component of faith is accorded appropriate status. Although this is a very difficult area to assess, in a quantified manner, that does not justify a denial of its impact in the lives of both men and women.

There are three poems written by Brennan which depict the more devotional dimension of her religiosity and also mirror the affective as distinct from the doctrinal elements of her religious conviction. Whether it is a pensive reflection of the pilgrim traveller (“The Voyager”) or the impact of watching the Passion Play at Oberammergau (“White Butterflies”) or on dealing with suffering during a festive season (“Sursum Corda”), these poems reflect elements of the more interior dimension of Brennan’s spirituality.¹²⁹ They all contain an overtly religious element and provide a different angle into a denotation of Brennan as a Catholic woman. She was ardent in her expression of her faith as a basis for social action but it is also important to note the interiority of her faith commitment. The importance of the personal dimensions of experience, need to be fully integrated into the discourse, if religion as a component of historical analysis is not to be severely redacted.

By broadening the scope of how women are represented, so that resisting oppression is not the only determining framework, it is possible to pay closer attention to religion in discussions of women’s history.¹³⁰ A significant aspect of feminist history and the study of religion is the need to closely attend to women’s experience in order to recognise their “agentic” capacity.¹³¹ How gender is perceived by those outside a dynamic and how it is actually expressed in a context can challenge what constitutes passivity or subordination. Kelsy Burke includes Catholicism in her discussion of the various ways that women’s agency, in what is referred to as “gender-traditional religions”, can be analysed.¹³² It is relevant to this discussion on religion and intersectionality to note that how agency is manifest cannot be universalised but always needs to be contextualised. Of particular interest is how women working within certain structures may seem to be oppressed by

¹²⁸ Tina Beattie, *New Catholic Feminism: Theology and Theory* (London: Routledge, 2006), 31.

¹²⁹ “The Voyager,” *Woman’s World*, September 1, 1930, 20; “White Butterflies,” *Woman’s World*, July 1, 1931, 6; and “Sursum Corda,” *Woman’s World*, December 1, 1934, 5.

¹³⁰ Jacqueline de Vries, “Rediscovering Christianity after the Postmodern Turn,” *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005): 137.

¹³¹ Kelsy Burke, “Women’s Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions: A Review of Four Approaches,” *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 2 (2012): 122-123.

¹³² Burke, “Women’s Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions,” 122.

those who are operating from a different paradigm.¹³³ In her discussion of the “Action Coalition of Muslim Women,” in Germany, Beverly Weber refers to the difficulty in discussing “faith in intersectionality” when agency is framed only with regard to “resistance”.¹³⁴ It can be very limiting to make certain assumptions about what constitutes autonomy.¹³⁵ A woman who chooses a style of dress, such as the veil, can be seen as either devoid of agency or extremely subversive.¹³⁶ These two interpretations of agency for women who choose to dress in a particular way, may not take into account the actual “religious motivations” which influence people to publicly proclaim their religious commitment.¹³⁷

A critical dimension regarding the interface between feminism and religious agency is to challenge the perception that the assertion of power is always one directional so that women operating in hierarchical structures are perceived or positioned as always resisting oppression. It is accepted that resistance might be a vital component of the dynamics that are operative in any religious organisation. Power is asserted in many ways and it should not be limited to notions of institutional leverage or hierarchical power.¹³⁸ Given the variants that become possible from an intersectional stance, an individual may value the totality of their spirituality, and this may hold greater meaning for her/him, than reacting to assertions of hierarchical governance. A personal allegiance to the depth and breadth of a religious affiliation can of itself be a very strong assertion of power and personal autonomy.

Biography and history

As this thesis focuses on one woman’s life experience, some aspects of the issues associated with the writing of historical biographies are discussed in the next section.

The challenges to understandings of objectivity that have arisen from “the linguistic or narrative turn” have had a significant impact on the relationship between history and

¹³³ Burke, “Women’s Agency in Gender-Traditional Religions,” 122, 129.

¹³⁴ Beverly Weber, “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith? Rethinking Intersectionality in German Feminisms,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 22, no. 1 (2015): 30.

¹³⁵ Weber, “Gender, Race, Religion, Faith? Rethinking Intersectionality in German Feminisms,” 31.

¹³⁶ Sirma Bilge, “Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance: An Intersectional Approach to the Agency of Veiled Muslim Women,” *Journal of Intercultural Studies* 31, no. 1 (2010): 14-20.

¹³⁷ Bilge, “Beyond Subordination vs. Resistance,” 21.

¹³⁸ Roy Kearsley, *Church, Community and Power* (Farnham, Surrey, England; Burlington, Vt: Ashgate, 2008), 85-111.

biography.¹³⁹ Notions of the biographer as the disengaged third party, have been strongly challenged by these epistemological and philosophical shifts. Ironically, certain modes of disclosure of self by the historian biographer may subtly and paradoxically reinforce contestable claims to objectivity.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, an even greater level of scrutiny is required to ensure that the interpretative nature of all texts is asserted. From a methodological perspective, this awareness of the contingent and constructed nature of knowledge is an important component of situating this work.

The influence of postmodernism is most evident in biographical writing where the experience and reactions of the one writing the account are included in the process of producing a text about another.¹⁴¹ The relationship between the biographer and the subject of a text as “auto/biography” has been clearly outlined by Liz Stanley.¹⁴² The connection between the writer and the subject of a text shapes the material that is produced.¹⁴³ Alert to the interplay of subjectivities, biographers can skilfully engage with and represent the experience of the subject of a study whilst ensuring that the writer’s interpretation does not supersede the voice of the subject.¹⁴⁴ A recent example of the immersion of the biographer in a text is noted by Judith Strong Albert who discusses Megan Marshall’s biography of Margaret Fuller, an influential nineteenth century American writer and promoter of women’s rights. In introducing Marshall as a biographer, Albert refers to Marshall’s use of Fuller’s first name and refers to a “combined Marshall/Fuller persona”.¹⁴⁵ How someone is named connotes many things.¹⁴⁶

In this thesis I have chosen to refer to Brennan by her surname. Besides observing the academic protocol of writing in what is regarded as a formal tone, this is also to signal to the reader that I am not generating a dialogical encounter between Brennan and myself.

¹³⁹ Alun Munslow, “History and Biography: An Editorial Comment,” *Rethinking History* 7, no. 1 (2003): 1; and José Miguel Sardica, “The Content and Form of ‘Conventional’ Historical Biography,” *Rethinking History* 17, no. 3 (2013): 386-387.

¹⁴⁰ Karen Halttunen, “Self, Subject, and the ‘Barefoot Historian’,” *Journal of American History* 89, no. 1 (2002): 24.

¹⁴¹ Rachel Morley, “Fighting Feeling: Re-thinking Biographical Praxis,” *Life Writing* 9, no. 1 (2012): 81-82.

¹⁴² Pauline Polkey, “Introduction” in Polkey, ed., *Women’s Lives into Print*, xiii.

¹⁴³ Long, *Telling Women’s Lives: Subject/Narrator/Reader/Text*, 118.

¹⁴⁴ Jenny Coleman, “Vested Interests: The Con Artist, the Historian, and the Feminist Biographer,” *A/b: Auto/Biography Studies* 25, no. 1 (2010): 22.

¹⁴⁵ Judith Strong Albert, “‘So Far As Can Be Known...’ A Commentary on Megan Marshall’s *Margaret Fuller: A New American Life*,” *Women’s Studies* 43, no. 4 (2014): 502-503.

¹⁴⁶ Coleman, “Vested Interests: The Con Artist, the Historian, and the Feminist Biographer,” 19-20.

If I had adopted a certain auto/biographical model, which endorsed the insertion of my own reflections on my experience of the process, I may have legitimately opted to remain on a first name basis with “Anna”. This process of examining what is signified by words can result in a circuitous discussion of linguistics and the multiple meanings that can be attributed to any word or nomenclature. Whatever strategies I have adopted, to produce this account of Brennan’s life, there is no claim being made that the methodologies employed ensure objectivity precisely because of the illusionary nature of assertions of objectivity. I want to declare unequivocally, the impact of intersubjectivity between Brennan, the text, the reader, and myself. I have chosen to be the gleaner of certain grains and while my insights point towards the storehouse of Brennan’s life I have only encountered some elements of the complexities of her life.

The “interpretative skills” that are employed become very important in the writing of historical biographies.¹⁴⁷ Presenting arguments for how a subject should be seen is an important component of the biographer’s task.¹⁴⁸ If this stance is adopted then there is the possibility of new and different perspectives emerging, which can be a very positive dynamic.¹⁴⁹ The articulation that one is presenting a particular insight into how someone can be represented, is a helpful means of constructing a representation which is open to dialogue and subsequent amendment. This rightfully dampens any claim of totality and embraces notions of provisionality.

The extent and type of reflexivity employed in writing a historical biography, is therefore an important issue, especially with regard to acknowledging and even affirming, the emotional impact that the process can have on the one authoring a biography.¹⁵⁰ It is helpful to note the distinction that Stanley makes between “analytical reflexivity” and “descriptive reflexivity”. The latter is where the biographer informs the reader of aspects of their own experience which is aimed at providing a level of transparency.¹⁵¹ In this regard I may state the common ground between my background and Brennan’s to indicate that I may share a similar worldview and hence may be more sympathetic to a certain interpretation of her life. Such declarations of association do not of themselves result in

¹⁴⁷ Alice Kessler-Harris, “Why Biography?” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 625-626.

¹⁴⁸ Susan Tridgell, “*Understanding Our Selves: The Dangerous Art of Biography*,” *European Connections*, vol. 12, ed. Peter Collier (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2004), 17, 46, 187.

¹⁴⁹ Tridgell, “*Understanding Our Selves*,” 131, 187.

¹⁵⁰ Rachel Morley, “Fighting Feeling: Re-thinking Biographical Praxis,” 81-90.

¹⁵¹ Stanley, “How Do We Know about Past Lives?” 19.

transparency. The idea of “stake inoculation” is very interesting in this context. A “stake inoculation” might be operating when a declaration of close connection to the subject of a study might serve to offset any potential perception of bias. This device can be utilised to claim a level of truth telling.¹⁵² What is required, according to Stanley’s standard of “analytical reflexivity”, is a transparent process of justification for a stance taken.¹⁵³ This is a much higher bar or level of reflexivity than simply stating a potential bias.

One of the reasons given for a negative view of biography and life writing within history is that the focus on the individual may not generate a sense of the wider societal setting.¹⁵⁴ In seeking to provide a comprehensive account of someone’s life, biographies can contain a lot of contextual information. It has been suggested that it is the specific merger of the individual’s life and the wider context that distinguishes the contribution of historical biography.¹⁵⁵ With reference to the work of Joan Scott and Patrick Joyce, Leigh Boucher calls for an extension of post-structuralist understandings in the writing of biographies.¹⁵⁶ He argues that all the ways an individual perceives and responds to a multiple number of social realities, which are all in a state of flux, means that the focus on an individual is revelatory but not fixed.¹⁵⁷ With regard to this thesis, for example, it is most helpful to discuss Brennan’s status as a single woman, when the relevant information about marriage and professional women in her times, is also outlined. This prevents an interpretive stance that risks rarefying what might actually have been normative or at least not exceptional.

In writing about the life of another person, the historian also needs to grapple with the particular notion of a “coherent” life.¹⁵⁸ Adherence to a particular ideology, social concern, or sense of personal destiny, may mean that some individuals do map out and

¹⁵² Christine Halse, “Writing/Reading a Life: the Rhetorical Practice of Autobiography,” *Auto/Biography* 14, no. 2 (2006): 103-105.

¹⁵³ Stanley, “How Do We Know about Past Lives?” 19.

¹⁵⁴ Tanya Evans and Robert Reynolds, “Introduction to this Special issue on Biography and Life-Writing,” *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012): 2.

¹⁵⁵ David Nasaw, “Introduction,” *American Historical Review* 114, no. 3 (2009): 574-575.

¹⁵⁶ Leigh Boucher, “Old Questions and ‘New Biography’: Labour Activism, William Murphy and Racialisation in 1880s Victoria,” *Australian Historical Studies* 43, no. 1 (2012): 90.

¹⁵⁷ Boucher, “Old Questions and ‘New Biography,’” 90, 94.

¹⁵⁸ Jo Burr Margadant, “Introduction: Constructing Selves in Historical Perspective,” in *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth-Century France* ed. Jo Burr Margadant (Berkeley, Calif.; London: University of California Press, 2000), 7. See also Nasaw, “Introduction,” 576. Nasaw refers to this section of Margadant’s text and to her insights on this aspect of biographical writing.

follow a specific path in life. In that sense there is a continuity and coherence about this component of such an individual's life. But in setting out to provide a biographical account of someone's life, it is necessary for the historian not to have a predetermined notion of coherence as normative, as this may prevent the vagaries of life being integrated alongside the significant milestones that might connote coherence. If the primary stance in writing a biography is a depiction of the subject according to the template of coherence, it is possible that what is produced sacrifices the ambiguity of experience for the sake of literary cohesion. Rather than trying to make the text fit the framework of coherence, the parameters of interpretation need to be flexible enough to reflect the unbounded nature of lived experience. Jo Burr Margadant says of the "new biography" that it does not aim to present some defining characteristic of an individual but acknowledges "that identities are mobile, contested, multiple constructions of the self and others that depend as much on context as any defining traits of character."¹⁵⁹

There are certain associations that can be made between the biographical task and some of the core insights of intersectionality. Intersectionality has the scope to enable a detailed analysis of gender as it establishes a means of investigating how gender is experienced alongside other aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality and most importantly in this study religion. The methodological shifts in the writing of historical biographies, especially in the dismantling of the idea of a "unified persona",¹⁶⁰ seem to be consistent with certain insights into intersectionality.¹⁶¹ The methodological issue is not just with regard to integrating multiple dynamics and power imbalances but a commitment to an epistemological framework that accepts the contingent nature of knowledge and all representations. Hence any knowing of others is always transitional. Intersectionality melds well with a biographical methodology that does not project coherence as normative but one that elucidates the multidimensional nature of identity and the incorporation of apparent or real dissonance.

¹⁵⁹ Margadant, 24.

¹⁶⁰ Margadant, 7.

¹⁶¹ See for example Davis, "Intersectionality as Buzzword," 79.

Literature review

The emphasis in the following literature review is on the scholarship that situates Brennan's life as a lay Catholic woman within the various social, religious, economic and political forces that shaped her times.

Brennan's family background as the daughter of upwardly mobile Irish Catholics, her tertiary education and position in society as a post suffrage pioneering female lawyer, her status as a single woman and her networking across a number of sectors has generated many avenues of inquiry. The bookends of Brennan's life can be indexed by reference to the experience of post famine Irish emigrants and the various campaigns in Australia for women's rights. Brennan's life can also be read alongside the development of Catholic social teaching from 1891, when *Rerum Novarum* was promulgated, to the factors that led to the convocation of the Second Vatican Council in 1962.

Given that the Brennan family were Irish Catholics any examination of Brennan's life needs to be referenced to some of the prior investigations and representations of the Irish in Australia particularly with regard to women within the Irish Catholic community. The multi variant aspects of nationality, migration, religion and culture are apparent in many of the works associated with presentations and interpretations of the Irish in Australia.¹⁶² The studies that have unpacked the varied and nuanced images of the Irish and Irish women in the "diaspora" of the Irish, are especially relevant, as they underscore the importance of intersectionality.¹⁶³ A promotion of the capacity and resilience of Irish women needs to be incorporated into accounts of their collective representation.¹⁶⁴ Brennan's contribution to the development of Australian society, as a lay Catholic

¹⁶² For some general examples of the issues associated with "the Irish" in Australia and the need for a detailed examination of many factors associated with this see Neil Coughlan, "The Coming of the Irish to Victoria," *Historical Studies: Australia and New Zealand* 12, no. 45 (1965): 68-86; Geoffrey Bolton, "The Irish in Australian Historiography," in *Australia and Ireland 1788-1988: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Colm Kiernan (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1986), 1-19; Chris McConville, *Croppies, Celts and Catholics: The Irish In Australia* (Caulfield East, Vic.: Edward Arnold, 1987); Patrick O'Farrell, *The Irish In Australia: 1788 to Present*, 3rd ed. (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2000); and John Wright, *Undaunted: The Irish in Australia* (Dublin: The History Press Ireland, 2012). For an example of the complexity around perceptions of collective identity see Donal Lowry, "The Crown, Empire Loyalism and the Assimilation of Non-British White Subjects in the British World: An Argument against 'Ethnic Determinism'," *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 31, no. 2 (2003): 96-120.

¹⁶³ Dianne Hall and Elizabeth Malcolm, "Diaspora, Gender and the Irish," *Australasian Journal of Irish Studies* 8 (2008/2009): 3-29; and Pauline Rule, "Women and Marriage in the Irish Diaspora in Nineteenth-century Victoria," *Australasian Journal of Irish Studies* 8 (2008/2009): 48-66.

¹⁶⁴ Hall and Malcolm, "Diaspora, Gender and the Irish," 21.

woman, is best understood in the context of the scholarship that promotes a highly nuanced appreciation of how race, ethnicity, religion and gender are all interwoven in discussions of identity. Some of the assumptions about class, religion and politics in Australia, have been examined, to indicate subtle but important interpretations that challenge notions of homogeneity or simplistic categorisation.¹⁶⁵

For women's suffrage to be realised a high degree of collective action was essential. This meant that certain women and organisations developed a profile which has provided historians with a context for writing about the history of the women's movement in Australia. Consequently, many issues associated with the role of women in the newly federated nation of Australia, have been examined within the ambit of the various campaigns for women's suffrage. The Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was one of the main organisations in the suffrage campaigns and its membership was essentially drawn from women in the Protestant churches.¹⁶⁶

Audrey Oldfield's research indicates that few Catholic women were active in the suffrage organisations in Australia. Significantly, as Oldfield observes, there was a range of views about suffrage in the Catholic Church in Australia. Most importantly she notes that what may be stated publicly does not transfer to being a testament of the thoughts of those in the pews.¹⁶⁷ The most notable Catholic suffragists were Annie and Belle Golding and their married sister Kate Dwyer, who all lived in New South Wales.¹⁶⁸ Kate Deverall states that: "The Golding sisters were something of a rarity within the suffrage movement. They were not Protestant, nor were they upper-middle class."¹⁶⁹ As Catholic women in

¹⁶⁵ Judith Brett, "Class, Religion and the Foundation of the Australian Party System: A Revisionist Interpretation," *Australian Journal of Political Science* 37, no. 1 (2002): 39-56; Brett, "The Sectarian Foundations of Australian Liberalism," *The Sydney Papers*, 14, no. 3 (2002): 160, 168-175; and Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class: From Alfred Deakin to John Howard* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 35-56.

¹⁶⁶ Anthea Hyslop, "Christian Temperance and Social Reform: The Woman's Christian Temperance Union of Victoria, 1887-1912," in *Women Faith and Fetes: Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, ed. Sabine Willis (Melbourne: Dove Communications, in Association with the Australian Council of Churches (New South Wales), Commission on Status of Women, 1977), 48.

¹⁶⁷ Audrey Oldfield, *Woman Suffrage in Australia: A Gift or a Struggle* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 182. My own survey of some relevant sections in two Catholic newspapers, the *Tribune* and the *Advocate*, also indicates that there was a range of views on suffrage.

¹⁶⁸ Laura Rademaker, "'A Miserable Sectarian Spirit': Sectarianism and the Women's Movement in Early Twentieth-Century New South Wales," *Labour History*, no. 112 (2017): 176, 180-181; and Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005), 85.

¹⁶⁹ Kate Deverall, "They Did Not Know Their Place: The Politics of Annie Golding and Kate Dwyer," *Labour History* no. 87 (2004): 34.

Australia were not active in a collective capacity in the campaign for suffrage, they are not notably recorded in this aspect of the relevant historical accounts of women's history in Australia.

The significance of religion in women's lives is not very evident in the earlier literature on the women's movement in Australia.¹⁷⁰ Some attention has been paid to the impact of Protestant spirituality.¹⁷¹ The need for additional inquiry into the influence of religious affiliation on the aims of women in the suffrage and post suffrage movement in Australia was articulated by Patricia Grimshaw over twenty years ago.¹⁷² With regard to the influence of religion, in first wave feminism and beyond, Ellen Warne's investigation of Protestant women's organisations has redressed the gap considerably.¹⁷³

The absence of attention to the role of women has been a real limitation in the histories of the Catholic Church in Australia.¹⁷⁴ In 1975, Patrick and Deirdre O'Farrell summarizing "The Status of Women" in the Catholic Church in Australia noted that: "There has been no previous historical work on the role of women within the Australian Catholic Church."¹⁷⁵ Patrick O'Farrell's seminal work on the Catholic Church in Australia devotes a short section to outlining the "woman question" from various Catholic perspectives.¹⁷⁶ In a wide ranging study of Catholic and Protestant women in Australia, Anne O'Brien articulates how women developed a sense of "belonging" by their

¹⁷⁰ Sabine Willis, "Introduction" in *Women Faith and Fetes, Essays in the History of Women and the Church in Australia*, ed. Sabine Willis (Melbourne: Dove Communications, in Association with the Australian Council of Churches (New South Wales), Commission on Status of Women, 1977), 11. At note 9 on page 18 Willis lists the relevant earlier literature.

¹⁷¹ Judith Smart, "Modernity and Mother-Heartedness: Spirituality and Religious Meaning in Australian Women's Suffrage and Citizenship Movements, 1890s-1920s," in *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race*, eds. Ian Christian Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall, and Philippa Levine (London: Routledge, 2000), 51-67.

¹⁷² Patricia Grimshaw, "In Pursuit of True Anglican Womanhood in Victoria, 1880-1914," *Women's History Review* 2, no. 3 (1993): 333.

¹⁷³ Ellen Warne, *Agitate, Educate, Organise, Legislate: Protestant Women's Social Action in Post-Suffrage Australia* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press/Publishing, 2017).

¹⁷⁴ For a discussion of the broader issues with regard to women and religion in Australian history see Roger C. Thompson, "Women and the Significance of Religion in Australian History," *Australian Historical Studies* 27, no. 108 (1997): 118-125; and Anne O'Brien, "Sins of Omission? Women in the History of Australian Religion and Religion in the History of Australian Women. A Reply to Roger Thompson," *Australian Historical Studies* 28, no. 108 (1997): 126-133.

¹⁷⁵ Patrick O'Farrell and Deirdre O'Farrell, *The Status of Women: Some Opinions in Australian Catholic History c1860-c1960*, Bulletin of Christian Affairs, Special; no. 2 (Camberwell: Vic: Holy Name Press, 1975), 2.

¹⁷⁶ Patrick O'Farrell, *The Catholic Church and Community in Australia: A History*, 254-261.

connection to groups and that this was especially the case for Catholic women.¹⁷⁷ Brennan's capacity to interact across a range of groups within and beyond her own Church affiliation is very interesting in the context of O'Brien's research.

The papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum* is a foundational document of Catholic social teaching. The background and development of *Rerum Novarum*, especially in the European context, has been examined in detail.¹⁷⁸ The impact of this encyclical on the Church's social teaching within the Catholic community in Australia, in the first decades of the twentieth century, has also been investigated.¹⁷⁹ Ursula Bygott's analysis of the role of the Jesuits in promoting Catholic social teaching in Victoria helps to situate Brennan's appreciation of the need to look to the causes of social disadvantage.¹⁸⁰

There was a robust intellectual and activist culture, in a section of the Catholic lay community in Melbourne, prior to the arrival of Archbishop Mannix in 1913.¹⁸¹ An acknowledgement of this Catholic milieu provides a basis for arguing that Brennan's engagement in social reform was not atypical, given the specific style of Catholic lay life that was present in the Catholic world that she inhabited, from her university days onwards. What did emerge across Brennan's lifetime was the increased involvement of certain women in a range of roles within the Catholic community. Kennedy's emphasis on the role of Catholic lay women in Australia opened up new avenues in Australian Catholic historiography but scholarship in this particular area has not been abundant since her work was published.¹⁸²

¹⁷⁷ Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005), 83.

¹⁷⁸ For some examples of these works see Paul Misner, "The Predecessors of *Rerum Novarum* Within Catholicism," *Review of Social Economy* 49, no. 4 (1991): 444-464; A.M.C. Waterman, "The Intellectual Context of *Rerum Novarum*," *Review of Social Economy* 49, no. 4 (1991): 465-482; and John Molony, *The Worker Question: A New Historical Perspective on Rerum Novarum* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1991).

¹⁷⁹ Colin Jory, *The Champion Society and Catholic Social Militancy in Australia, 1929-1939* (Sydney: Harpham, 1986); and Bruce Duncan, *The Church's Social Teaching: From Rerum Novarum to 1931* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1991).

¹⁸⁰ Ursula Bygott, *With Pen and Tongue: The Jesuits in Australia 1865-1939* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1980).

¹⁸¹ Morgan, *Melbourne Before Mannix*. Morgan's study refers to this active lay leadership. Mannix's arrival in 1913 is noted on page 148.

¹⁸² Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*. For an example of how Catholic lay women in America have been omitted in historical accounts see Jeanne Petit, "'Organized Catholic Womanhood': Suffrage, Citizenship and the National Council of Catholic Women," *U.S. Catholic Historian* 26, no. 1 (2008): 84-86.

In recent decades, considerable attention has been given, to the writing of the histories of female religious orders in Australia.¹⁸³ The studies that have been undertaken about women religious are helpful in contrasting how a single woman like Brennan, who did not have the confines and supports of a religious community, chose a collaborative mode of engaging with other women's groups. Nevertheless, the promotion of Catholic lay women does require greater attention specifically with regard to those who did not enter religious life but arguably attached a vocational dimension to their professional lives.

Naomi Turner has written a comprehensive account of the social history of the Catholic community in Australia.¹⁸⁴ It provides an overview of many topics with an evident commitment to women's issues. The many ways in which gender intersects with the formation of specific groups in faith communities, is very relevant to this thesis. Katharine Massam's enquiry into various aspects of spirituality in the Catholic community in Australia (particularly as it was expressed in Western and South Australia) pays close attention to the gendered experience and expressions of Catholic faith.¹⁸⁵

Although central to the worldview that has shaped many lives, the influence or absence of religion and spirituality is only relatively recently gaining more attention in Australian women's history.¹⁸⁶ There is a growing momentum around the intersection of women and religion and the continued integration of theological and feminist analysis.¹⁸⁷ The developing academic interest in the importance of religion as a critical component of women's experience is typified by Saba Mahmood's text, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*.¹⁸⁸ Although a detailed analysis of the context that Mahmood is writing about is beyond the scope of this study, her articulation of the

¹⁸³ Stephanie Burley, "An Overview of the Historiography of Women Religious in Australia," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 26, (2005): 43-60.

¹⁸⁴ Naomi Turner, *Catholics in Australia: A Social History*, vols. 1 and 2 (Blackburn, Vic.: Collins Dove, 1992).

¹⁸⁵ Katharine Massam, *Sacred Threads: Catholic Spirituality in Australia 1922-1962* (Sydney: NSW University Press, 1996). In her introductory comments, Massam noted the need for more research on the role of the laity in the Catholic community. (See page 5 of the Introduction.)

¹⁸⁶ Margaret Allen, Sandra Stanley Holton and Alison Mackinnon, "Women, Religion and Citizenship: Intersections," *Australian Feminist Studies* 13, no. 28 (1998): 195-198.

¹⁸⁷ As an example of this shift see Jacqueline De Vries, "Rediscovering Christianity after the Postmodern Turn," *Feminist Studies* 31, no. 1 (2005):135-155; Kathleen McPhillips, "In This Southern Land: Gender, Nation, and Saint-Making in Australia," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 29, no. 1 (2013): 34-35; and Dawn Llewellyn and Marta Trzebiatowska, "Secular and Religious Feminisms: A Future of Disconnection?" 244-258.

¹⁸⁸ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, c2005).

importance of women's religious autonomy, is of great relevance to the topics it explores.¹⁸⁹ Therefore, the inclusion of an analysis of Brennan's life, to this field of inquiry, is timely.

Many members of the Brennan family gained professional standing similar to that explored in Janet McCalman's study of education in the upward mobility of certain groups in Victoria and it pertains to Irish Catholics as well as Protestants.¹⁹⁰ These insights are of considerable importance, when one looks at the impact of education, in Brennan's life. A reassessment of certain ideas about the links between class and religion in Australia supports the view that the total cultural milieu associated with a religion is a key determinant of political allegiance rather than class alone.¹⁹¹ The life choices of university educated women are very apposite when examining Brennan's life.¹⁹² Her status as a single professional woman can be placed within the ambit of those studies which have examined what singleness might have meant for women in various times and contexts.¹⁹³ The biographies of Rose Scott and Vida Goldstein both reflect the importance of situating the study of an individual against the backdrop of wider social factors.¹⁹⁴

Some analysis has been undertaken of the common issues and differences with regard to the factors that were supportive and or obstructive as women sought to train and then practise as lawyers. Mary Jane Mossman's comparative study refers to several

¹⁸⁹ For a critique of Mahmood's text see Sindre Bangstad, "Saba Mahmood and Anthropological Feminism after Virtue," *Theory Culture and Society* 28, no. 3 (2011): 28-54.

¹⁹⁰ Janet McCalman, *Journeyings: The Biography of a Middle-Class Generation 1920-1990* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

¹⁹¹ Brett, *Australian Liberals and the Moral Middle Class*, 55.

¹⁹² Alison Mackinnon, "'Nowhere to plant the sole of the foot?': Women, University Education and Subjectivity in the Early Twentieth Century," *Melbourne Studies in Education* 47, nos. 1-2 (2006): 269-292; and Mackinnon, "'The Keystone of the Arch': University Education and the Leadership of Early Women Graduates," in *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities* eds. Rosemary Francis, Patricia Grimshaw, and Ann Standish, (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2012), 213-222.

¹⁹³ Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (London: Virago, 1985); Katie Holmes, "'Spinsters Indispensable': Feminists, Single Women and the Critique of Marriage, 1890-1920," *Australian Historical Studies* 29, no. 110 (1998): 68-90; Alison Oram, "Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World? The Spinster in Inter-war Feminist Discourses," *Women's History Review* 1, no. 3 (1991): 413-433; Moira Martin, "Single Women and Philanthropy: a Case Study of Women's Associational Life in Bristol, 1880-1914," *Women's History Review* 17, no. 3 (2008): 395-417; and Majorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (Melbourne: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9-29, 55-91.

¹⁹⁴ For Rose Scott see, Judith Allen, *Rose Scott: Vision and Revision in Feminism* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1994) and for Vida Goldstein see Janette M. Bomford, *That Dangerous And Persuasive Woman: Vida Goldstein* (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 1993).

jurisdictions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.¹⁹⁵ Her exposition of the commonalities of women's experience also highlights that greater analysis of the particular issues that were operative in individual contexts is required.¹⁹⁶ Mossman does not go into much detail regarding the experience of the first Australian women lawyers.¹⁹⁷ Her comparative study supports the rationale for an in-depth study of Brennan's life and times. Margaret Thornton has noted the positive outcomes for those women who had familial connections within the legal fraternity.¹⁹⁸ This thesis considers this issue of family solidarity, especially in the way it may have allowed Brennan to manage as a pioneer female lawyer and how this worked to alleviate the disadvantages faced by women entering a predominantly male profession. Brennan's own observations of her entry into the profession speak of an ease of reception. Whilst not negating the major obstacles that women faced, this study will also shed some light on those factors that made it possible for Brennan to pursue her career as a lawyer. *The Trailblazing Women and the Law Project*, which has been established to highlight the achievement of Australian women in the legal profession, provides a valuable context for situating Brennan's life and times in the wider context of women's experience as lawyers in Australia.¹⁹⁹

During Brennan's lifetime, the economic independence of women and various industrial campaigns for greater parity for women were very much a feature. In her recent discussion on leadership, Raelene Frances refers to the impact in the union movement, prior to World War II, of certain women from Irish and Irish Catholic backgrounds.²⁰⁰ Although Brennan was sympathetic to the industrial and employment problems faced by women, she was not associated with the unions in any organisational sense. A study of Brennan's life offers another insight into the various ways that women of a similar cultural and religious background engaged in this aspect of social reform. The different ways that women have

¹⁹⁵ Mary Jane Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers: A Comparative Study of Gender, Law and the Legal Professions* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2006).

¹⁹⁶ Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers*, 15-16, 278-279.

¹⁹⁷ Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers*, 155-190. In her chapter sub titled "Women Lawyers in the Colonies," Mossman concentrates on the New Zealand context and hence only a few pages refer to the Australian situation.

¹⁹⁸ Margaret Thornton, *Dissonance and Distrust: Women in the Legal Profession* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1996), 71.

¹⁹⁹ "The Trailblazing Women and the Law Project," (Australian National University and The University of Melbourne: Parkville, Vic.: eScholarship Research Centre, 2013) www.tbwl.esrc.unimelb.edu.au/

²⁰⁰ Raelene Frances, "Authentic Leaders: Women and Leadership in Australian Unions before World War II," *Labour History* no. 104 (2013): 16-17.

exercised leadership has emerged as a fruitful avenue of research.²⁰¹ The recent Australian studies, on the different forms of leadership amongst women, are allied to this thesis as Brennan exercised leadership in formal and informal ways.²⁰²

Marian Quartly and Judith Smart's recently published history of the National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA) provides critical insights into the issues of concern that were addressed by women through that organisation.²⁰³ The breadth of contextual information contained in this study provides a strong framework for referencing Brennan's connection to many of the campaigns for women's rights, adopted by the Council. As she was associated with the National Council of Women in Victoria (NCWV), from her university days onwards, this is of particular importance in examining Brennan's life. The loss of autonomy that married women experienced, with regard to their nationality, was a vexed issue for women's groups internationally for many decades in the twentieth century. The importance of this issue as feminist concern has been identified but not yet fully investigated.²⁰⁴ Quartly and Smart's synthesis of the issues, with regard to the NCWA, has provided an invaluable basis for analysing Brennan's commitment to reform in this area.²⁰⁵

The transnational and supportive component of women's organisations in the twentieth century has been the subject of much fruitful study.²⁰⁶ As it was mostly elite women who could engage at this level of advocacy, due to the costs and time involved in travel, the active members of these organisations were more reflective of elite racial, religious, and class groupings.²⁰⁷ Brennan's professional life and group affiliations meant that she became part of these circles of influence. Her active involvement in the Victorian section

²⁰¹ For example see: Wendy Dick, "'Vigorous-Minded and Independent': Ellen Mulcahy as a Labour Leader," *Labour History* no. 104 (2013): 32-34.

²⁰² Rosemary Francis, Patricia Grimshaw, and Ann Standish, eds. *Seizing the Initiative: Australian Women Leaders in Politics, Workplaces and Communities* (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre, University of Melbourne, 2012), and Fiona Davis, Nell Musgrove, and Judith Smart, eds. *Founders, Firsts and Feminists: Women Leaders in Twentieth-century Australia* (Melbourne: eScholarship Research Centre; University of Melbourne, 2011).

²⁰³ Marian Quartly and Judith Smart, *Respectable Radicals: A History of the National Council of Women of Australia 1896-2006* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing/National Council of Women of Australia, 2015).

²⁰⁴ Ellen DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," in *Globalizing Feminisms 1789-1945*, ed. Karen Offen (London; Routledge, 2010), 204-216.

²⁰⁵ Quartly and Smart, *Respectable Radicals*, 113-117, 193-199.

²⁰⁶ Leila Rupp, *Worlds of Women: The Making of an International Women's Movement* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1997).

²⁰⁷ Rupp, *Worlds of Women*, 48-57.

of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, from 1936 onwards, situates her as a woman who operated in this transnational context. There is an additional layer of the transnationalism inherent in the Catholicity of Catholicism.

Much of the history of lay Catholic involvement in social justice concerns in Australia centres on the activism and the political agendas which eventually led to the division in the Australian Labor Party in 1955.²⁰⁸ The factors that shaped the expression of lay leadership in "Catholic Action" in Australia and the related controversies that were to have such a major impact in Australian politics, indicate that there are many ways of interpreting active citizenship and the divisions between Church and State.²⁰⁹ The scholarship in this area focuses primarily on the Catholic men who were at the forefront of action in the years leading to the "Split" in the Labor Party. As a study which highlights a woman's experience as an agent of social justice, which encompasses this timeframe, this thesis provides a perspective from a different standpoint.

The highly specific contribution that this study makes is to address the occlusion that exists with regard to how Catholic lay women encountered and shaped the women's movement in Australia. This study concentrates on one woman's experience but the focus on her expansive networking and engagement in social issues reveals much about the world around her. In particular, Brennan's ability to navigate certain sectarian tensions highlights the importance of promoting women's experience in counter poise to a reading of Catholic history from an institutional or mono gendered dimension. Given the developing interest in the impact of religion and spirituality in the writing of women's history in Australia, it is hoped that a representation of Brennan's life indicates that this is a rich field of inquiry.

²⁰⁸ Hilary Carey et al., "Australian Religion Review, 1980-2000, Part 2: Christian Denominations," *Journal of Religious History* 25, no. 1 (2001): 66. For an integrated summary of where a range of Catholic historical interests has been incorporated into the field see J.D. Bollen et al., "Australian Religious History, 1960-1980," *Journal of Religious History* 11, no. 1 (1980): 8-44.

²⁰⁹ Bruce Duncan, *Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the Anti-Communist Struggle in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2001).

Chapter 2

“A Perfectly Free Agent”²¹⁰

Niall Brennan referred to his aunt (Anna Brennan) and women like her, as “emancipated spinster[s].”²¹¹ The relative weight that needs to be given to her status as a spinster and her commitment to the emancipation of women is an important question. This chapter will contextualise Brennan’s status as a woman who remained single and show how aspects of her familial life provided a supportive structure for her entry and long-term career as a lawyer. The broader issues associated with the status of single professional women and Brennan’s integration into the legal community will be referred to in the context of Leonore Davidoff’s insights into the positive impact of sibling supports.²¹² What becomes evident is that there can be no single meaning to being single.

The Law as a career for women

Reflecting her sense of women’s fundamental human dignity and right to equality Brennan wrote in 1933 that:

An adult woman is a perfectly free agent—subject to the laws of morality and the dictates of conscience—in the ordering of her own life. To deny this is to impose on her the status of slavery.²¹³

Brennan demonstrated that she was “a perfectly free agent” and she was clear from an early age that she wanted to pursue a profession.²¹⁴ Implied in this was an acceptance that the long term commitment to such a career was probably not consonant with marriage. Therefore, Brennan’s singleness can be viewed as an assertion of personal power based on choice rather than a default stance. If in the hierarchy of life choices, her commitment to a professional career was the primary force, then she can be seen as one who has chosen

²¹⁰ Brennan, “A Far Voice,” *Catholic Citizen*, September, 1933, 71.

²¹¹ Niall Brennan, *Dr Mannix* (Adelaide, S.A.: Rigby Limited, 1964), 310.

²¹² Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Davidoff, “Kinship as a Categorical Concept: A Case Study of Nineteenth Century English Siblings,” *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 411-428.

²¹³ Brennan, “A Far Voice,” 71.

²¹⁴ Brennan, “Need of University Training for Women,” *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

knowingly. It is not accurate to infer from this that Brennan's life as a single woman constituted a disregard for marriage indeed it is evident from her work on divorce and the nationality of married women that she placed a very high value on the importance of marriage. She also acknowledged that members of the public were often threatened and critical of women studying law partly because their devotion to a career appeared to displace a commitment to married life.

An interesting nuance to Brennan's awareness of how female lawyers might be perceived in the wider community is suggested in a short story that she wrote for the *Melbourne University Magazine* in 1908 which was titled, "Man Proposes".²¹⁵ This endearing passage tells of the development of a romantic relationship between two university students. The young man in question assumes that the woman he is pursuing is studying domestic economy and decides that she would make a suitable wife.²¹⁶ It is a source of great distress for him after his marriage proposal was well received, to discover that his beloved is a law student. The young man bemoans the problems that will beset him given the legal knowledge of his intended wife. This is evident in the phrase "there was an acid drop of bitterness in the reflection that she would probably know her exact chance of getting damages in a breach of promise action."²¹⁷ Although it is not wise to infer too many things from such a story, it is possible to see in it a clear sense of Brennan's awareness of how as a woman who chose to study law, she may have seemed threatening to others.

Certainly during her schooling, Brennan noted how a strong pursuit of a professional life was needed to counteract the disapproval of women with ambition in this regard. In 1917, whilst listing some of the reasons why so few Catholic women were undertaking higher education, Brennan commented:

And in my own limited experience I found that Catholic teachers
who became aware of my determination to undertake a profession

²¹⁵ A.T.B., "Man Proposes," *Melbourne University Magazine* vol. II, no. 3 (October, 1908): 81-82. (This story is signed A.T.B. which was how Brennan signed certain passages. Given that Brennan has indicated that she contributed to the magazine and also that she was a law student at the University of Melbourne at this time, it seems reasonable enough to assume that A.T.B. is Anna Teresa Brennan.)

²¹⁶ A.T.B., "Man Proposes," 81.

²¹⁷ A.T.B., "Man Proposes," 82.

regarded my action as anything between a bad joke and a serious aberration.²¹⁸

Brennan sensed some resistance to her aspirations to become a professional woman but her persistence in her quest indicates how highly she valued her autonomy and demonstrates something of her tenacity of spirit.

Brennan's entry into the legal profession was recorded as an item of interest in the press where she was anything from a "lady solicitor" to a "modern Portia."²¹⁹ In 1912 however, Brennan gave a talk at a meeting of the Australian Natives' Association, where she is recorded as being of the view that the entrance of women into the legal profession was well accepted, adding that as the law was so involved in many aspects of human experience it was of great interest.²²⁰ The fact that there was no approved dress code for female lawyers, when Brennan appeared as counsel in 1913, reflects the pioneering aspect of her professional life. A description of Brennan as "a summer girl in a shady hat," belies the seriousness with which she undertook her legal responsibilities.²²¹ At this stage she was thirty-four years of age, so hardly a "girl" of any season.

A certain pragmatic attitude is evident in an article written in 1912, inquiring into the reasons why Brennan undertook her career in law. This article makes it clear that she was disappointed not to be able to continue with her medical studies but also felt that she was well received as a woman lawyer. Her work provided her both with an income and enjoyment. Although women like Brennan are often noted for their pioneering role as professional women, she did not see herself as doing anything particularly noteworthy and regularly acknowledged that her family support was a factor in her being able to establish herself in her career.²²² Although her family story is one of upward mobility, Brennan would have needed to make a financial contribution to the family unit. In 1917, Brennan made a critical reference to the exaltation of "the woman who lives at ease on somebody

²¹⁸ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

²¹⁹ "Lady Solicitor," *Bathurst Times*, November 30, 1911, 2; and "Modern Portia," *Weekly Times*, December 27, 1913, 12. There are many similar items recorded in a number of newspapers about Brennan's entry into the legal profession.

²²⁰ "Law's Lighter Side," *Argus*, August 1, 1912, 15.

²²¹ "Modern Portia," *Weekly Times*, December 27, 1913, 12.

²²² "Exam. Funk.," *Northern Star*, May 11, 1912, 10.

else's money."²²³ Later in her life she stated that she "took up the law for the very unromantic reason that I had to make a living."²²⁴

In her analysis of female lawyers at the turn of the twentieth century Mossman identifies the various ways that women engaged in the legal community and observes that it was not usual for women to be married and to develop a legal career.²²⁵ As Brennan was able to take up employment in her brother Frank's law firm, she may have been shielded from some of the economic difficulties faced by those pioneers, who had to establish themselves independently.²²⁶ This familial assistance meant that Brennan had a level of economic security which resulted in her being able to develop her career. In this sense her single status would have become confirmed as her career developed rather than it being an interim stage of her life.

The single woman

In her study of single women in Canada, Jenéa Tallentire, highlights the importance of examining marital status, providing an additional layer of inquiry to the other categories that can be drawn on to discuss women's experience.²²⁷ The person that Brennan was cannot be encapsulated by referring to her simply as a woman or a single woman but a woman practising her profession, connecting with her many clubs and associations, a family member, a devout Catholic and an advocate for social reform.²²⁸ Brennan's "singleness" is a significant descriptor of her life but it needs to be understood alongside the many other dimensions of her identity and her experience.

An appreciation of the impact of emigration on a post famine Irish Catholic family adds another tier to an analysis of Brennan's life. The impact of the factors that lead people to emigrate can result in a strong awareness of the need for mutual support within a family

²²³ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 10.

²²⁴ "Woman Celebrates 50 Years in Law," *Age*, August 1, 1961.

²²⁵ Mossman, "'The Law as a Profession for Women': A Century of Progress?" *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 30, no. 1 (2009): 134-138.

²²⁶ For examples of the difficulties faced by some of the first female lawyers in a number of countries see Mossman, "'The Law as a Profession for Women': A Century of Progress?" 131-145.

²²⁷ Jenéa Tallentire, "'The Ordinary Needs of Life': Strategies of Survival for Single Women in 1901 Victoria," *BC Studies* no. 159 (2008): 45-80.

²²⁸ Richard Ely has also noted a range of descriptors for Brennan. Richard Ely, "Anna Brennan: Armistice Day at Port Arthur. -Includes text of her essay: Peace at Port Arthur, originally published in *The Argus* (Melbourne) 7 Dec 1918-." In *Papers and Proceedings: Tasmanian Historical Research Association* (Papers and Proceedings) 39, no. 2 (June 1992): 83.

unit.²²⁹ Both of Brennan's parents seem to fit the mould of the emigrant willing to endure much hardship in search of a better standard of living. What becomes of interest here is the model of family that may have influenced Anna Brennan's life choice. As the daughter of post-famine emigrants she would have had an awareness of the impact of scarcity.²³⁰ As a white, educated woman she was to become part of an elite circle. As individuals engage in life across a spectrum of categories any representation of them must acknowledge this constellation of connections.²³¹ Therefore, unpacking what singleness may have meant to Brennan is one among many foci in a representation of her life.

Singleness might never have been not majoritarian but nor has it ever been exceptional. In various times and circumstances a significant number of women have never married.²³² O'Farrell observed that many women within the urban colonial Irish community in Australia, especially those who were "better off" did not marry.²³³ In a different context, Timothy Guinnane has shown that not marrying was a pattern across Europe for centuries.²³⁴ For some women certain struggles for social reform may have involved a decision to remain single.²³⁵ Although it was not without precedence for women to remain single, it has become the focus of much attention with regard to women's life choices at certain times in history. This was true of the era in which Brennan lived. How women who have never married are perceived is important as it often says much about various other aspects of women's status in the wider community. With reference to Joan Scott's work on the changeability of meaning and the interdependence of categories, Katherine Holden states that "the meanings of singleness are in a dialogue with the meanings of marriage, with each category shifting in relation to the other in response to wider societal change."²³⁶ In a reflexive sense a vital question that has emerged in this thesis is whether

²²⁹ Timothy Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration, and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850-1914* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1997), 285.

²³⁰ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 7.

²³¹ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920*, 6.

²³² Holmes, "'Spinsters Indispensable,'" 70; and Martha Vicinus, "The Single Woman; Social Problem or Social Solution?" *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 2 (2010): 192.

²³³ O'Farrell, *The Irish in Australia: 1788 to Present*, 152.

²³⁴ Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish*, 235.

²³⁵ Vicinus, "The Single Woman; Social Problem or Social Solution?" 200.

²³⁶ Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-60*, Gender in History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 6.

or not even the discussion of Brennan's singleness operates to situate the single state in contrast to marriage rather than an intrinsically valid life choice.

Given the context of Brennan's life and times, the synopsis of some of the scholarship on single women that is referred to here, pertains to women within her cohort of the community. It is not presumed that this represents the experience of other women outside this stratum. A university education could provide women with options other than that of marriage and domestic life.²³⁷ A connection has been made between the higher education of women and increased rates of singleness.²³⁸ Likewise, the importance of bodily autonomy and its link to economic independence has been emphasised.²³⁹ Women who had some economic security were the focus of some of the previous scholarship on single woman.²⁴⁰ In discussing various views on the spinster in the Australian context, 1890-1920, Katie Holmes states that "for white women with sufficient income and no dependents, [sic] singleness offered freedom."²⁴¹ This appreciation of the freedom that single women could enjoy has also been observed with regard to the situation in England and the United States.²⁴² It has been suggested that some feminists tried to show how the autonomy of married women could also be heightened by reference to what single women achieved.²⁴³

Single women have been regarded in a negative or positive light according to the dominant social issues of the time. In her analysis of women and marriage in Britain after the Great War, Holden outlines how the spectre of the war gave credence to the idea if it had not

²³⁷ Alison Mackinnon, "Nowhere to Plant the Sole of the Foot?": Women, University Education and Subjectivity in the Early Twentieth Century," *Melbourne Studies in Education* 47, nos. 1 and 2 (2006): 277.

²³⁸ Carole Hooper, "The University of Melbourne's First Female Students," *Victorian Historical Journal* 81, no. 1 (2010):107-108. Hooper's study refers to the period 1871-1901 but her observations, in the context of Brennan's timeframe, would still seem to be relevant. Hooper's findings are consistent with the pattern evident in similar studies of university women. See Mackinnon, "Nowhere to Plant the Sole of the Foot?" 273. For the broader context with regard to the higher education of women, see Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom: Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 76-116.

²³⁹ Holmes, "'Spinsters Indispensable,'" 74.

²⁴⁰ Kay Whitehead, "The Spinster Teacher in Australia from the 1870s to the 1960s," *History of Education Review* 36, no. 1 (2007): 1.

²⁴¹ Holmes, "'Spinsters Indispensable,'" 87.

²⁴² Ruth Freeman and Patricia Klaus, "Blessed or Not? The New Spinster in England and the United States in the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries," *Journal of Family History* 9, no. 4 (Winter 1984): 394-414.

²⁴³ Holmes, "'Spinsters Indispensable,'" 84.

been for the war more women would have married.²⁴⁴ In other words remaining single was not viewed as a valid option but as a tragic consequence of the war. The perception, as distinct from the reality, that more women would have married if it had not been for the war, acted to reinforce marriage as normative. This notion also led to the spinster being viewed in a sympathetic light.²⁴⁵ In certain situations when a significant number of women were seen to be choosing singleness over marriage anxieties arose and a stronger promotion of marriage as normative became evident. The spinster then became the object of a type of ridicule that was far from innocuous.²⁴⁶ Where women were seen to have accepted their single lot, because of the need to care for family members, their non-married status was not seen as so threatening. The implication was that they were single out of sense of familial duty and not by choice. By becoming teachers and nurses single women could also offset some of the perceived negatives of singleness because of the service components of these roles.²⁴⁷ In counter-poise to this vocational sense, Martha Vicinus refers to some historians who have noted that whilst single women were very evident in the “helping professions” they have assumed other “businesses” beyond those roles that were seen as “nurturing”.²⁴⁸

In her examination of how unmarried women were viewed in Australia in the 1920s and the 1930s, Catriona Elder pays close attention to the freedom of the young single white girl who might work prior to marriage.²⁴⁹ Single women in this category were not necessarily single for life and in this interim period were free to spend their income on themselves and to enjoy the progress and spirit of the age. This was in contrast to the image of the older career woman who remained single and for whom paid work was not just an interim phase or for those who assumed more vocational roles as teachers or nurses.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁴ Katherine Holden, “Imaginary Widows: Spinsters, Marriage, and the ‘Lost Generation’ in Britain after the Great War,” *Journal of Family History* 30, no. 4 (2005): 400.

²⁴⁵ Holden, “Imaginary Widows,” 403-404.

²⁴⁶ Holmes, “‘Spinsters Indispensable’,” 75-77, 83, 89-90.

²⁴⁷ Holmes, “‘Spinsters Indispensable’,” 77-78.

²⁴⁸ Vicinus, “The Single Woman; Social Problem or Social Solution?” *Journal of Women’s History* 22, no. 2 (2010): 193.

²⁴⁹ Catriona Elder, “‘The Question of the Unmarried’: Some Meanings of Being Single in Australia in the 1920s and 1930s,” *Australian Feminist Studies* 8, no. 18 (Summer 1993): 151-173.

²⁵⁰ Elder, “‘The Question of the Unmarried’,” 154-160, 163-165.

The single woman in some of Brennan's writings

It is useful to link some of these ideas about women's singleness to a couple of passages written by Brennan. In 1913 she wrote a short story and with reference to the alliteration in a young woman's name called it: "The First of the C'S."²⁵¹ This passage was written early in her professional life and the entry seems to be rather whimsical in tone. In this short story about a young woman who works in an office, Brennan attempts to contrast the pride of a young woman in earning her own income with a young man's concern for a young woman fending for herself. In this story Brennan seems to go to some length to comment on the fact that although he is not abrasive, the young woman's employer does not have much awareness of her as a person. Several interesting ideas emerge in this story. The young woman in question seems to be jolted out of her daydreaming about her future marriage prospects at the image of "herself growing old-alone."²⁵² Her dread at this prospect is lightened by the thought of a "knight somewhere who would take care of her."²⁵³ In her conversation with a young man in the office the young woman is very keen to point out to him that she earns her own income. His response is very revealing: "He still looked down at her brown eyes, and the feeling rushed over him suddenly that it was very pathetic to see a girl so pretty and sweet and young quite earning her own living."²⁵⁴ In a different context but also in a humorous but pointed short story, Brennan refers both to the dominance of a male stereotype in professional life and the derision that could be directed towards the unmarried working woman.²⁵⁵

In another passage written in 1920, about the use of cosmetics, Brennan argues against such usage not from a moral position but from an aesthetic one. Having outlined many issues associated with the use of cosmetics Brennan moves beyond aesthetics to a psychological insight when she writes: "So that precious thing which is us, must it be so completely submerged in substances bought in a shop? It seems to argue some lack of confidence in our inherent powers, some lack of originality or moral courage."²⁵⁶

²⁵¹ Brennan, "The First of the C's," *Australasian*, January 25, 1913, 51-52.

²⁵² Brennan, "The First of the C's," 51.

²⁵³ Brennan, "The First of the C's," 51.

²⁵⁴ Brennan, "The First of the C's," 52.

²⁵⁵ A.T.B., "The Scandal," *Woman's World*, May 1, 1929, 308. (This entry was signed as A.T.B. As noted previously, Brennan sometimes used these initials. As she regularly wrote in *Woman's World* it seems reasonable to assume it was Brennan who wrote this passage.)

²⁵⁶ Brennan, "Girls – Plain or Coloured," *Argus*, December 11, 1920, 7.

Although at first glance this critique of cosmetics does not seem linked to Brennan's abiding concerns with social reform, the belief that she has in the inherent capacity of women to engage on their own terms, is embedded in her assessment of the issue. The way Brennan reflected on such an issue reveals something of how she analysed trends in her own society with a conviction about the benefits of individuals being able to draw on their own inner resources as a source of affirmation.

Impact of Freudian analysis

The promotion of motherhood necessarily had an impact on how spinsters were viewed.²⁵⁷ The association of womanhood with motherhood was most problematic for women who neither married nor had children, and was especially the case when motherhood was associated with good health.²⁵⁸ The application of Freudian analysis to the life choice of single celibate women, could result in such women being "pathologised".²⁵⁹ The inference of this type of reasoning could lead to a sense that the single and non-mothering woman was truly outside the norm.

Brennan was very aware of the views about sexuality that were circulating at this time in some sectors of society and she seemed to have a firm intuition that the uncritical adoption of Freudian analysis might not always augur well for society and for women in particular. In 1923 she wrote an article for *Woman's World* which outlined her concerns about the impact of Freud especially on the younger members of the community. In this article Brennan is scathing of dream analysis and is condemnatory of a text used in a university, which she argues does not withstand the level of scrutiny expected in an academic institution. In a light-hearted vein, Brennan uses an example of one of her own dreams, to highlight what she sees as the pitfalls and subjectivity inherent in an uncritical application of psychoanalysis.²⁶⁰ Her criticism of those who have promoted Freudian ideas without what she regards as the necessary level of investigation is evident when she writes: "The critical faculty, an ill-distributed gift at the best, seems to fall dead, and those whose

²⁵⁷ Oram, "Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World?" 418.

²⁵⁸ Eileen Janes Yeo, "Constructing and Contesting Motherhood, 1750-1950," *Hecate* 31, no. 2 (2005):14, 6-7.

²⁵⁹ Oram, "Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World?" 415.

²⁶⁰ Brennan, "A Modern Rabelais," *Woman's World*, May 1, 1923, 271, 273.

occupations require the weighing of evidence must stand open-mouthed in wonder and anxiety.”²⁶¹

Brennan’s interest and insight into Freudian analysis is also evident in a passage published in the *Bulletin* in 1924.²⁶² As in her 1923 entry in *Woman’s World*, Brennan challenges psychoanalysis for what she claims is a lack of scientific rigour. She does not question the presence of the sub-conscious but queries the level of influence that it has upon conscious life and cites the lack of evidence for this influence as indicative of the lack of scientific rigour. Brennan is also very concerned about the influence of psychoanalysis on unquestioning teachers who pass on these ideas to the young people in their care.²⁶³ Her condemnation of Freud’s methods is evident in her critique of his treatment of an 18 year old girl.

He works out by a train of reasoning which is screamingly funny or very nauseating, according to the reader’s type of mind, that the girl is obsessed by a peculiarly revolting sex-passion; and, in spite of continuous and sustained denials, by persistent pressure he breaks her down to acquiesce.

That is to say, he finds her a nervous girl, he leaves her a sex-pervert.²⁶⁴

Brennan is very concerned about the professional endorsement of Freudian ideas and its impact with regard to the consequences and the possible reference to them as expert evidence in jury trials. The real threat to the liberty of those who are considered seriously mentally ill is also mentioned. She is very critical of the inclusion of works on psychoanalysis in public libraries to the exclusion of other texts that she considers more worthwhile.²⁶⁵ Although Brennan’s Catholic sensibilities, about sexual matters, would have been influential in her assessment of Freud’s work, her critique of his findings from

²⁶¹ Brennan, “A Modern Rabelais,” 273.

²⁶² Brennan, “Psycho-Analysis and Youth,” *Bulletin*, (*The Red Page*) April 17, 1924. I wish to acknowledge that I was able to locate the reference to this *Bulletin* article as it was cited by Ely in “Anna Brennan: Armistice Day at Port Arthur,” 83. As outlined by Ely, the article in the *Bulletin* by Anna T. Brennan, has been the subject of some confusion as it has been incorrectly attributed to the daughter of the Australian poet Christopher Brennan.

²⁶³ Brennan, “Psycho-Analysis and Youth”.

²⁶⁴ Brennan, “Psycho-Analysis and Youth”.

²⁶⁵ Brennan, “Psycho-Analysis and Youth”.

the perspective of scientific method, seems to be in harmony with some very recent scholarship in this area.²⁶⁶

Given her critique of Freud, Brennan would seem to fit into the category of woman who Oram identifies in the interwar period in Britain, as challenging the pathologising of the single woman.²⁶⁷ While Brennan does not dismiss the potential for psychoanalysis to assist some people she is highly critical of the impact of the adoption of untested theory especially given the consequences across society.²⁶⁸ Much of what she feared did indeed come to pass, with spinsters coming under scrutiny due to the dissemination of ideas based on Freudian methods. Her 1938 consideration of some of the issues associated with a Freudian perspective is evident when she writes:

Sex “repression” may bring unhappiness, it frequently does; so, unfortunately, may marriage; so, inevitably, does sexual uncontrol. There is no foolproof guarantee of happiness in this world. But there is always self-respect. One can always be master of one’s fate, and captain of one’s soul.²⁶⁹

It is also important to locate Brennan’s status as a single woman with reference to various influences in her life as a Catholic. In 1904, her brother, Frank Brennan gave a paper on “The Emancipation of Women”. It was noted that he referred to the greater autonomy given to women with regard to marriage and the esteem in which women were held within the Catholic tradition.²⁷⁰ Annie Golding, a Catholic lay woman from New South Wales, was very involved in women’s issues within and beyond the Catholic community. In a paper for the Third Australasian Catholic Congress in 1909, she provided an overview of the socio-economic disadvantages, faced by many women in Australia at the turn of century, which she suggests had a negative impact on married life. Golding’s analysis of the economic and other hardships experienced by many married women, due to what she

²⁶⁶ Frederick Crews, *Freud: The Making of an Illusion* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2017). With reference to the use of a case study see Chapter 33 “Girl Trouble” 590-616.

²⁶⁷ Oram, “Repressed and Thwarted, or Bearer of the New World?” 428.

²⁶⁸ Brennan, “Psycho-Analysis and Youth”.

²⁶⁹ “The Modern Woman ... Modern Morals,” *Woman’s World*, May 1, 1938, 15. (The adaptation of a line from the poem “Invictus” by William Ernest Henley, is evident in the last sentence of this comment by Brennan.)

²⁷⁰ “Shamrock Club,” *Advocate*, February 8, 1904, 14.

referred to as the “inequality” in the marriage relationship, would have contributed to the ideas about marriage in the Catholic world of Brennan’s times.²⁷¹

A short but interesting entry in the *Argus* in 1951 demonstrates the view of marriage that Brennan promoted. In responding to a previous report which was critical of brides being “given away” Brennan, in her capacity as the President of St Joan’s (Vic.) states: “The expression and the fact are alike offensive to human dignity and belittle the freedom of choice which is the essence of Christian marriage.”²⁷² Having clarified the historical record Brennan goes on to state that: “the promise by the wife to obey, ... did not in the middle ages, and does not today, form any part of the Catholic marriage service.”²⁷³ Whilst clearly espousing the mutuality of women in the marriage relationship, this reference seems to come from one who also had a clear understanding of Christian and Catholic marriage. From what can be gleaned of Brennan’s views on the matter it would seem that for her, marriage would have been considered a matter of personal choice. What is distinctive about her standpoint was that she placed such a high status on the right and freedom to choose as much as the choice itself.

The influence of a supportive family

Besides the wider social issue of how singleness was perceived, it is also pertinent to refer to the importance of the family circle, for those who did not marry.²⁷⁴ Possibly Brennan was able to sidestep some of the limitations that circumscribed the experiences of many women by remaining single; and by drawing on the intellectual, emotional and financial resources of the extended family. This is not to detract from Brennan’s personal autonomy but to provide an additional hue to a portrayal of her life.

Leonore Davidoff’s work, on the importance of sibling and kinship networks, provides a framework for considering Brennan’s family structure as a critical component in her life

²⁷¹ Annie Golding, “The Industrial and Social Condition of Women in the Australian Commonwealth,” *Proceedings of the Third Australasian Catholic Congress, held at St Mary’s Cathedral, Sydney, 26th September-3rd October 1909* (Sydney: St. Mary’s Cathedral Book Depot, 1910), 292.

²⁷² Brennan, “Readers’ Viewpoint,” *Argus*, February 24, 1951, 2.

²⁷³ Brennan, “Readers’ Viewpoint,” 2. Brennan was accurate with regard to marriage in the Catholic tradition. See Timothy Willem Jones, “Love, Honour and Obey? Romance, Subordination and Marital Subjectivity in Interwar Britain,” in *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918-1970*, eds. Alana Harris and Timothy Willem Jones, *Genders and Sexualities in History Series*, (Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 124-143.

²⁷⁴ Katherine Holden, Amy Froide, and June Hannam, “Introduction,” *Women’s History Review* 17, no. 3 (2008): 320-321.

choices.²⁷⁵ Davidoff's work relates to specific examples of families and sibling relationships mainly in Britain in the "long nineteenth century".²⁷⁶ Her attention to the role of sibling and kinship connections, how these contributed to the rise of the British middle class, and the significance of gender in the various roles assumed within and beyond households she studied, are relevant for understanding the Brennan family.²⁷⁷

The Brennan family can be aligned to Davidoff's reference to the "long family".²⁷⁸ There were a considerable number of years from the birth of the first Brennan child in 1857 to the thirteenth (Anna) in 1879.²⁷⁹ In such a "long family" it is possible for there to be several sub groupings. In the case of the Brennan's, a new outpost of the family was formed in Melbourne. Instead of each individual setting out on their own in the city, the family established houses initially in North Carlton, and then in Parkville.²⁸⁰ At a later stage, several unmarried members of the family, including Anna, lived together in a house in Kew.²⁸¹ Central to the functioning of the Brennan family was the role of the older single siblings such as Ellen, and May (Mary Catherine) as housekeepers. May worked in the Brennan legal firm in a clerical capacity but resumed a role as the housekeeper after Ellen died.²⁸² The undertaking of domestic roles, by the other female siblings, meant that Brennan was free to pursue her studies and her career.

Davidoff notes that women have not always conformed to gendered notions of femininity or operated just in the "domestic sphere"²⁸³ but in the timeframe of her research it was usually the male members of the household who assumed a professional profile.²⁸⁴ An interesting aspect of Brennan's life is that it was her family's collective capacity and possibly her status as the youngest girl, which enabled her to undertake a university education, to establish herself as a professional woman and to maintain an active

²⁷⁵ Leonore Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), and Davidoff, "Kinship as a Categorical Concept: A Case Study of Nineteenth Century English Siblings," *Journal of Social History* 39, no. 2 (Winter 2005): 411-428.

²⁷⁶ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920*, 3.

²⁷⁷ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920*, 1, 3, 4, 25, 252-254, 281.

²⁷⁸ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920*, 78, 378. Davidoff explains that the reference to the 'long family' is a colloquial expression. See page 378 at note 1.

²⁷⁹ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 289-298.

²⁸⁰ Ryan, *ADB*, and Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 18, 291.

²⁸¹ Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 289.

²⁸² Ryan, "Frank Brennan: A Political Biography," 297.

²⁸³ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920*, 5.

²⁸⁴ Davidoff, *Thicker Than Water: Siblings and Their Relations, 1780-1920*, 49-77.

involvement in a range of social concerns. Brennan and her niece Laura were both mentioned in a newspaper article that commented on the intergenerational pattern of women taking up a career in the law who already had family members who were lawyers.²⁸⁵

Given that she was always a member of a family household Brennan does not fit the image of the isolated spinster or a single woman striding out totally on her own. Guinnane has referred to the development in rural Ireland of different household patterns which did not centre on a couple in a marriage relationship, but still provided many domestic, social and economic supports.²⁸⁶ The point of interest is that the pattern of family living adopted by the Brennans reflects the type of family structure that Guinnane outlines in his study of Irish demography.

A vocational sense of service

Interviewed in 1911 about being a lawyer, Brennan indicated that she intended to use the benefits of her education to be supportive of other women. What is of critical interest here is Brennan's sense of vocation.²⁸⁷ Implied in this vocational sense is an appreciation of the need to use one's gifts, which are seen as being given by God, for service to others.²⁸⁸ The role of service and the vocational discourse within the Catholic community would have had some impact on Brennan's life choice. Given the Catholic sense of vocation, which emphasises service for the common good, Brennan can be seen very much as a product of her Catholic upbringing. This is not to perceive this upbringing as a negative force but one which was essentially communitarian. Brennan described the role of wife and mother as a "chosen vocation."²⁸⁹

This appreciation of choice is a central theme in Brennan's worldview. She was aware that there could be a perception in the Catholic and wider community that women, engaged in social issues, might be less focused on social reform if they were married and concentrated more on their domestic responsibilities. The telling aspect of Brennan's

²⁸⁵ "Girl Articled to Her Mother," *Central Queensland Herald*, July 20, 1939, 28.

²⁸⁶ Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish*, 230-233.

²⁸⁷ "Miss Anna Brennan," *Southern Sphere*, September 1, 1911, 34.

²⁸⁸ It is not implied that this sense of vocation and service of the wider community is unique to a Catholic/Christian perspective.

²⁸⁹ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

insight into this dynamic was her articulation that it might have been necessary for a single woman like herself to absorb the disparagement that single women with a sense of social responsibility might encounter.²⁹⁰

Within the Catholic community, the discernment that one was called to become a priest or a member of a religious order, was widely promoted and generally positively valued. It was not uncommon in Catholic families for one or more of the children to pursue such a religious vocation. This would have been true in Brennan's lifetime and she was aware of the female religious orders that were involved in education.²⁹¹ Life in a religious order could offer women an opportunity to integrate a personal sense of vocation with service to the wider community. It could also provide a sense of female solidarity and leadership opportunities. Although it was a valid and valued life choice within the Catholic community it was not one that Brennan felt called to follow.

Brennan's status as a single professional woman meant that she had a very different life course to women who were Catholic wives, mothers or religious sisters. Additional to these considerations is that her living arrangement, as a member of the Brennan household, and her active involvement in a range of organisations and clubs from her early adulthood, provided her with a sense of community which may have been fulfilling in its own right. Brennan's Catholicism would also have provided support for her single status by its validation of singleness and by the recourse to a vocational perspective. From early in her career Brennan valued the service element of her professional life, especially with regard to what she could do for other women.²⁹²

²⁹⁰ "Catholic Women's Social Guild: Inaugural Meeting in the Cathedral Hall," *Advocate*, October 7, 1916, 26.

²⁹¹ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

²⁹² "Miss Anna Brennan," *Southern Sphere*, September 1, 1911, 34.

Chapter 3

“An Apostle of Goodwill”²⁹³

Following a brief reference to wider contextual factors, this chapter will discuss the particular influence of Catholic social teaching on Brennan, specifically with reference to the style of lay engagement that was operative in the Catholic community in Melbourne and her involvement with the Catholic Women’s Social Guild (CWSG) from 1916-1920.²⁹⁴

In her overview of “First Wave Feminism” in Australia, Katie Spearritt has indicated that there was a sense of energy and confidence about what women could achieve collectively.²⁹⁵ Spearritt’s timeframe for this “wave” of feminism spans from 1880-1914. The formation of organisations for women was a critical aspect of how certain women galvanised themselves in the long campaign to obtain suffrage and other reforms for women.²⁹⁶ These years from 1880 to 1914 correspond to Brennan’s girlhood, her entry into university and her first years in the legal profession. The sense that women could initiate change to promote the cause of women filtered across her life. However, the right to vote did not result in women gaining equality in all spheres and the pioneer women in the legal profession faced many obstacles.²⁹⁷ Nevertheless, suffrage did represent potentiality and it was in this atmosphere that Brennan began her professional life. By 1916 she was articulating the need for Catholic women to become more involved in the wider community and to assume a much higher profile as women who could offer a

²⁹³ “What Women are Talking About,” *Woman’s World*, August 1, 1930, 12. This was how Brennan was described by someone writing in *Woman’s World* with regard to Brennan’s overseas travel in 1930.

²⁹⁴ At a much later date the CWSG was to become known as the Catholic Women’s League of Victoria and Wagga Wagga. Kennedy has noted that early in the twentieth century, various Catholic women’s groups were founded in Australia such as the Catholic Women’s Association in Sydney in 1913 and the Catholic Women’s League in South Australia in 1914. Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 1-9. Each of these groups arose in different contexts and each was shaped by a range of factors. The influence of the Catholic Women’s League in England, on the South Australian foundation, is an example of this. Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 9.

²⁹⁵ Katie Spearritt, “New Dawns: First Wave Feminism 1880-1914,” in *Gender Relations in Australia: Domination and Negotiation*, ed. Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Marrickville: New South Wales, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Group, 1992): 325-349.

²⁹⁶ Spearritt, “New Dawns: First Wave Feminism 1880-1914,” 325-326.

²⁹⁷ Thornton, *Dissonance and Distrust: Women in the Legal Profession*, 56-64; and Thornton, “Rapunzel and the Lure of Equal Citizenship,” *Law Text Culture* 8, (2004): 231-237.

specific perspective to a range of social issues.²⁹⁸ This articulation of the need for members of the Catholic community to respond to the social questions of their times can be referenced to the broader context of how the Catholic Church's social teaching evolved.

***Rerum Novarum* and the influence of Catholic Social Teaching**

There has always been a sound theological basis in the Christian community, for an active engagement in civic and social issues. This can be derived from a close reading of St Augustine's influential text *City of God*.²⁹⁹ What has developed over the centuries, in Catholic social teaching, is that the Catholic Church cannot be isolated from the society in which it exists if it is to articulate a perspective on the discourse in the public space. In 1891, the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum: On the Condition of the Working Classes*: was issued by Pope Leo XIII.³⁰⁰ It signalled the official promotion of a renewed form of social engagement, which looked to the causes and possible remedies of economic distress, as being central to Catholic teaching.³⁰¹ Encyclicals like *Rerum Novarum* do not originate or develop in an intellectual vacuum but owe much to various strands of scholasticism and social, political and ecclesial factors.³⁰² In particular *Rerum Novarum* was written to deal with the problems that arose in industrial societies with regard to the conditions for salaried workers. It focused especially on the principles that should be adopted to analyse and critique the conditions of those who only had their labour to offer in a time when exploitation and a loss of dignity were often the result for those who were the least powerful.³⁰³ In accord with the principles that the Church held to be paramount,

²⁹⁸ "Catholic Women's Social Guild: Inaugural Meeting in the Cathedral Hall," *Advocate*, October 7, 1916, 26.

²⁹⁹ Robert Gascoigne, *The Church and Secularity: Two Stories of Liberal Society*, Moral Traditions Series (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2009), 20-36; and Jean Elshtain, "St Augustine," *Contemporary Political Thought* 3, no. 3 (2004): 270-272.

³⁰⁰ *Rerum Novarum: Encyclical Letter of His Holiness Pope Leo XIII: On the Condition of the Working Classes*. (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1942).

³⁰¹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), 297.

³⁰² Paul Misner, "The Predecessors of *Rerum Novarum* Within Catholicism," *Review of Social Economy* 49, no. 4 (1991): 444-464; A.M.C. Waterman, "The Intellectual Context of *Rerum Novarum*," *Review of Social Economy* 49, no. 4 (1991): 465-482; and John Molony, *The Worker Question: A New Historical Perspective on Rerum Novarum* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1991).

³⁰³ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, 296-297.

both capitalism and socialism were critically evaluated.³⁰⁴ *Rerum Novarum* was read in all the Catholic churches in the Archdiocese of Melbourne.³⁰⁵

Early in the 20th century, Church leaders were actively involved in public and political discussions about the development of Australia's social and economic policy.³⁰⁶ In a general sense the inclusion of religious perspectives on social issues was accepted. *Rerum Novarum* provided the Catholic laity in Australia, with a strong justification for being involved in social action.³⁰⁷ Bruce Duncan is of the opinion that a specific difference between Australia, and the European context of *Rerum Novarum*, was the fact that the Catholic Church in Australia was more closely connected to the real lives of the working class.³⁰⁸ There was a high degree of compatibility in Australia with regard to this new social movement in the Church because positive notions of democracy and involvement in the Labour movement were a part of Catholic life.³⁰⁹ In discussing the various factors that influenced Mr Justice Higgins, in his considerations of how a basic wage should be determined, Marian Sawyer states: "*Rerum Novarum* was part of the climate of ideas in Australia."³¹⁰

Ursula Bygott's study of the Jesuits in Australia provides an insight into the specific influence of certain Jesuits in Victoria with regard to the promotion of social analysis from a Catholic perspective. The links that the Jesuits in Australia had with their peers, who were engaged in critique of social issues outside of Australia, meant that those who they influenced also imbibed this wider world view. This would have involved an appreciation of the need for the principles contained in *Rerum Novarum* to be applied to local contexts.³¹¹ It is noteworthy and apposite that the Jesuits promoted the role of women as active participants in the apostolate of the laity.³¹² Archbishop Mannix was

³⁰⁴ Duncan, *The Church's Social Teaching*, 71.

³⁰⁵ Duncan, *The Church's Social Teaching*, 171.

³⁰⁶ Brian Howe and Renate Howe, "The Influence of Faith-based Organisations on Australian Social Policy," *Australian Journal of Social Issues* 47, no. 3 (2012): 321.

³⁰⁷ Hilary Carey, *Believing in Australia: A Cultural History of Religions* (St Leonards, NSW: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 123.

³⁰⁸ Duncan, *The Church's Social Teaching*, 162-163.

³⁰⁹ James Murtagh, *Australia: The Catholic Chapter* (Melbourne: The Polding Press, 1969), xix.

³¹⁰ Marian Sawyer "The Ethical State: Social Liberalism and the Critique of Contract," *Australian Historical Studies* 31:114, (2000): 85.

³¹¹ Ursula Bygott, *With Pen and Tongue: The Jesuits in Australia 1865-1939* (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1980), 89-123.

³¹² Bygott, *With Pen and Tongue*, 248.

supportive of the efforts of the lay people in Melbourne who were committed to addressing social concerns.³¹³ Much has been written about the content of *Rerum Novarum* but what is of most interest for the purposes of this discussion, is the impetus that it gave to the promotion of Catholic social principles and the specific way that this became evident in Brennan's life. This seems especially apparent in her membership and active contribution to the CWSG from 1916-1920 and the influence of the Jesuits in this organisation.

The social reform agenda of the Catholic Women's Social Guild: 1916-1920

Established in Victoria in 1916, the CWSG had a number of professional women like Brennan on the first Central Committee.³¹⁴ The commitment to social action founded on social principles was central to its activity.³¹⁵ One of the defining features of the CWSG was its commitment not just to social welfare but to social reform, especially in matters affecting women. Kennedy points out that although the Jesuit, Father Lockington, was instrumental in initiating the CWSG, its dynamism reflected the abilities and vision of the women involved. Another Jesuit, Father Egan, also had an educative role in the CWSG.³¹⁶

Like other canons of scripture, literature or law, Catholic social teaching can be cited and called upon for a range of purposes, even within the same topic area. Caitríona Beaumont has observed that after the development of the Irish Free State, reference to *Rerum Novarum* and other Catholic social teaching contributed to a limited notion of women's citizenship in Ireland. In particular the close alignment of the Irish legislature and Catholic teaching meant that there was an official representation of women that promoted traditional domestic roles.³¹⁷ However, Beaumont also makes it clear that through their involvement in a number of organisations, Irish women actively sought greater recognition of their claims to equality as citizens.³¹⁸

³¹³ Duncan, *The Church's Social Teaching*, 185.

³¹⁴ Lucille Quinlan and Ursula Clinton, *What is this Catholic Women's Guild: The Story of the Catholic Women's Social Guild, 1916-1938, its aims, its objects, its activities*, A.C.T.S., publications, no. 785 (Melbourne: The Australian Catholic Truth Society, 1938), 4.

³¹⁵ "Catholic Women's Social Guild: Inaugural Meeting in the Cathedral Hall," *Advocate*, October 7, 1916, 26.

³¹⁶ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 10-12, 24.

³¹⁷ Caitríona Beaumont, "Women, Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922-1948," *Women's History Review* 6, no. 4 (1997): 563-566.

³¹⁸ Beaumont, "Women, Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922-1948," 564-565, 578.

It is important to note that in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*, the papal document that was published in 1931 by Pope Pius XI in commemoration of *Rerum Novarum*, the fundamental role of women that is promoted is of women as wives and mothers upholding the unity of the family.³¹⁹ Kennedy argues that both the CWSG and later on the St Joan's Alliance in Victoria, challenged the utilisation of *Rerum Novarum* as a justification for limiting the scope of women's activities in the wider community, as a misreading of the primary focus of the encyclical which was to articulate a concern about the dignity and rights of workers.³²⁰ It seems reasonable to assume that the same critique would be applied to the use of *Quadragesimo Anno* as a means of trying to call on Church teaching to limit the role of women beyond the home. The selective use and even silence about various aspects of papal pronouncements, which endorsed a very limited view of women's agency, has also been noted with regard to the New South Wales branch of the St Joan's Alliance.³²¹ Unlike the situation in Ireland, where there was such close connection between the Catholic Church and the State, the Australian context meant that it was highly unlikely that Catholic social teaching could be utilised in a legislative capacity to curtail the freedom of post suffrage women, such as Brennan.

Nevertheless, it is recognised that there is a tension with respect to the view of women that is contained in *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno* and the views expressed by Brennan with regard to the importance of Catholic women in exercising their civic duty. There are two observations that can be made about this real tension. The first is that whilst Brennan was very aware of Catholic social teaching her focus seemed to have been on the wider economic and social issues analysed in both *Rerum Novarum* and *Quadragesimo Anno*. Secondly, Brennan appreciated the social significance of the role undertaken by women as wives and mothers but she did not see this as the only role for women. Indeed, Brennan was very clear that Catholic women had a duty to participate in the wider community as citizens and as Catholics who may also be wives and mothers. Brennan's decision to become a professional woman and her status as a single woman actively involved in her community, did not seem to be at all constrained by references

³¹⁹ For this view of women in *Rerum Novarum* see n.60 and in *Quadragesimo Anno* see n.71. The text of *Quadragesimo Anno* that has been cited is; Pope Pius XI, Encyclical Letter, *Quadragesimo Anno* (London, Catholic Truth Society, 1960), 31.

³²⁰ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 18, 183.

³²¹ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 245-247. Kennedy is referring here to the New South Wales branch of the St Joan's Alliance but the strategy employed by these women was also evident in Brennan's selective recourse to papal documents.

in papal statements about women and family life. In this respect Brennan seems very much like the Irish women in Beaumont's analysis who moved beyond the confines of Church groups to claim their fundamental rights as citizens.³²² It is interesting to note the acclaim of the Legion of Catholic Women in Australia at the National Conference held in 1947 of Pope Pius XII's public affirmation of the role of Catholic women in public life.³²³ This definitely signalled a shift at the highest ecclesial level about the place of Catholic women in the wider community. In this sense the public affirmation of this expansive view of the role of Catholic women was one that was very much a key aspect of Brennan's stance from her time as a founding member of the CWSG in 1916.

For Brennan, the assertion of Church teaching affirmed her commitment to active citizenship and engagement in social issues. She appeared to be able to set her sights on a wide framework so that the central call to be an engaged member of society, as a Catholic lay woman, resulted in her rendering as peripheral those voices which sought to limit her sense of Catholic women's place in public discourse. In the CWSG the role of Catholic lay women as agents of social reform was clearly evident.

The distinctive purpose of the CWSG is evident by contrasting it to another group for Catholic women, the Catholic Women's Club (CWC). Prior to the founding of the CWSG, Marion Miller Knowles and other Catholic women had established the CWC in 1913. Knowles was well-known in Catholic circles and she was a regular writer in the Catholic newspaper the *Advocate*. Brennan was involved in the CWC which provided a place for Catholic women to socialise, ran a hostel for women and took an active interest in charitable works.³²⁴ Although there was an element of outreach in the CWC, the establishment three years later, of the CWSG, clearly indicates that each group had a different purpose.

Various entries in the journal produced by the CWSG from 1916-1920 (*Woman's Social Work*), indicates that the spirit of *Rerum Novarum* certainly permeated its ideology and discourse.³²⁵ For example in the November 1918 edition there is an entry called *The Foundation of Social Action* which states: "In social action, as in every other sphere of

³²² Beaumont, "Women, Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922-1948," 564, 569.

³²³ "Women in Conference," *Catholic Weekly*, October 9, 1947, 4.

³²⁴ Morgan, *Melbourne Before Mannix*, 140-142; and Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 28.

³²⁵ The first edition of this publication in October 1916 was called *Women's Social Worker* but after that it was renamed *Woman's Social Work*.

work, it is all important that the foundation be secure, and the only solid foundation of all social action is a knowledge of Christian principles.”³²⁶ This article goes on to state that the CWSG had formed Study Circles or Study Clubs for the purpose of educating the members about Christian principles.³²⁷ What is salient about the mandate of the CWSG was that the formation of women in the principles of Catholic social teaching was not just to be for those who were tertiary educated but for all those who were connected to the CWSG. The Guild’s journal was central to this educative role.³²⁸

Another example of the way that the CWSG was imbued with a working knowledge of *Rerum Novarum* is evident in the “Social Study Circle” of the Ballarat Branch, where it was noted that members would study the encyclical having undertaken some prior study on related topics.³²⁹ In reflecting on the work of the CWSG, soon after its first congress was held, a member noted: “With the second phase of the “Woman Movement” has come a change. It is no longer considered unwomanly to take an interest in vital public questions.”³³⁰ In the post suffrage context the CWSG opened a unique space for Catholic women to engage with “vital public questions” and Brennan was a core member of this group. Her active role in the CWSG from 1916-1920, and the articles that she wrote for its journal, reflect a clear sense of vitality. In an entry for the first edition of its publication, Brennan notes how the energy for social reconstruction can wane but makes it clear that even if total change is not possible it is not acceptable to assume that inequality is inevitable.³³¹ In another instance, in encouraging Catholic women to adapt to the demands of a new age and noting how many women were involved in work outside the home, Brennan advocates for a response to social concerns beyond a disengaged charitable reaction. In particular she encourages working girls to become informed about how the major social issues of the times could be addressed and discussed from a Catholic perspective.³³²

³²⁶ “The Foundation of Social Action,” *Woman’s Social Work*. November 1, 1918, 11. (The author of this entry is listed as C.M.H.)

³²⁷ “The Foundation of Social Action,” 12.

³²⁸ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 15.

³²⁹ “Guild Notes: Ballarat Branch. Monthly Report,” *Woman’s Social Work*, April 7, 1919, 16.

³³⁰ “The Guild and Its Work,” *Woman’s Social Work* May 1917, 1. (The author of this article is listed as M.D.)

³³¹ Brennan, “You and Me,” *Women’s Social Worker*, October 1916, 2-3.

³³² A.T.B., “The Carpenter’s Son,” *Woman’s Social Work*, May 1917, 4-5. (As noted previously, A.T.B. refers to Anna Teresa Brennan.)

Higher education for Catholic women

Many elements of Brennan's views on women and specifically women in the Catholic community are apparent in a lengthy paper that she gave at the second annual congress of the CWSG in 1917 entitled "Need of University Training for Women."³³³ Despite the broad title Brennan focused the paper on Catholic women. Her introduction makes it clear that she will be discussing educational matters "exclusively from the woman's point of view."³³⁴ The problem for Brennan was that more Catholic men were attending the university than Catholic women. Indeed at one point during her University studies she was the only Catholic woman enrolled. She resists the notion that studying at university will lead to a loss of faith but particularly debunks the claim that this potential loss of faith would be more likely for "girls" than it would be for "boys".³³⁵ Brennan maintains that the failure to equip Catholic girls for university entrance was due to a lack of commitment on the part of certain parents and the Catholic education system. She cites her own case as an example of the limitations of the Catholic schools to support those who wanted to enter university. Likewise, she challenges the Catholic community for what she asserts was its resistance to university training for teachers and argues that the social cost of failing to provide women with opportunities for higher education was very great indeed.³³⁶

In her assessment of the benefits of scientific training Brennan comments with a tone of opprobrium that she "heard a member of one of our teaching Orders say that she did not see any use in teaching girls science."³³⁷ Whilst noting that the Religious Orders will need to send their own members to the university for training, she does not think that this will further the cause for other Catholic women. Linking higher education with social reform, Brennan asserts that women are the best ones to determine what is in the best interests of women. The importance of women being economically independent and the specific role that Catholic women could undertake in the wider community, are connected to the benefits of higher education.³³⁸

³³³ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9-10.

³³⁴ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

³³⁵ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

³³⁶ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

³³⁷ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9.

³³⁸ Brennan, "Need of University Training for Women," *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 9-10.

Asserting that Catholic women should also be able to benefit from the Catholic University College, Brennan states that as women have contributed financially to this endeavour they should have access to the outcome of their contributions. She also argues for Catholic women to be able to apply for any scholarships that are available.³³⁹ At the time that Brennan presented this paper to the CWSG, she initiated a resolution that the Archbishop be approached to promote the CWSG support for equality for Catholic women with regard to “facilities” and “scholarships” at the “Catholic University College”.³⁴⁰ Her arguments did not fall on deaf ears: when Archbishop Mannix addressed the last session of the CWSG Conference he made a public announcement that he was going to pass on a donation of £1,000 to support a scholarship or other assistance for the university education of Catholic women.³⁴¹ Newman College for Catholic men and St Mary’s Hall for Catholic women opened in 1918.³⁴²

This 1917 paper indicates that the integration of ideas and action is very clear in Brennan’s methodology, as is the sense of the solidarity of women together to bring about change in those things that affect women. Brennan does not encourage a passive stance which rests on an appeal to a higher ecclesial authority for Catholic women but focuses on the capacity of individuals to be able to provide a rationale for a particular Catholic viewpoint.³⁴³ This is very much in harmony with the idea that principles should underpin social reform. Brennan’s support for Catholic women studying at the university was grounded in a practical awareness of what needed to be provided for this to happen. The Newman Society, a Catholic organisation for university students and graduates, had been established in 1910 and Brennan was one of two women on the founding committee.³⁴⁴ As a member of the Newman Society, Brennan acted as a contact person for Catholic women undertaking study at the University of Melbourne.³⁴⁵ Hence, by the time she gave her presentation to the CWSG in 1917, she was able to draw on her experience and her

³³⁹ Brennan, “Need of University Training for Women,” *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 10. See also Selleck, *The Shop: The University of Melbourne 1850-1939*, 576. In a list of financial contributions to the “Catholic University College” in 1914 several women are listed including Miss Anna Brennan. See *Tribune*, June 20, 1914, 8.

³⁴⁰ “Catholic Women’s Social Guild,” *Advocate*, April 7, 1917, 17. See also Selleck, *The Shop: The University of Melbourne 1850-1939*, 576.

³⁴¹ “Catholic Women’s Guild,” *Argus*, April 4, 1917, 13; and “Dr Mannix,” *Age*, April 4, 1917, 8.

³⁴² Michael Francis, *Contesting Catholic Identity: The Foundation of Newman College Melbourne, 1914-18* (Parkville, Vic.: Newman College, 2018), 13-15, 24.

³⁴³ Brennan, “Need of University Training for Women,” *Advocate*, April 14, 1917, 10.

³⁴⁴ “The Newman Society,” *Advocate*, December 30, 1911, 28.

³⁴⁵ “Newman Society,” *Advocate*, February 7, 1914, 21.

willingness to do her part to support other Catholic women. It has been noted that even though Brennan was known for her promotion of higher education for Catholic women, neither she nor the then principal of the Catholic residence for woman, spoke at the opening of St Mary's Hall.³⁴⁶

A persistent theme in Brennan's public addresses is for Catholic women to take up their role in the wider community. Just as the idea of women being relegated to the domestic sphere was challenged by the evolution of the women's movement, so the notion that the Church and the needs of humanity could be separated, is challenged by the manner in which Brennan encourages others to become more involved in social service. The core issue here is not the promotion of the Church institutionally but a view of the Church that sees it as immersed in social reality and responsive to social concerns.

As the President of the CWSG in 1920, she used her address to call on Catholic women to be active in social reform. In the context of encouraging more Catholic women to become involved in the work of the CWSG, Brennan speaks of how important it is for individuals to really make a personal decision about their contribution to the common good. In what may seem an incidental comment during this presentation, she refers to what individuals can do "for the service of humanity and the Church (or of humanity through the Church)" and notes the need for each woman to discern her own response.³⁴⁷ This aside in the brackets is illuminating regarding Brennan's perception of how social service and religious affiliation could be integrated. In an address such as this Brennan seems to be exercising a strong element of leadership. Although she is not speaking from a pulpit, through her leadership of the CWSG, Brennan provided her audience with a succinct summary of how a committed Catholic woman could exercise her citizenship without evoking a dualism between the needs of the world and the role of the Church.

A commitment to affiliation

Theoretically, it was very sound for Catholic women to assume a greater role in civic matters. In the sectarianism that was apparent in Australia during the first half of the twentieth century, this engagement could become fraught. This will be evident in

³⁴⁶ Brenda Niall, Josephine Dunin, and Frances O'Neill, *Newman College: A History 1918-2018* (Parkville, Vic.: Newman College, 2018), 20-22.

³⁴⁷ "Catholic Women's Social Guild: Fourth Annual Conference," *Advocate*, April 15, 1920, 24.

appraising the reasons why Brennan resigned from the CWSG in 1920. The circumstances surrounding her decision shed some light on how Brennan's sense of the greater good went beyond a limited Catholic parochialism.

Brennan had been associated with the Victorian branch of the National Council of Women (NCWV) from her university days. Given the aims of the CWSG it seemed congruent that it would seek affiliation with the NCWV, which it did in 1919. This affiliation became a major source of tension in 1920. Some members of the CWSG argued that through its affiliation with the NCWV the CWSG was not being supportive of Archbishop Mannix.³⁴⁸ Whilst it arose as a very controversial issue for the CWSG in 1920, this matter was based initially on events surrounding the St Patrick's Day parade in 1918. The Anglo-Irish War and the rise of *Sinn Fein* resulted in even greater sectarian tensions in Australia after the second conscription referendum. In particular the loyalty to Australia of many Irish Catholics was called into question with the heightened tensions in Ireland and the Irish quest for independence.³⁴⁹ Therefore, the inclusion of *Sinn Fein* symbols as part of the parade at this time was seen by some as being provocative and a blatant act of disloyalty. On the Friday following the St Patrick's Day parade in 1918, a large group of people met at the Town Hall, to voice their condemnation of what they regarded as use of the public domain for the promotion of *Sinn Fein*. This delegation wanted the Lord Mayor to ensure that this would not happen again. It seems that emotions ran high at this meeting and the president of the NCWV was recorded as having voiced her disapproval of the public display of *Sinn Fein* symbols.³⁵⁰

In response to the criticism about the affiliation of the CWSG with the National Council of Women, Brennan argued that the capacity of a large organisation such as the NCWV, on a national and international level to effect social change and the common concern held by the CWSG and the NCWV about the welfare of women and children, meant that the mandate of the CWSG was supported by being linked to the NCWV. It was through such

³⁴⁸ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 30-36; and "The Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, August 12, 1920, 17.

³⁴⁹ Neville Meaney, "Australian Irish-Catholics and Britishness: The Problem of British 'Loyalty' and 'Identity' From the Conscription Crisis to the End of the Anglo-Irish War," *Journal of the Australian Catholic Historical Society* 34 (2013): 36-39.

³⁵⁰ "St Patrick's Procession," *Bendigo Independent*, March 22, 1918, 6; and "National Council of Women," *Age*, March 23, 1918, 13. For an overview of some of the tensions also operative with the NCWV at this time see Judith Smart, "Women Waging War: The National Council of Women of Victoria 1914-1920," *Victorian Historical Journal* 86, no. 1 (2015): 61-82.

an affiliation that Catholic women could have an impact on legislative change. She was also keen to point out that there could be tensions involved in any affiliation but argued that a diversity of viewpoints should not result in an isolationist or separatist stance. There are two prongs to her reasoning which illustrate subtle but significant aspects of her worldview. Firstly, the larger common cause for women's welfare and rights was a motivator but, secondly, where it was possible she was equally keen to articulate a Catholic stance on social issues.³⁵¹ This was not in contrast to other positions but in tandem with them. With regard to the affiliation of the CWSG with the NCWV it would seem that Brennan saw mutual benefit and not a threat.

The complexity of issues encased within the issue of the CWSG affiliation with the NCWV is apparent in letters to the editor of the Catholic newspaper, that were reprinted in the CWSG publication *Woman's Social Work* with a note indicating that a letter by Brennan had not been printed in full in the *Advocate*.³⁵² A comparison of Brennan's letter in the *Advocate* with the version in the CWSG publication indicates that the *Advocate* had excluded two sections.³⁵³ In the fourth paragraph both versions of Brennan's letter state: "It is to be stressed, moreover, that the question of Sinn Fein emblems involves no question of Catholic principles."³⁵⁴ But the *Advocate* then omits the following section.

Cardinal Logue, the Primate of Ireland, in a recent utterance [sic] on the Sinn Fein movement, said that "it would be a joke if it were not such a tragedy." Our late Archbishop, Dr. Carr, used even stronger words when he denounced it as "criminal insanity." Now I do not suggest for a moment that the utterance of any prelate, however eminent, on purely secular matters, binds anybody, and I am well aware that many Catholics, clerical and lay, entirely and strongly dissent from the views quoted, and are at perfect liberty to do so. But I think few would have the temerity to accuse either of

³⁵¹ "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 6, 1920, 17. For two of the letters indicating concern about the affiliation see "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, April 29, 1920, 21.

³⁵² "Affiliation of the C.W.S.G. with the National Council of Women," *Woman's Social Work*, May-June, 1920, 1.

³⁵³ "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 20, 1920, 17.

³⁵⁴ "Affiliation of the C.W.S.G. with the National Council of Women," *Woman's Social Work*, May-June, 1920, 2; and "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 20, 1920, 17.

these ecclesiastics or the notable Catholic laymen who share their views, of disloyalty to the faith.³⁵⁵

Brennan is arguing here about the right of individual Catholics to determine their own stance on a controversial issue. Her argument is logical and reasonable but it would have been very challenging at a time when there were such massive public displays of support for Archbishop Mannix. In the context of this discussion what is highly significant is that Brennan chose to counterpose Archbishop Mannix's well known views with that of his immediate predecessor in Melbourne, Archbishop Carr, and Cardinal Logue who was at that time the Primate of Ireland. Putting aside all the vagaries of personality, it says a great deal about Brennan's clarity of purpose, that she inserted into a highly emotionally charged discussion a clear and reasoned argument about the right of individuals to assert different opinions. What is evident here is Brennan's recourse to her legal skills to distinguish who is the legitimate authority in a given matter. It is especially significant that she is clearly able to separate out the allegiances that are required doctrinally in a faith community from those issues which are rightfully a matter for public debate and personal discernment.

The second section of Brennan's letter that was excluded in the *Advocate's* version referred to the efforts of the committee of the St Patrick's procession in 1920, to avoid any display of "offending emblems."³⁵⁶ As it was mentioned in a list of summary points made by Brennan, this committee was noted in the letter that was published in the *Advocate*. However, Brennan had also cited a section from a letter, from the secretary of the St Patrick's committee to the Lord Mayor, indicating the committee's opposition to the display of anything that would be "offensive" but this was omitted in the *Advocate*.³⁵⁷ It seems that Brennan had made a lot of inquiries about the whole matter, arguing that the more recent view of the relevant St Patrick's Committee indicates that the promotion of *Sinn Fein* was not endorsed by those who were responsible for the procession in 1920 and that this stance was indicative of their general position on the matter. By reprinting Brennan's letter in full in *Woman's Social Work*, the leaders of the CWSG were

³⁵⁵ "Affiliation of the C.W.S.G. with the National Council of Women," *Woman's Social Work*, May-June, 1920, 2.

³⁵⁶ "Affiliation of the C.W.S.G. with the National Council of Women," *Woman's Social Work* May-June, 1920, 2.

³⁵⁷ "Affiliation of the C.W.S.G. with the National Council of Women," *Woman's Social Work*, May-June, 1920, 2-3; and "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 20, 1920, 17.

demonstrating that they were more than capable of dealing with the tensions involved and saw the need to ensure that the wider community was afforded an option to access their views. As the President of the CWSG it would seem reasonable to suggest that Brennan was supportive of the republication of her letter to the *Advocate*.

There is an additional element to Brennan's reaction to the tensions over the affiliation of the NCWV and the CWSG. In responding to those who were critical of the affiliation Brennan makes a comment which seems tangential but is very important with regard to her sense of herself as Australian born of Irish parents. In the context of the reaction to the display of "Sinn Fein emblems" Brennan states that as someone born in Australia and committed to responding to the needs of Australia she has "little time or inclination to follow the tortuous political questions of a far-off country", warning her fellow members that the CWSG needed to ensure that it did not adopt a particular political stance.³⁵⁸ It may seem like a simple statement of allegiance to Australia but in the context of the broader Irish Catholic community Brennan's reference to Ireland as a "far-off country" seems to challenge representations of the Irish Catholic community which assume a primary allegiance to Ireland and its "tortuous political questions." Brennan's stance did not go unnoticed and a week later a member of the CWSG retorted in a letter to the editor, that the CWSG could not "expect to go ahead in Australia if it has no time or inclination for the concerns of Ireland."³⁵⁹ While Brennan's comment about Ireland says something about the strength of her identification with Australian issues, it also indicates that she did not look back to Ireland for her religious roots but saw them bound to Australian soil.

The tensions over the affiliation of the CWSG with the NCWV epitomised the sectarian tensions of the times and the issues associated with Irish nationalism. Kennedy asserts that Archbishop Mannix was resolute that the CWSG should disaffiliate from the NCWV. After considerable efforts to resolve the problem were unsuccessful, Brennan and some other key women chose to resign from the CWSG. This issue is a clear example of how ecclesial power can be exercised in a hierarchical structure. As noted by Kennedy, the decision by Brennan and others to resign rather than appease can also be viewed as a demonstration of strength.³⁶⁰

³⁵⁸ "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 20, 1920, 17.

³⁵⁹ "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 27, 1920, 15.

³⁶⁰ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 31-32, 35-36.

This issue did not just involve Brennan and Archbishop Mannix. As an event in Brennan's life it is worthy of attention as it represents her capacity to stand firm in the face of opposition, especially at a time when Mannix was so much in the public domain and clearly had the loyalty of many in the Catholic community. Right in the middle of the tensions about the affiliation of the CWSG with the NCWV, Brennan wrote an article for *Woman's Social Work* about Cardinal Manning.³⁶¹ This nineteenth century English Cardinal did not just pity the poor from afar but was well known for his involvement in a number of social causes. He favoured a Catholic paradigm of social reform that was to be made manifest in *Rerum Novarum*.³⁶² With the assistance of the then Archbishop of Dublin, Manning was given the responsibility of translating *Rerum Novarum* into English.³⁶³

Cardinal Manning was known for his social activism and Brennan emphasised his willingness to connect with other religious groups for the greater good. It is interesting that in this passage about Cardinal Manning, Brennan referred to the influence that the English Catholic Women's League was able to exert by being connected to the National Union of Women Workers.³⁶⁴ This leaves the reader to draw the obvious parallel to the affiliation of the CWSG with the NCWV. Brennan's appreciation of Manning's stance on social issues supported the type of networking that she believed was essential in order to bring about effective social change. By promoting Manning so strongly, Brennan shifted the focus away from the affiliation of the CWSG and the NCWV, to illustrate the benefits of affiliation for the greater good. Like Margaret Fletcher, who was the founder of the Catholic Women's League in England, Brennan was clear about how her Catholicism required a connection across the wider community in order to enable a collective objective to be obtained. With reference to Fletcher's founding role, Beaumont makes the point that the Catholic Women's League in England was clearly under the authority of the Church hierarchy.³⁶⁵ Brennan was certainly aware of Fletcher's role amongst Catholic women in England. However, after her visit to England in 1930 her focus shifted towards the

³⁶¹ Brennan, "Cardinal Manning," *Woman's Social Work*, July 1, 1920, 2-4.

³⁶² Race Mathews, *Of Labour and Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966* (Clayton, Vic.: Monash University Publishing, 2017), 3, 58, 73-77, 341.

³⁶³ Race Mathews, *Of Labour and Liberty: Distributism in Victoria 1891-1966*, 59, 75.

³⁶⁴ Brennan, "Cardinal Manning," 4. Brennan noted that her reference to the Catholic Women's League in England was from a previous entry in *Woman's Social Work* written by Margaret Fletcher, who founded the League in England.

³⁶⁵ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens, Domesticity and the Women's Movement in England, 1928-64* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 15-16.

activities of the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance which was somewhat independent of the Church hierarchy. This is not to suggest that Brennan had any sort of antithesis to the work of women such as Fletcher but that her experience led her to see the importance of Catholic lay women being able to exercise organisational autonomy.

An expansive sense of how to be an active Catholic lay woman was a strong element of Brennan's identity. The next chapter will refer to a range of groups and issues that Brennan was involved with to indicate something of how she was connected across many different domains. It is suggested that it was eventually through her involvement with the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance that Brennan was to find the type of organisation that melded most fully with her sense of how a Catholic woman could best serve her Church and the wider world.

Chapter 4

At Home in St Joan's

Through her association with women's organisations and her breadth of networking Brennan became well known in Melbourne. An overview of some of her associational links helps to establish a sense of how broad her community involvement was. A synoptic presentation of some of the issues that she spoke about in public provides an insight into how the well-being of women and children was her paramount concern. Brennan's foundational quest for women to be regarded as equal human beings is particularly apparent in her advocacy on the nationality rights of married women. It was eventually through her involvement in the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance that Brennan was to find a true home from which she could confidently integrate her feminism and her expansive sense of how Catholic women like herself could engage collaboratively in the wider community whilst maintaining a strong Catholic identity.

Clubs and professional associations

The world of women's clubs and associations was very much a component of the community to which Brennan was connected. In 1905 Grata Flos Greig was the first woman to enter the legal profession in Australia.³⁶⁶ In a paper written in 1909, Greig lists the many different women's groups that were active at the time and highlights the importance placed on organisational connections for women, at the stage when Brennan was just beginning her professional life.³⁶⁷

At the University of Melbourne Brennan was an active member of the Princess Ida Club. Farley Kelly has identified the many ways in which this club provided a sense of mutual support and encouragement for the women who were members, even after they graduated.³⁶⁸ Brennan was involved in the Princess Ida Debating Society and in 1908 she was the Assistant Honorary Secretary of the club as a whole.³⁶⁹ It was this involvement

³⁶⁶ Ruth Campbell, *A History of the Melbourne Law School 1857-1973* (Parkville, Vic.: Faculty of Law, University of Melbourne, 1977): 28.

³⁶⁷ G. Flos Greig, "The Law as a Profession for Women," *Commonwealth Law Review* 6, no. 4 (March-April, 1909): 146.

³⁶⁸ Kelly, *Degrees of Liberation*, 30-37.

³⁶⁹ *Melbourne University Magazine*, vol. I, no. 1 (June, 1907): 25; and *Melbourne University Magazine*, vol. II, no. 2 (September, 1908): 48. Brennan is listed in 1907 as the Assistant Secretary of the

in the club that had initially linked her to the National Council of Women in Victoria.³⁷⁰ Brennan's membership and roles in the Princess Ida Club provided her with an opportunity, early in her professional life, to establish skills and a sense of how women could unite to be supportive. Her links to the National Council of Women endured across her professional and associational life.³⁷¹

From the time of its foundation in Melbourne, in 1912, Brennan was connected to the Lyceum Club. Jane Carey observes that Lyceum Clubs: "provided an arena in which elite professional women could form strong networks and cultivate useful contacts. Indeed, the Clubs were explicitly designed to provide a space for female networking — both locally and internationally."³⁷² Angela Woollacott also refers to the many ways in which women's clubs promoted a sense of internationalism noting particularly that a club like the Lyceum provided a forum and a sense of connection, for like-minded feminist women across the British Empire.³⁷³ In her analysis of Irene Longman's entry into Parliament in Queensland in 1929, Kay Ferres has observed the significance of club membership, specifically the Lyceum Club in Brisbane, in providing her with opportunities, skills and networks that were supportive of her entry into the world of politics.³⁷⁴

Through the Lyceum Club, Brennan was linked to other women who had academic and professional interests and was able to network across different sectors of the community.³⁷⁵ A few examples of occasions when Brennan was present at the Lyceum Club serve to affirm how important this Club was for her associational life. In 1924 she spoke at a dinner at the Lyceum Club that was held for Mrs. E. F. Allan prior to a journey overseas. Brennan had been associated with her through their common studies in law and

Princess Ida Debating Society and as the Assistant Honorary Secretary of the Princess Ida Club in 1908.

³⁷⁰ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 13.

³⁷¹ Minutes of Council, November 8, 1962, National Council of Women of Victoria, Papers, YMS 16241, Box 4, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. (Records not fully processed at date of access.) Brennan died in October 1962. Her name was mentioned, along with others, during a time of silent remembrance at the start of this November meeting of the NCWV.

³⁷² Jane Carey, "Recreating British Womanhood: Ethel Osborne and the Construction of White Middle-class Femininity in Early Twentieth-Century Melbourne," in *Exploring the British World: Identity, Cultural Productions, Institutions*, eds. Kate Darian-Smith, Patricia Grimshaw, Kierra Lindsey, and Stuart McIntyre (Melbourne, RMIT Publishing, 2004), 25. (Conference Paper)

³⁷³ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 116.

³⁷⁴ Kay Ferres, "The Lyceum Club and the Making of the Modern Woman," *Queensland Review* 21, no. 1 (2014): 62.

³⁷⁵ "'At Home' at 'Cranford'," *Table Talk*, October 3, 1912, 12.

their membership of the Melbourne Lyceum Club, from its beginnings.³⁷⁶ Mrs. Allan had written the women's column as "Vesta" in the *Argus* for many years and was well known in women's circles.³⁷⁷ Ellen, May and Anna Brennan were all present at a special party hosted by the writer, Mary Grant Bruce, to bid farewell to her friends when she was leaving Australia in 1927.³⁷⁸ In 1930, when Brennan wanted to hold a party, prior to her own travel overseas, she was able to hold it at the Lyceum Club.³⁷⁹ Most significantly, in 1940 she convened a meeting at the Lyceum Club, so that women from a cross section of the wider community, could come together to discuss common concerns about social issues.³⁸⁰

Brennan was committed to establishing professional solidarity with other legal women. Her name was included in a list of those who were eligible to become members of the Women's Law Society, when it was formed in 1914. This Society was established so that the pioneering women lawyers in Victoria could be supportive of each another.³⁸¹ It is not evident how long the Women's Law Society operated but in 1931 a new group with similar aims was established. This new entity was called the Legal Women's Association of Victoria.³⁸² In 1932 this Association expressed the need to make contact with similar groups overseas. In 1933 Brennan was the president of this Association.³⁸³ This provides some insight into the breadth of the international connections Brennan had access to and a sense of how legal women across various countries were connected. The Women Justices' Association of Victoria was established on 30th June 1938.³⁸⁴ Brennan was the speaker for its inaugural luncheon gathering addressing the topic of "Women in Justice."³⁸⁵ As there were several eminent guests present for this gathering, the choice of Brennan as the speaker, reflects the standing she had achieved. It also indicates how her

³⁷⁶ "A Farewell Dinner," *Table Talk*, July 3, 1924, 37.

³⁷⁷ "The World of Women," *Argus*, May 3, 1938, 7.

³⁷⁸ "Mary Grant Bruce Says Farewell," *Table Talk* January 27, 1927, 65.

³⁷⁹ "Notes from the Capitals," *Australasian*, July 26, 1930, 11.

³⁸⁰ "Party At Lyceum Club," *Argus*, May 20, 1940, 5.

³⁸¹ "Women's Law Society," *Weekly Times* September 5, 1914, 10.

³⁸² "Women in the Legal Profession," *Age*, October 28, 1931, 10.

³⁸³ "Legal Women's Association," *Argus*, February 16, 1932, 3; and "Social Notes," *Argus*, December 8, 1933, 16.

³⁸⁴ Annual Report 1939, Women Justices' Association of Victoria, Papers, 1939-1974, MS 10773, Box 2/6, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. The date of the establishment of this Association was noted in the first Annual Report in 1939.

³⁸⁵ Annual Report, 1939, 5, Women Justices' Association of Victoria, Papers, 1939-1974, MS 10773, Box 2/6, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. The reference to Brennan at this luncheon is on page 5 of the Annual Report.

professional role as a lawyer was a key element of her networking across groups. From an intersectional perspective it is interesting to note that Brennan was also connected to the Women Justices' Association of Victoria in her capacity as a member of St Joan's (Vic.).³⁸⁶ It also speaks of her endorsement of groups that could provide support for women who were exercising a role in the legal system.

Brennan's view about the function of women's clubs and the importance of female solidarity became apparent in relation to her involvement with the Catholic Women's Club (CWC). At the Third Annual General Meeting of this club in 1916, it was suggested that Catholic men should be able to become honorary members.³⁸⁷ Miss E. McMahon objected to this proposal on the grounds that the CWC "was founded wholly and solely for women."³⁸⁸ The *Advocate* reported: "Miss Anna T. Brennan, B.A., LL.B., seconded the amendment, and in an able and humorous speech presented all the disadvantages accruing from the inclusion of men, even as honorary members, in a club meant for the fair sex alone. "Women," she said, "went to women's clubs in order to get away from the men."³⁸⁹

Although Brennan and McMahon were unsuccessful, their opposition to the proposal articulated the growing sense that women should be able to congregate in clubs specifically for women. This issue gained some traction in the Catholic newspapers.³⁹⁰ Marion Miller Knowles, president of the CWC and writer of *The Ladies' Page* in the *Advocate*, argued that the admission of men as associate members would enable them to feel comfortable when they entered the rooms of the CWC but did not give them any control of the management.³⁹¹ Brennan and McMahon argued more from the perspective of how the women felt about the men being present not how the men felt about being able to join.³⁹² Given that Brennan had prior experience of the Princess Ida Club and was by

³⁸⁶ Correspondence 1940-1946, Women Justices' Association of Victoria, Papers, 1939-1974, MS 10773, Box1/1, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria.

³⁸⁷ "Catholic Women's Club," *Advocate*, May 13, 1916, 27.

³⁸⁸ "Catholic Women's Club," *Advocate*, May 13, 1916, 27.

³⁸⁹ "Catholic Women's Club," *Advocate*, May 13, 1916, 27.

³⁹⁰ "Catholic Women's Club," *Advocate*, May 27, 1916, 27; and "Catholic Women's Club," *Tribune*, May 25, 1916, 3.

³⁹¹ "The Ladies' Page," *Advocate*, May 20, 1916, 31.

³⁹² "Catholic Women's Club," *Advocate*, May 13, 1916, 27.

this stage an active member of the Lyceum Club (Melbourne) she could base her arguments for a women's only club on her experience of other such clubs.

The *Sunday Times* featured Brennan's views on Women's Clubs in 1921, noting her membership of the Lyceum Club but adding that Brennan also argued for another club for "small salaried women."³⁹³ At first this reference to women on a lesser salary may seem condescending but it also indicates that for Brennan it was the need for women to be able to access a space for themselves that made clubs so important. This article also indicates that Brennan had a sense that clubs served a different function for women than they did for men. Clubs for women, she believed, were not about passive isolation but about connection with other women.³⁹⁴

Brennan seemed to have a highly developed sense of how women could band together beyond denominational lines for the greater benefit of all women. In encouraging Catholic women to engage in public life Brennan valued local civic connections and did not limit the notion of active citizenship to "parliamentary" matters.³⁹⁵ The range of issues that she canvassed throughout her life indicates both the breadth of her engagement in the wider community and the constancy of her energies being directed to matters affecting women and children.

It is interesting to link Brennan's involvement in various clubs and organisations to some of the ideas that have surfaced due to the developments in social movement and network theory.³⁹⁶ The detailed study that was undertaken by Naomi Rosenthal et al., on the connections that operated in the nineteenth century amongst reformist women in New York State, can be aligned to how Brennan and other women were connected in Melbourne in the post suffrage era.³⁹⁷ The New York State study is very detailed and draws on a great deal of data. Whilst not attempting any sort of parallel analysis with this

³⁹³ "A Woman Solicitor Talks of Her Work," *Sunday Times*, March 20, 1921, 13.

³⁹⁴ "A Woman Solicitor Talks of Her Work," *Sunday Times*, March 20, 1921, 13.

³⁹⁵ "Catholic Women Draw Up Practical Policy," *Advocate*, October 15, 1953, 2. Although this article refers to a Mrs A. Brennan this was Anna Brennan. See also "Catholic Women Meet at Hobart Conference," *Advocate*, October 8, 1953, 16. (Brennan is listed as representing the CWSG at this meeting which reflects the enduring connection that she had with the CWSG.)

³⁹⁶ Mario Diani, "Social Movements and Collective Action," in *The Sage Handbook of Social Network Analysis*, eds. John Scott and Peter J. Carrington (London: Sage Publications, 2016): 223-235.

³⁹⁷ Naomi Rosenthal, et al., "Social Movements and Network Analysis: A Case Study of Nineteenth-Century Women's Reform in New York State," *American Journal of Sociology* 90, no. 5 (1985): 1022-1054.

American study, it is possible to see how Brennan and her peer group of elite women were enmeshed in ways similar to the activities of the leading women in the New York State Study. It is difficult to determine how deliberately post suffrage women in Australia, such as Brennan, set out to establish a social movement but there is no doubt that she and other like-minded women saw the need for and benefit of organisational links which supported their feminist agenda. The various webs of connectivity amongst social and social reform groups in Melbourne resulted in women like Brennan having ties across a range of organisations. In this sense a common concern for the promotion of women's rights constituted the basis for a social movement that was not strictly defined as such.

Similarly, with reference to how active citizenship was realised by post suffrage women, there are many similarities between the civic involvement of women like Brennan and her Australian peers and the study by Sue Innes of Women Citizens' Associations in Scotland in the interwar years. The women in Innes' study were also very aware of their collective power to effect social change in matters affecting women. What is of specific interest with regard to this study of Brennan's sense of active citizenship and Innes' research is the interface between feminism and citizenship which meant that women's groups in a post suffrage context formulated a new understanding of how citizenship was realised which was not gender neutral.³⁹⁸

The reference to 'active citizenship' to describe someone like Brennan's engagement in social reform, alludes to the specific way that certain post suffrage women saw themselves as having a distinctive contribution to make to the civic community that was imprinted with an overtly feminist consciousness. It could be that suffrage gave women the armour with which to engage in civic issues with a greater sense of individual and collective power. Given that post suffrage women could effect political change at the ballot box, it is highly possible that their notion of citizenship was not just a passive adherence to the dominant male model but one which had women's interest at the forefront. Significantly it was not just that the interests of women were highlighted but that they were advocated for by women for women. Innes notes that besides her own study of the situation in Scotland there were similar trends in how citizenship was conceptualised by women's groups in various countries, including Australia, in the

³⁹⁸ Sue Innes, "Constructing Women's Citizenship in the Interwar Period: the Edinburgh Women Citizens' Association," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 4 (2004): 621-623, 638, 640.

interwar years.³⁹⁹ It is the link between the advocacy for equal rights for women and the greater inclusion of all women in the benefits of social change brought about through the highly articulated concerns of women's groups who participated in public life that is evident in her study.⁴⁰⁰ This mirrors Brennan's sense of citizenship which was moulded by her primary focus on equality for women but also on the need for change to be realised by women, including Catholic women, by assuming an active interest in various aspects of civic life. There is also some resonance between Beaumont's use of the term "democratic citizenship" to describe the activities of the women's groups that she researched, and some of the women's groups that Brennan was involved in.⁴⁰¹ Brennan did not seem to have any problems aligning with feminism but Beaumont has shown that some women's organisations in England did seem to create a distance between their organisations and feminism.⁴⁰²

A public voice on a range of issues

Early in her professional life, Brennan was called upon to present her views at a gathering of women when she participated, alongside Dr Edith Barrett, in a meeting of past students of the Presbyterian Ladies' College in 1911. The problem of accessing domestic help was discussed at this gathering.⁴⁰³ Brennan's suggested application of a highly planned solution to the shortage, with arrangements being made so that domestic help would be available at point of need in the course of day, was perceived to be impractical by other women. Commenting on this exchange, the *Argus* journalist "Vesta" suggested that Brennan's intellectual approach might have had a positive impact on a group of men but was not "convincing" for a group of women.⁴⁰⁴ This example is interesting as it casts some light on how early in her career, Brennan's response to a vexed issue, did not result in a total affirmation of her systematic and reasoned approach.

Brennan was committed to engaging in public debate ever ready to challenge any entity and over her lifetime would write in many public newspapers and journals. R.J.W Selleck noted, in his history of the University of Melbourne, that in 1912, Brennan wrote to the

³⁹⁹ Innes, "Constructing Women's Citizenship in the Interwar Period," 624.

⁴⁰⁰ Innes, "Constructing Women's Citizenship in the Interwar Period," 635.

⁴⁰¹ Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, 40.

⁴⁰² Beaumont, *Housewives and Citizens*, 40.

⁴⁰³ "New Thoughts on an Old Subject," *Advocate*, November 25, 1911, 33.

⁴⁰⁴ "Women to Women," *Argus*, November 29, 1911, 11.

Catholic newspaper, the *Advocate*, criticising its stance over a controversy regarding the editorial independence of two University of Melbourne student magazines. Subsumed in this issue were notions about a perceived need to be protective of women's sensibilities but Brennan makes it clear that women were more than capable of make their own judgements about matters affecting them.⁴⁰⁵

Two years later, it was noted in a local paper that Brennan's insights, along with others, were included in an article in *Everylady's Journal*, on the topic: "Have Australian Girls too much Liberty."⁴⁰⁶ At this time there was a concern that there was something about life in Australia that produced a heightened sense of autonomy in Australian girls. Although positive in her assessment of the modern girl, Brennan notes the formative influence of the family home and asserts that the behaviour of the so called "bad" girls is essentially an indictment of "an educational system detached from religion and idealism."⁴⁰⁷ In her analysis of the modern girl in Ireland, Louise Ryan outlines the many different interpretations and assessments of young women or "flappers" that were apparent in certain Irish newspapers. Ryan notes that the way in which the fashions of young women were interpreted and judged either positively or negatively needs to be closely read with regard to a range of social, political and religious influences.⁴⁰⁸ Likewise, Brennan's analysis of the root cause of what may appear to be unacceptable behaviours, as noted above, reflects her capacity to avoid a simplistic judgement of young women which does not pay enough attention to broader issues. The close link that Brennan makes between religion and a healthy functioning society is evident in her comments on many social issues. Whilst she respects personal autonomy it is for her always within the paradigm of a religious worldview.

When reflecting on the terrible impact of World War I and in expressing gratitude to all those who served, Brennan confidently includes the impact of the war on women and the contribution that women made. In 1918 she writes: "Because for every man who, his duty done, will triumphantly return, and more still for every man who rests under his little

⁴⁰⁵ Selleck, *The Shop: The University of Melbourne 1850-1939*, 514-516. The article in the *Advocate* that Brennan was reacting to is under the heading "University Papers" in "Prominent Topics," *Advocate*, August 10, 1912, 30. The letter written by Brennan to the editor of the *Advocate* is "University Papers," *Advocate*, August 17, 1912, 19.

⁴⁰⁶ "Money in Gardening for Women," *Richmond Australian*, August 15, 1914, 3.

⁴⁰⁷ "Australian Girls," *Examiner*, August 15, 1914, 2.

⁴⁰⁸ Louise Ryan, *Gender, Identity and the Irish Press 1922-1937: Embodying the Nation* (Lewiston, New York: Edwin Mellen, 2002), 37-68.

wooden cross or who lies unburied and unrecorded on foreign soil, some woman has watched and wept and prayed and worked.”⁴⁰⁹ Besides its lyrical quality this sentence encapsulates a lot about Brennan’s realism and her inclusivity of women when referring to the massive impact of the War in the lives of so many people.

A significant theme that runs through Brennan’s engagement in the public domain focused on women’s issues and the welfare of children in the event of poverty or family breakdown. Brennan’s concern for children who had been placed in State care is evident in her 1920 address as President of the Catholic Women’s Social Guild at the Fourth Annual Conference.⁴¹⁰ Brennan’s awareness of the underlying causes of poverty and destitution is also evident in her analysis of child guardianship laws. In what seems a truly respectful and enlightened view, Brennan argues for not separating children from their parents for longer than was necessary, due to the impact of poverty. Besides the rights of children, Brennan also advocated for the rights of parents, whose primary role in the lives of their children could be usurped by certain institutions.⁴¹¹

Brennan was also very critical of institutions extending their control over young people who in other circumstances would be granted a level of autonomy. She argued that neither parents nor children should be penalised because of any transient hardship, whereby the temporary placement of a child in an institution could result in a loss of family connection and place a young person under unwarranted scrutiny by the courts. In her discussion of child guardianship issues Brennan highlighted the lack of status given to mothers, compared to fathers.⁴¹² Some of her criticism of any extension to the laws on divorce was premised on her reading of materials about the situation in America which suggested a strong correlation between juvenile delinquency and parents who were divorced.⁴¹³

She maintained her concern on these matters, calling Catholic women in 1925 to be more involved in social action. Using her position as the only woman speaker at the Australian Catholic Federation’s summer school at Queenscliff that year, she illustrated the lack of involvement of Catholic women in social issues by noting that at a recent conference, there had been no Catholic representation amongst the 130 organisations attending,

⁴⁰⁹ Brennan, “Victory and Peace,” *Woman’s Social Work*, December, 1918, 1.

⁴¹⁰ “Catholic Women’s Social Guild,” *Advocate*, April 15, 1920, 24.

⁴¹¹ “Neglected Children,” *Argus*, April 17, 1923, 10.

⁴¹² “Neglected Children,” *Argus*, April 17, 1923, 10.

⁴¹³ “Dangers of Divorce,” *Age*, October 29, 1924, 11.

despite important matters being discussed.⁴¹⁴ Brennan used this platform to articulate her view that women generally had established an active role in shaping society and Catholic women needed to be active citizens to publicly promote a Catholic view on social issues and especially on matters that related to women. Speaking from her own experience, she assured other women that a Catholic perspective was worthy of consideration.⁴¹⁵

At a conference of the National Council of Women in 1938, Brennan highlighted the importance of family and called for “proper, impartial and scientific investigation” into the link between the “falling birth rate” and “maternal mortality”.⁴¹⁶ In 1938 she endorsed child endowment as a means of supporting families.⁴¹⁷ Brennan also argued that women should be able to gain the assistance of a court, to help in situations where women could not access the household income.⁴¹⁸

Industrial conditions for women

For most of Brennan’s lifetime there were concerns raised in the wider community about various aspects of the employment of and industrial conditions for women. A significant feature of Brennan’s associational life is that in contrast to Muriel Heagney and the other women identified by Raelene Frances for both their Irish and Irish/ Catholic backgrounds and their leadership in union issues prior to World War II⁴¹⁹ Brennan did not invest her energies into the labour movement.

In Australia, it had been arbitrated that women would receive a lower rate of pay than men. This was premised on the assumption that working women were single and had less demand on their income.⁴²⁰ In 1912 it was determined that a woman who was working in a job that was considered to be a “‘male’ occupation” could receive the same rate as a man in that position. For various reasons, this did not result in real parity for women,

⁴¹⁴ “Church News,” *Argus*, February 12, 1925, 14.

⁴¹⁵ “Catholic Women and Social Activity,” *Southern Cross*, February 27, 1925, 9.

⁴¹⁶ “‘A Spirit of Defeatism’,” *Advocate*, November 3, 1938, 28.

⁴¹⁷ “To Stop Fall in Birth Rate,” *Argus*, October 28, 1938, 6.

⁴¹⁸ “Court of Domestic Relations,” *Argus*, November 1, 1943, 6.

⁴¹⁹ Frances, “Authentic Leaders: Women and Leadership in Australian Unions before World War II,” 16-17.

⁴²⁰ Penelope Johnson, “Gender, Class and Work: The Council of Action for Equal Pay and the Equal Pay Campaign in Australia During World War II,” *Labour History* no. 50 (1986): 135.

across the employment sector.⁴²¹ Which women entered the work force and the type of work that they did was altered by factors such as the impact of war.⁴²² The campaigns for equal pay in Victoria, in the first few decades of the twentieth century, reflect the complex interplay of economic realities, competing agendas and divisions across society. This was mirrored in the differences between various women's organisations and their stance on equal pay.⁴²³

The complexities of the issues associated with women obtaining equality in the workforce are evident in Brennan's involvement in this matter. She had a realistic insight into the harsh and difficult working conditions that many young women had to endure.⁴²⁴ Brennan also expressed the view that women who had the benefits of an education could not ignore the plight of those toiling in terrible industrial situations.⁴²⁵ There was an element of conservatism evident in her support for protective legislation for women in certain areas of work.⁴²⁶ In 1922 she spoke about industrial issues affecting women at a meeting of the National Council of Women in Melbourne. It is clear from this presentation that Brennan had a very good working knowledge of the relevant legislation and she advocates for the wages for girls to be high enough to prevent them from having to take on additional work to supplement their wages.⁴²⁷ A year later, when Dame Adelaide Anderson, "principal lady Inspector of Factories in Great Britain," visited Australia, Brennan expressed sympathy with those who saw the need to campaign for suitable working conditions for women.⁴²⁸

As Brennan was involved in women's issues for such a long period of time it is possible to see how her emphasis on certain issues was in tune with various shifts in the wider society. Her involvement in the CWSG between 1916 and 1920 reflected the feminist concern of the time with ensuring that post suffrage women took up their role as active

⁴²¹ Melanie Nolan, "Sex or Class? The Politics of the Earliest Equal Pay Campaign in Victoria," *Labour History* no. 61 (1991): 116.

⁴²² Penelope Johnson, "Gender, Class and Work: The Council of Action for Equal Pay and the Equal Pay Campaign in Australia During World War II," 138.

⁴²³ Melanie Nolan, "Sex or Class? The Politics of the Earliest Equal Pay Campaign in Victoria," 118,121.

⁴²⁴ "Catholic Women's Social Guild: Inaugural Meeting in the Cathedral Hall," *Advocate*, October 7, 1916, 26.

⁴²⁵ "Social Events: To Meet Miss Dingman," *Argus*, October 26, 1923, 18.

⁴²⁶ "Against 'Equal Pay for Sexes'," *Register News-Pictorial*, August 30, 1929, 28.

⁴²⁷ "Women's Wages," *Age*, August 25, 1922, 11.

⁴²⁸ Brennan, "An Administrative Adventure," *Woman's World*, August 1, 1923, 421, 451.

citizens beyond the boundaries of domesticity. Likewise, Brennan's involvement in the rights of women to be granted equal pay for equal work also reflects the shifts in feminist discourse in Australia in the 1930s around the rights of women as workers.⁴²⁹

A very clear example of how Brennan advocated for the rights of women in factories is apparent in her reply to an article penned in 1923 by J. Law, who was the manager of the Pelaco factories in Melbourne where many women were employed.⁴³⁰ Law had argued that there was a certain rightness that those who perform menial repetitive tasks were operating at a level commensurate with their abilities. He provided many apparently rational reasons for piecework and suggested that the ill health in workers may have been due to their own "over-indulgence in pleasure".⁴³¹ Law's article sought to justify women's share of the industrial burden by pointing to the good of the wider society and economic prosperity. Brennan rejected the utilitarian strand in Law's arguments that were out of tune with the spirit of *Rerum Novarum* and wasted no time in writing a rebuttal.

In the next edition of *Woman's World* Brennan challenged Law and argued for better conditions for women.⁴³² Brennan rejected Law's acceptance of the status quo and identifies thinkers of the age who had expressed the need for change in industrial conditions. She calls on "Karl Marx and Pope Leo XIII., C.F.G. Masterman and John Galsworthy, H.G. Wells and Dame Adelaide Anderson" as if they are her witnesses for the prosecution.⁴³³ Brennan goes on to give a very sympathetic account of the difficulties faced by female factory workers due to their low income. Brennan's particular advocacy for women was apparent when in her condemnation of Law's stance on this issue she states "it is difficult to deal temperately with the implication in the article that girls are doing such work because they have not the intelligence or desire to do anything better."⁴³⁴ In her response, Brennan discloses her genuine sympathy for the harshness that the factory system imposed on whole families and for housing conditions that had such a

⁴²⁹ Lesley Johnson and Justine Lloyd, *Sentenced To Everyday Life: Feminism and the Housewife* (Oxford, UK: Berg, 2004), 40-41.

⁴³⁰ J. Law, "The Industrial System To-Day: A Plea for a Broader Understanding," *Woman's World*, October 1, 1923, 525-526.

⁴³¹ J. Law, "The Industrial System To-Day: A Plea for a Broader Understanding," 526.

⁴³² Brennan, "The Philosophy of Pollyanna: A Plea for a Broader Understanding," *Woman's World*, November 1, 1923, 583-584.

⁴³³ Brennan, "The Philosophy of Pollyanna: A Plea for a Broader Understanding," 583.

⁴³⁴ Brennan, "The Philosophy of Pollyanna: A Plea for a Broader Understanding," 584.

negative effect on the quality of life for so many young girls.⁴³⁵ Brennan, the rugged realist, was also Brennan the woman whose view of women's potentiality is supported by a view of the human person which is far beyond utilitarian. Indeed, in much of her condemnation of systems, she rallies against what she perceives to be to the detriment of body, mind and soul.

Although supportive of equal pay for equal work, Brennan did express a concern about the impact of the physical demands of certain work, particularly on married women.⁴³⁶ Like many contemporaries, she viewed married women as the mothers of the nation. Her assessment, as reported in a 1929 newspaper account, that at times protectionism (that excluded women from the paid workforce) might be invoked by some in the community when women in industry were perceived as being in competition with men was astute.⁴³⁷ Brennan's notion of equality does not cause her to discount the physical difference between men and women. She acknowledged there might be some work that was not suitable for women or for women to undertake beyond a certain number of hours. This acknowledgement of difference does not in Brennan's view negate the need to provide equal pay for equal work.

In this instance, Brennan's sympathy for the protection of women in the industrial labour force and her emphasis on physical limitations, seems to be in contrast to her general stance on autonomy for women. Could it be that Brennan's view on the importance of motherhood, for the life of the nation, may have resulted in her adopting a somewhat maternalistic approach? Some women viewed any form of protectionism as promoting inequality, whilst others were supportive of Brennan's view about the importance of married women not being involved in industry.⁴³⁸ Margaret Lade, who owned her own factory but had previously worked herself in industry, was very critical of Brennan's position. Lade challenged what she perceived as Brennan's lack of practical insight into the social realities which necessitated married women's work in industry. She pointed out

⁴³⁵ Brennan, "The Philosophy of Pollyanna: A Plea for a Broader Understanding," 584.

⁴³⁶ "Against 'Equal Pay for Sexes'," *Register News-Pictorial*, August 30, 1929, 28.

⁴³⁷ "Against 'Equal Pay for Sexes'," *Register News-Pictorial*, August 30, 1929, 28.

⁴³⁸ "Protective Legislation for Women in Industry," *Register News-Pictorial*, August 31, 1929, 26.

that, excluding married women from the industrial workforce, limited their options and denied them the opportunity for an increased level of economic independence.⁴³⁹

Brennan had the opportunity to assert her stance on industrial issues, due to her connection to various organisations, but it is evident in the example above that her arguments were challenged by those with a direct working knowledge of industrial situations. Brennan articulated the need for women to be economically independent, joining with Vida Goldstein and Julia Rapke in 1934 to declare “that the situation which existed to-day with regard to the right of women to work and the principle of equality, offered the greatest challenge to women since the struggle for the suffrage ended.”⁴⁴⁰ Brennan also added that “there could be no freedom without economic independence. If anybody too seriously threatened the position of women she thought it would be found that they would speak quite effectively through the medium of the vote.”⁴⁴¹

Muriel Heagney’s report, *Are Women Taking Men’s Jobs?* is a very important text in the history of women’s struggles for equal pay.⁴⁴² In 1935 a meeting was arranged by the Victorian section of the “Open Door Council” and Heagney was one of the convenors.⁴⁴³ In arguing for equality in industry at this meeting Brennan states:

We should not make the argument for the employment of women a utilitarian one and put forward the plea that they, too, have to support a family. We must take our stand on the basis of being equal human beings, and, for practical purposes, voting human beings. No one should be able to forget that with safety.⁴⁴⁴

Brennan argued that women’s rights should not be determined by reference to any other relationship but rested totally on their status as “equal human beings”. Obviously, some working women were supporting or contributing to the support of a family but were denied the basic wage that was determined on the notion of a male breadwinner. Brennan

⁴³⁹ “Elizabeth Leigh’s Pages for Women: Equal Efficiency and Equal Pay,” *Register News-Pictorial*, September 2, 1929, 28.

⁴⁴⁰ “Woman’s Realm and Social News: Women, Work, and Pay,” *Argus*, May 16, 1934, 15.

⁴⁴¹ “Woman’s Realm and Social News: Women, Work, and Pay,” *Argus*, May 16, 1934, 15.

⁴⁴² Muriel Heagney, *Are Women Taking Men’s Jobs?: A Survey of Women’s Work in Victoria, with Special Regard to Equal Status, Equal Pay, and Equality of Opportunity* (Melbourne: Hilton and Veitch, 1935). See also “Occupations of Women,” *Argus*, February 4, 1936, 10.

⁴⁴³ “Women in Industry,” *Argus*, July 11, 1935, 12.

⁴⁴⁴ “Women in Industry,” *Argus*, July 11, 1935, 12.

argued that women regardless of their family obligations should be treated with parity with male workers who received a family wage regardless of whether they had a family or not. Another important aspect of this statement is that as a post suffrage woman she was aware of the dynamics of power and how to assert it.

Another strand of Brennan's view was her stance that women should not be defined by their domestic roles. In 1937, she addressed the annual conference of the National Council of Women on "Women of the Modern State."⁴⁴⁵ Taking issue with the notion that "Woman's sphere is her home," she argued if this was the case very little would be done to solve problems like "maternal mortality" especially for those living in very poor circumstances.⁴⁴⁶ She suggested that if women did not move beyond the domain of the home they would have little impact on social reform. Brennan's stance in this context does not seem consonant with the view of women in the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo Anno*, given that this document reinforced the notion of women operating primarily in the domestic sphere. For Brennan, serious social concerns like maternal mortality required a level of action that necessitated a much broader view of the role of women in society. It was not necessarily a matter of Brennan choosing an adversarial stance with regard to Catholic social teaching but her belief that the social issues that she was aware of required action for women by women. In this regard Brennan's feminism could not be tempered by idealised notions about the role of women. Just as Catholic social teaching sought to respond to societal ills so Brennan sought to address the manifestations of inequality for women especially in matters such as maternal mortality.

When the value of providing higher education for women, who were also mothers, emerged again as a topic of debate in certain circles in 1938, Brennan was approached for an opinion. She responded by offering specific examples of women who were mothers but also occupied significant roles in the wider community arguing forcibly that the societal limits placed on women occupying certain professional roles constituted the real obstacle to women being able to utilise all the benefits of their tertiary education.⁴⁴⁷ In citing a number of university graduates who were mothers and professionals she includes the example of Dr Vera Scantlebury Brown, who was very influential in the development

⁴⁴⁵ "Much of Interest for the Modern Woman," *Argus*, October 30, 1937, 38.

⁴⁴⁶ "Much of Interest for the Modern Woman," *Argus*, October 30, 1937, 38.

⁴⁴⁷ "Higher Education or Home and Babies?" *Argus*, January 21, 1938, 6.

of the services in infant and child welfare.⁴⁴⁸ Brennan was not shy in expressing her argument that the paucity of appointments of women to public roles was the result of discriminatory practices. Brennan's view on this topic was in contrast to that of Mrs. E. B. Heffernan, (Dr Hilda Greenshields) who made it clear that she was not in favour of women moving beyond the domestic sphere and deplored the loss of "womanly" qualities in the younger women of her day.⁴⁴⁹ Although Brennan valued the role of mothers she avoided drawing on gendered arguments which promoted the notion of women as having distinctly "womanly" qualities. Instead she cited the endorsement by St Joan's (Vic.) of university education for women.⁴⁵⁰ Brennan did not see her religious affiliation as a private matter but as a component of her stance in public debate. She was both a public citizen and a public Catholic. Her organisational ties with other Catholic women who espoused similar views worked to create new impressions of emerging consensus among forward thinking Catholic women on some topics.

Brennan demonstrated the capacity to maintain a stance on an issue, which was not always in accord with other feminist women in her circles. Maude Royden was a British preacher who became well known, in the early decades of the 20th century, for her positivity with regard to sexuality as creative energy whilst also endorsing the value of celibacy for unmarried women.⁴⁵¹ Royden was widely acclaimed by many women's groups, during her visit to Australia 1928.⁴⁵² Laura Rademaker has argued that the extensive media coverage of Royden's Australian tour and her willingness to publicly deal with topical issues from a Christian perspective, reflects how important a contemporary response to religious questions and issues was for women in Australia at that time.⁴⁵³ Royden was very positive about the welcome she received in Melbourne during her visit.⁴⁵⁴ In 1938, *Woman's World* featured an article by Royden on modern women and morality.⁴⁵⁵ By

⁴⁴⁸ "Higher Education or Home and Babies?" *Argus*, January 21, 1938, 6; and Kerreen Reiger, "Vera Scantlebury Brown: Professional Mother," in *Double Time: Women in Victoria-150 Years*, eds. Marilyn Lake and Farley Kelly (Ringwood; Penguin Books, 1985), 288.

⁴⁴⁹ "Higher Education or Home and Babies?" *Argus*, January 21, 1938, 6.

⁴⁵⁰ "Higher Education or Home and Babies?" *Argus*, January 21, 1938, 6.

⁴⁵¹ Alison Falby, "Maude Royden's Sacramental Theology of Sex and Love," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 79, no. 2 (2010): 124-126, 137-138.

⁴⁵² "Miss Maude Royden," *Argus*, June 20, 1928, 19.

⁴⁵³ Laura Rademaker, "Religion for the Modern Girl: Maude Royden in Australia, 1928," *Australian Feminist Studies* 31, no. 89 (2016): 351.

⁴⁵⁴ Rademaker, "Religion for the Modern Girl: Maude Royden in Australia, 1928," 341.

⁴⁵⁵ Dr Maude Royden, "The Changing Moral Standards of Women," *Woman's World*, April 1, 1938, 8-9, 66-68.

this stage her profile and popularity in women's circles was well established. The editor of the magazine invited several women, including Brennan, to respond to the article. Brennan challenged both the reasoning and liberalism of Royden's stance and made it evident that she could not endorse what she would consider to be moral relativism.⁴⁵⁶ While she would not have been unique in her critical appraisal of Royden's views, regarding women's sexual morality, Brennan's reaction indicates that she was confident in her own ability to promote a conservative and arguably Catholic standpoint on such matters.

The endorsement of literature and Catholic culture

Brennan had a very keen interest in the arts and literature especially with regard to how a Catholic perspective could inform and form the individual and society. In 1916 (as a representative of the CWSG) Brennan endorsed the aims of the Australian Catholic Truth Society which sought to promote to young workers the elevating potential of reading substantive literary works to avert the influence of less sophisticated works.⁴⁵⁷ In accord with the type of social analysis that was typical of the CWSG, Brennan noted that young working women had little time for leisure and were understandably attracted to popular entertainments such as "picture shows".⁴⁵⁸ She was very aware that Church groups like the CWSG had to find ways to reach out to young women, given the range of competing influences upon them in the wider society.⁴⁵⁹

In the context of encouraging Catholic women at the university to participate in the establishment of a "Girls Club", Brennan noted that certain girls did not have the "opportunities for self-improvement."⁴⁶⁰ In 1917 she wrote. "It has been repeated to the point of weariness that the future of a nation rests with its mothers. It has been less insisted that the future of the nation's mothers rests with the nation's girls."⁴⁶¹ Brennan was clear that the commitment to the education and self-development of young girls could provide an alternative for those who had to cope with very burdensome conditions. In extending

⁴⁵⁶ For Brennan's response see "The Modern Woman ... Modern Morals," *Woman's World*, May 1, 1938, 14-15.

⁴⁵⁷ "Australian Catholic Truth Society," *Tribune*, December 7, 1916, 5.

⁴⁵⁸ "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 26, 1917, 24.

⁴⁵⁹ "Catholic Women's Social Guild," *Advocate*, May 26, 1917, 24.

⁴⁶⁰ Brennan, "University Women and Social Service," *Woman's Social Work*, November, 1917, 6.

⁴⁶¹ A.T.B., "The Carpenter's Son," *Woman's Social Work*, May, 1917, 4. (As noted previously, A.T.B. refers to Anna Teresa Brennan.)

a vote of thanks at the end of a lecture on “The Catholic Church and Art,” Brennan places a strong emphasis on the positive impact that could be made on young people by drawing their attention to the place of beauty in the Catholic tradition.⁴⁶² As a member of the CWSG, Brennan affirmed the need for women to read “wholesome” literature.⁴⁶³

Fr William Hackett, a Jesuit priest, was instrumental in establishing the Central Catholic Library in Melbourne. He was very keen to develop the intellectual life of lay Catholics.⁴⁶⁴ When this library was established in 1924, there was in the wider Catholic community a sense that Catholicism was the answer to the problems besetting the world. The conversion of G.K. Chesterton to Roman Catholicism took on particular significance.⁴⁶⁵ The elevation of the Catholic Church, as the means for humanity to overcome the evils of the day, was also evident in certain Catholic discourse in Australia in the 1930s.⁴⁶⁶ In 1934, in Melbourne, Hackett established the Century Club to promote Catholic literary culture. Brennan was in attendance at the first meeting, held in the Central Catholic Library, to discuss the main aims of this new group and she refers to the need for this newly founded club and all Catholic groups to be inclusive of women in their leadership roles. What stands out in this context is her clarity about the need for young women to be included in such a group and her capacity to ensure that women had an active role in the development of the Club.⁴⁶⁷ Her willingness to join the Provisional Committee of the new club represents her keenness to ensure that what she suggests should happen does happen.⁴⁶⁸

Closely aligned with her Catholic sensibilities about the capacity of literature to shape the morality of society is Brennan’s critical appraisal of certain modern fiction. Her stance is typified by her criticism of D.H. Lawrence. Brennan’s negative assessment of Lawrence’s work reflects her concern not just with questions about decency or blasphemy but

⁴⁶² “Catholic Evidence Lectures,” *Advocate*, August 21, 1924, 12.

⁴⁶³ “Catholic Women’s Social Guild,” *Advocate*, April 27, 1918, 22.

⁴⁶⁴ Brenda Niall, *The Riddle of Father Hackett: A Life in Ireland and Australia* (Canberra, ACT: National Library of Australia, 2009), 167-189.

⁴⁶⁵ Angela Incigneri, “The Establishment of the Central Catholic Library Melbourne, and The History of the Central Catholic Library Melbourne,” 1993: 10. (Richmond, Vic.: Angela Incigneri, 1993/1995).

⁴⁶⁶ For an example of this type of reference to the Roman Catholic Church see, “The Need For Catholic Thought and Action in our Youth: Brilliant Lecture by Mrs Paul McGuire,” *Southern Cross*, March 3, 1933, 4, 9.

⁴⁶⁷ “Centre of Catholic Culture: Century Club Formed,” *Advocate*, September 6, 1934, 12.

⁴⁶⁸ “Century Club Formed,” *Argus*, August 31, 1934, 8; and Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 103.

primarily about what she views as the transitory nature of literature based on popular acclaim.⁴⁶⁹ Her judgement is made after she sets herself the task of reading four of Lawrence's novels with a view to being as objective as possible about his work. In her scathing review of what she read Brennan sees Lawrence as being representative of those who after the war were intent on shaping a world where individual freedom would supersede outmoded forms of constraint and control.⁴⁷⁰ The need to correct the reader should they be taken in by Lawrence's fashionable status is evident when Brennan writes:

When a novelist dabbles in twice-cooked Freud and pre-digested Einstein, can one afford to pass him out merely because he is foul? One might be suspected of not understanding him. Thus we have fearless novels which show the courage of an unwashed gutter, and human document as daring as a decadent fish, and a novel-reading public with the independence of judgement of the Gaderine [sic] swine.⁴⁷¹

It would be simplistic to reduce Brennan's censure of Lawrence simply to a prudish inability to deal with the sexual issues canvassed in the novels that she analysed. Her critique of the way Freudian ideas gained popularity is again evident in her identification of their influence in Lawrence's writing. Most importantly her disdain for Lawrence's work focuses on the much broader issue of the reconstruction of a post war world which Brennan thought should be based on clear moral standards.

Twelve years after her analysis of Lawrence's work, Brennan referred to the insights of T.S. Eliot, with reference to his articulation of the consequences of the rejection of tradition and aversion to religion in modern literature. She suggests that Eliot's views on the need for orthodoxy and the capacity of Christianity to influence society warranted consideration.⁴⁷² Brennan is not endorsing rigidity or a fundamentalist approach but for her a living tradition, founded on Christian principles is an essential safeguard for a truly moral existence. Brennan placed a high premium on the capacity for all religion to be instructive in building up society by fostering the capacity for people to have an external point of reference beyond any subjective determination of morality. Brennan's view on

⁴⁶⁹ Brennan, "D.H. Lawrence," *Woman's World*, June 1, 1925, 377, 379.

⁴⁷⁰ Brennan, "D.H. Lawrence," 377.

⁴⁷¹ Brennan, "D.H. Lawrence," 379.

⁴⁷² Brennan, "Notes by the Way: After Strange Gods," *Woman's World*, July 1, 1937, 16, 17, 49, 50.

the impact of the “Anti-God movement” is made clear in her decision in 1939 to challenge a book reviewer in *Woman’s World*, for his positive assessment of a book that she viewed as being part of the literary movement that she saw as detrimental to society.⁴⁷³

Brennan’s promotion of women through her writings and textual analysis

In her analysis of certain texts and in own literary endeavours Brennan placed a great deal of emphasis on the promotion of women. In April 1923, Brennan and the editor of the *Advocate* were involved in a discussion about the literary merits and historical basis of “The Ring and the Book.”⁴⁷⁴ The reference in the *Advocate* to this work being derived from a “shilling shocker” or as a “sordid story” was not acceptable to Brennan.⁴⁷⁵ In June 1923 Brennan wrote again in praise of Browning’s poem in an article for the *Argus*.⁴⁷⁶ This passage in the *Argus*, two months after her interchange with the editor of the *Advocate*, indicates her interest in the analysis of this text. The consideration that Brennan gave to how “The Ring and the Book” was discussed is noteworthy in light of the scholarly attention that has been given to analysing its representation of gender and the agentic capacity of the central female character.⁴⁷⁷

In a review of a book written by Sir Edmund Gosse titled “Leaves and Fruit” Brennan highlights the sections of the text that refer to women.⁴⁷⁸ At times when it is not expected, Brennan introduces an idea about women in her writings. This indicates the strength of her commitment to including women in all aspects of civic and social life. An example of this inclusiveness is revealed in an article that she wrote for the *Argus* in 1931 called “The Translation of Edward.”⁴⁷⁹ This passage recounts an event that takes place each year at Westminster Abbey, on the Feast of Edward the Confessor, when the placement of Edward the Confessor’s remains are recalled with great ceremony. Brennan notes that when this ritual was held in 1930, there was a group of Australian lawyers present to observe the events. (This was the year Brennan was in England.) In 1930 the ceremony

⁴⁷³ Brennan, “The Bible and Porridge,” *Woman’s World*, November 1, 1939, 29. The book in question was Dr Joad’s *Guide to Modern Wickedness*.

⁴⁷⁴ “Ring and the Book,” *Advocate*, April 26, 1923, 26. Brennan wrote her letter to the editor of the *Advocate* in reply to a previous article in the *Advocate*.

⁴⁷⁵ “Ring and the Book,” *Advocate*, April 26, 1923, 26.

⁴⁷⁶ Brennan, “The Old Yellow Book,” *Argus*, June 30, 1923, 6.

⁴⁷⁷ Susan Brown, “Pompilia: The Woman (in) Question,” *Victorian Poetry* 34, no. 1 (1996): 16-18, 29-31.

⁴⁷⁸ Brennan, “Women of Character,” *Argus*, May 26, 1928, 7.

⁴⁷⁹ Brennan, “The Translation of Edward,” *Argus*, April 25, 1931, 6.

for Edward the Confessor was also the same day as the annual ritual for the reopening of the Law Courts in England. Brennan gives an account of the legal procession including a description of the legal persons who are processing along in all their regalia. She imagines that Edward the Confessor is looking down upon this great occasion and then she inserts a most interesting section into the passage:

But the brooding spirit of the Confessor may have given a little start, may have taken a second and more intent look over the “gold bar of heaven” when he saw filing past in that solemnly picturesque procession a small number of women. May be, but may be not. Modern scholarship has revealed women in so many unexpected places in the middle ages that perhaps, after all, some of his law lords may have been women.⁴⁸⁰

The passage then shifts back to a description of the procession. What is really significant about the inclusion of this reference to women is Brennan’s artfulness in situating the women at the centre of things and not on the periphery. On the face of it there was no need for her to have inserted an image of women into this event. It indicates an intention on Brennan’s part to promote women. The comment on modern scholarship reflects both her knowledge of the scholarship and the implication that, just as women were active in society in the past, so they should be in the present. In this sense it could be argued that Brennan was engaging in a similar project to those historians who wanted to rediscover the historical place of women to ensure that history was genuinely inclusive. That she chose to add something in such a deliberate manner points to her concern for the inclusion of women at all levels of society.

Given her public profile it is not surprising that Brennan was included in 1934, when the Women’s Centenary Council, published the *Centenary Gift Book* which was written specifically to acknowledge the contribution of women to Victoria over the previous one hundred years.⁴⁸¹ Brennan’s inclusion in this publication indicates that she was well regarded as both a writer and as an advocate of women’s issues. In her entry called

⁴⁸⁰ Brennan, “The Translation of Edward,” 6.

⁴⁸¹ *Centenary Gift Book*, eds. F. Fraser and Nettie Palmer (Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens Limited 1934). (Published for the Women’s Centenary Council.) See also Deborah Jordan, “[Nettie] Palmer’s Present: Gender and the National Community in 1934,” *Hecate*, 29, no. 2 (2003): 99-112.

“Blazing the Trail” she uses the example of Florence Nightingale to conjure up an image of the type of energy required to alter the status quo.⁴⁸² It would seem that for Brennan it is the interior energy which propels women that is central to being a pioneer and she is of the view that this spirit is not confined to one stage of history.⁴⁸³ The importance for Brennan of promoting women’s role in society is apparent in her detailed account of how the determination of certain women made it possible for others to follow in their emancipatory steps. Through this entry she engaged in a project of advancing the status of women, by publicly acknowledging their impact in the wider community, across many different sectors. What is distinctive about Brennan’s entry is the breadth of the examples that she includes with regard to female pioneers. From the first unknown typist, to the first telegraphist, municipal councillor and founder of a literary society, to an astute wool grower, estate manager, managing director, magazine founder and those women who were gymnastic and swimming coaches, she emphasises the capacity of women to bring about change. It is not just the activities that these women were involved in which Brennan articulates. She also highlights their tenacity.⁴⁸⁴

Marian imagery to support the dignity and capabilities of women

Brennan’s obituary noted that she had a strong personal devotion to Mary and that she died on the Feast of Our Lady’s Maternity.⁴⁸⁵ Late in her life Brennan wrote a short passage titled “Our Lady” which calls on Catholic imagery and symbolism to explain her message of women’s rights to a Catholic audience. Given the importance of Marian devotions in Catholic culture it is noteworthy that Brennan begins this passage by challenging representations of “Our Lady” which she maintains do not do her justice. She points out that certain readings of Mary would not provide a true appreciation of Mary’s qualities given the images of her that were popularly promoted.⁴⁸⁶

Brennan used this medium not just to convey a range of ideas about the status of “Our Lady” but about the status of all women. The images of Mary that she wanted to see

⁴⁸² Brennan, “Blazing the Trail,” in *Centenary Gift Book*, eds. F. Fraser and Nettie Palmer (Melbourne: Robertson and Mullens Limited, 1934), 19-22.

⁴⁸³ Brennan, “Blazing the Trail,” 19, 21.

⁴⁸⁴ Brennan, “Blazing the Trail,” 19-22.

⁴⁸⁵ “Anna Brennan,” *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1962, 76.

⁴⁸⁶ Brennan, “Our Lady,” *Catholic Citizen*, March 15, 1955, 18. This passage was originally printed in the publication called *St Joan’s, Australia*.

promoted were of her “strength, and beauty and wisdom”.⁴⁸⁷ Citing the example of a young priest who suggested that Mary might have been “scrubbing the floor” when the “Angel Gabriel appeared”, Brennan criticised the imagery noting that such an example might generate the idea that domestic labour was befitting for all women.⁴⁸⁸ As this passage was printed in the publication of *St Joan’s* in England and was also circulated amongst the members of the Alliance in Australia, it is possible to see how Brennan used her literary abilities as a means to convey her ideas about women’s equality in a way that was both novel and instantly recognisable to a Catholic audience. Brennan’s tone and depth of analysis in this short passage honours the two causes so precious to her “the Church and woman’s freedom.”⁴⁸⁹

Linked with Brennan’s interest in literature and the arts, her Catholic sensibilities and her concerns for how women were portrayed, was her involvement in the issue of censorship.⁴⁹⁰ Contained in a passage that she wrote about this topic is a real concern for how the failure to scrutinise certain publications can result in a normalisation of abusive treatment of women and girls.⁴⁹¹ At a meeting of the Australian Literature Society in 1935 on censorship, Brennan seems to be mostly concerned about the criteria that were being used by the censors, to determine which books should be banned.⁴⁹² She also expressed a concern that literature could suffer as result of censorship except where it might be necessary with regard to younger people.⁴⁹³

The nationality of married women

There is one issue that significantly demonstrates Brennan’s commitment to women’s autonomy: the nationality of married women. The fact that it became the norm for a married women’s nationality to be determined by her husband’s nationality, was an issue that concerned women’s organisations internationally, in the first half of the twentieth

⁴⁸⁷ Brennan, “Our Lady,” 18.

⁴⁸⁸ Brennan, “Our Lady,” 18.

⁴⁸⁹ “International Notes: Australia,” *Catholic Citizen*, July-August, 1946, 43.

⁴⁹⁰ Brennan, “Censorship of Books,” *Argus* January 28, 1933, 9.

⁴⁹¹ Brennan, “Censorship of Books,” *Argus* January 28, 1933, 9.

⁴⁹² “Obscenity or ‘Mush’,” *Argus*, April 16, 1935, 10.

⁴⁹³ “Galvin Will Ask for Law against ‘Bad’ Books,” *Argus*, January 21, 1954, 6.

century.⁴⁹⁴ It was also an issue for women's groups in Australia.⁴⁹⁵ The alteration of a person's nationality is a significant matter, as it is an important aspect of one's identity. This point is made by Angela Woollacott in discussing the impact on Australian born writer, Winifred James of losing her British nationality because of her marriage to an American.⁴⁹⁶ Especially during times of war, there were serious implications for women in having to assume their husband's nationality.⁴⁹⁷ Most importantly, from a feminist perspective, the enforcement of a new nationality upon marriage represented a foundational disregard of the status of women as independent adults. In order to provide a broader canvas for an examination of Brennan's engagement with the issue it is helpful to refer synoptically to some of the relevant legislative changes in Britain and Australia between 1870 and the late 1940s.

Prior to the introduction of the Naturalisation Act in Britain in 1870, a woman's nationality was not subject to change due to marriage.⁴⁹⁸ After 1870 the general rule was for women to assume the nationality of their husbands. A key component of this legislative change was that married women lost control of their right to hold on to their British nationality, if they married an alien, but for men this loss of nationality required "express consent."⁴⁹⁹ The principle that married women in Australia were to adopt the nationality of their husbands was evident in section 9 of the *Naturalisation Act 1903 (Cth)*.⁵⁰⁰ In the context of their status as British subjects, certain amendments were made to the *Nationality Act (Cth)* in 1920 and again in 1936, which reflected some recognition of the difficulties particular women encountered.⁵⁰¹ It was the complications that arose

⁴⁹⁴ Ellen DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," in *Globalizing Feminisms 1789-1945* ed. Karen Offen (London: Routledge, 2010), 206.

⁴⁹⁵ Quartly and Smart, *Respectable Radicals*, 113-117, 193-200, 222.

⁴⁹⁶ Angela Woollacott, *To Try Her Fortune in London: Australian Women, Colonialism, and Modernity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 28-29, 45, 171-172.

⁴⁹⁷ Maria Glaros, "'Sometimes a little injustice must be suffered for the public good': How the *National Security (Aliens Control) Regulations 1939 (Cth)* affected the lives of German, Italian, Japanese and Australian born women living in Australia during the Second World War," (PhD Thesis, University of Western Sydney, 2012):77-79, 313-350. Accessed online at: <https://researchdirect.westernsydney.edu.au/islandora/object/uws%3A14497>

⁴⁹⁸ M. Page Baldwin, "Subject to Empire: Married Women and the British Nationality and Status of Aliens Act," *Journal of British Studies* 40, no. 4 (2001): 525.

⁴⁹⁹ Baldwin, "Subject to Empire," 526.

⁵⁰⁰ Rosemary Owens, "Federation, Citizenship and Women in Australian Constitutional Law," in *Spirit of Australia: Religion in Citizenship and National Life*, eds. Brian Howe and Alan Nichols, ATF Series 4; (Hindmarsh; South Australia: Australian Theological Forum: 2001), 97 at note 15.

⁵⁰¹ Owens, "Federation, Citizenship and Women in Australian Constitutional Law," 97 at notes 16 and 17. With reference to the 1920 legislative amendments, Owens refers to the specific issues for women married to enemy aliens.

due to the difference between countries in the laws concerning nationality and marriage that resulted in it becoming a common cause for the main women's entities that operated at an international level.⁵⁰² Many women's organisations had campaigned for reform during the Codification Conference held by the League of Nations in The Hague in 1930, although this international gathering did not result in the changes that the women had lobbied for so extensively.⁵⁰³

In 1946 legislation was introduced in Australia which made it possible for a British woman who was married to an alien, but living in Australia, to retain her British nationality.⁵⁰⁴ It was only when the *Nationality and Citizenship Act 1948* was implemented that women who were citizens obtained equality with regard to their nationality. In a global context complications still arose about the nationality status of married women. Australia's ratification in 1961, of the United Nations *Convention on the Nationality of Married Women*, represents the most complete recognition, by this country, of the right of married women to their own nationality.⁵⁰⁵

Trying to secure equality for married women regarding their nationality was fully consonant with Brennan's view that women had equal rights as human beings. Her involvement in this issue is representative of many elements of her concern for women's rights and her commitment to working collaboratively for a common cause. It also provides a basis for seeing how her varied roles became intertwined.

In 1916, Brennan spoke about the nationality of married women at a meeting of the National Council of Women (Victoria). A report of her address makes it clear that she had a strong awareness of the disadvantages faced by certain married women when their nationality was altered by marriage. Brennan points out that it was not easy for a woman

⁵⁰² DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," 206.

⁵⁰³ DuBois, "Internationalizing Married Women's Nationality: The Hague Campaign of 1930," 204-216; and Quartly and Smart, *Respectable Radicals*, 117 at note 33. Quartly and Smart note that although other reforms were not obtained, the issue of statelessness was addressed by The Hague Conference in 1930.

⁵⁰⁴ Jatinder Mann, "The Evolution of Commonwealth Citizenship, 1945-1948 in Canada, Britain and Australia," *Commonwealth and Comparative Politics* 50, no. 3 (2012): 307. At note 70 on page 312 the relevant legislation is cited as: "The Commonwealth of Australia, No. 9 of 1946, An Act to provide for the Retention or Acquisition of British Nationality by Women married to Aliens, 18 April, 1946, *The Acts of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia passed during the year 1946*, 29."

⁵⁰⁵ Quartly and Smart, *Respectable Radicals*: 199-200. Quartly and Smart outline the gradual steps with regard to Australia finally ratifying this United Nations Convention although they do not state the title in full.

who became widowed or divorced to regain her nationality if it had changed upon marriage.⁵⁰⁶ As she asserts at a later stage, the problems that certain married women encountered around their nationality became very evident during World War I.⁵⁰⁷ In her 1916 presentation, Brennan spoke of her knowledge of two women who were affected by their marriage to German men and their subsequent difficulties when they were not supported by their husbands but could not make certain transactions due to the nationality that they had to assume upon marriage.⁵⁰⁸ One of the examples involved a British born woman who had married a German man, over thirty years earlier. Having been deserted by him she was unable to buy land in Australia, as she was now considered an “enemy subject” by virtue of her marriage.⁵⁰⁹ Brennan refers to one of these women again in 1935 when giving another talk. She also noted that some women could also become stateless, due to the problems associated with their nationality status upon marriage. The example is given of a woman who married an American but due to the different laws around nationality became stateless until she could meet the necessary legislative requirements in America.⁵¹⁰

Brennan prepared a paper on the nationality of married women for the Australian delegation to the Pan-Pacific Women’s Conference in 1930.⁵¹¹ This Conference was convened “under the auspices of the Pan-Pacific Union.”⁵¹² The Union had very broad aims to facilitate many levels of connection between countries connected by their location in the “Pacific area”.⁵¹³ Brennan’s paper for this conference was included in a group of “Advance Papers” that were published in the August 1930 edition of the Union’s official organ, the *Mid-Pacific Magazine*.⁵¹⁴ That Brennan’s paper was among those selected for advance publication affirms the view that her examination of the issues was well regarded. The Pan-Pacific Women’s Association was established at the 1930 conference to provide a means for women in the same geographical area to connect around common

⁵⁰⁶ “News of the Day,” *Age*, September 1, 1916, 4.

⁵⁰⁷ “Nationality in War Time,” *Argus*, August 30, 1940, 12.

⁵⁰⁸ “News of the Day,” *Age*, September 1, 1916, 4.

⁵⁰⁹ “News of the Day,” *Age*, September 1, 1916, 4.

⁵¹⁰ “Disabilities of Nationality,” *Argus*, October 4, 1935, 5.

⁵¹¹ “Woman’s Interests” *Age*, May 7, 1930, 15.

⁵¹² “The Pan-Pacific Women’s Conference,” (no author listed) *The Mid-Pacific Magazine*, XL no. 3 September 1930, 231.

⁵¹³ “Aims of the Pan-Pacific Union,” (no author listed) *The Mid-Pacific Magazine*, XL no. 3 September 1930, 264.

⁵¹⁴ *The Mid-Pacific Magazine*, XL, no. 2, August 1930.

concerns affecting women in the Pacific.⁵¹⁵ What is of significance here is that Brennan's connection to this women's organisation indicates that her advocacy about married women's nationality went beyond her associational life in Melbourne.

An analysis of the paper that Brennan prepared for the 1930 Pan-Pacific Women's Conference demonstrates her legal reasoning around this issue. Having provided a summary of the main issues she asserted the need for an international solution. She noted how an Australian woman might become stateless with reference to the nationality laws operative in the context of her marriage to an American. Brennan recommended that those who were interested in pursuing the whole issue should access the relevant proceedings of the 1923 British Select Committee, the 1926 Imperial Conference and the Codification Conference of the League of Nations of 1930.⁵¹⁶ Brennan's clear legal reasoning and balance was a powerful form of advocacy as it enables debate to progress from a position of clarity about the law and not simply a perception of disadvantage. The contents of this paper highlight the specific way that Brennan was able to use her legal skills to engage in a forum beyond the Australian context whilst serving the needs of Australian women at the same time.

In 1935, Brennan argued: "The nationality demand differs from all others in that there has been no conflicting propaganda against it from any responsible woman or body of women."⁵¹⁷ Her strength of character and her confidence in her knowledge about the depth of feeling amongst women's groups about the need for reform is demonstrated in her challenging of a statement attributed to Mr Bruce, the High Commissioner, that women were not "unanimous" on this topic.⁵¹⁸ The issue of the nationality of married women did generate some difference of opinion amongst women's groups internationally, with regard to whether "family unity" should take precedence over the rights of women.⁵¹⁹ Although safeguarding family life was very important to Brennan, on this topic

⁵¹⁵ Angela Woollacott, "Inventing Commonwealth and Pan – Pacific Feminisms: Australian Women's Internationalist Activism in the 1920s-30s," *Gender and History* 10, no. 3 (1998): 432.

⁵¹⁶ Brennan, "Nationality of Married Women," *The Mid-Pacific Magazine*, XL, no. 2, August, 1930, 113-116.

⁵¹⁷ "Disabilities of Nationality," *Argus*, October 4, 1935, 5.

⁵¹⁸ "Disabilities of Nationality," *Argus*, October 4, 1935, 5.

⁵¹⁹ Katarina Leppänen, "The Conflicting Interests of Women's Organizations and the League of Nations on the Question of Married Women's Nationality in the 1930s," *Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 17, no. 4 (2009): 242-243.

she did not focus on this issue of family unity as her emphasis was primarily on the protection of women's autonomy.⁵²⁰

The security concerns that were raised during World War II placed the spotlight again on nationality and allegiance. Speaking at a meeting of the National Council of Women Victoria in 1940, Brennan was adamant that the protections that had been gained for certain married women, contained in the 1936 legislative amendments in the relevant law on nationality, should not have been compromised by the "National Security Act of 1940."⁵²¹ She was very clear about the need to ensure that the previous advocacy, which contributed to significant changes in the law, should not be discounted by administrative procedures. In the same year Brennan cited the Irish legislative response as an example of how the issue on the nationality of married women could be resolved by not making nationality contingent on marriage. She seemed to be fully aware that in some situations a marriage might be sought for ulterior motives but was dismissive of using a language test to determine a person's suitability to become naturalized. What is of special interest is that Brennan indicated that her support of the Irish legislation was from her perspective as a feminist.⁵²² At a conference in 1944 about the role of women in Australia, she was clear about the need for legislation that would provide married women with the right to retain their own nationality.⁵²³

Brennan's long term involvement and her public stance on the matter, was recognized when she was nominated by the National Council of Women of Australia (NCWA) to be a member of the Parliamentary Committee convened in 1946 to address some of the issues.⁵²⁴ Given the extensive membership base of the NCWA, and the process used to

⁵²⁰ Kennedy notes that changes in society, that were seen to impact negatively on family life, resulted in St Joan's (Vic.) adopting a very strong focus on the preservation of the family. See Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 184-185.

⁵²¹ "Nationality in War Time," *Argus*, August 30, 1940, 12; and "Nationality Laws" *Age*, August 30, 1940, 3.

⁵²² "Ireland Can Show the Way," *Argus*, September 27, 1940, 11.

⁵²³ "Women in the Life of the Nation," *Argus*, September 30, 1944, 12.

⁵²⁴ National Archives of Australia, NAA: A446 1960/67025, Nationality of Married Women, Item 129. "Report Of Committee Appointed by Minister for Immigration to Consider the Practical and Legal Difficulties Involved in the Possession, by Husband and Wife, of Different Nationalities," 6th August 1946, 2. Miss Anna T. Brennan is listed here for the National Council of Women of Australia.

select a nominee, this nomination says something of Brennan's status amongst women's organisations.⁵²⁵

The Chairman of the Committee was Senator Dorothy Tangney. Dame Enid Lyons was also a member.⁵²⁶ The committee recommended that the necessary steps be taken in Britain, so that through the United Nations, women universally could have the right to their own nationality.⁵²⁷ Jatinder Mann has referred to the importance of this Parliamentary Committee, in shaping the legislative reforms which became operative after 1948, that afforded married women in Australia greater autonomy regarding their nationality.⁵²⁸ Dame Enid Lyons referred to the report as "a triumphant vindication of the intellectual perspicacity of the members of the committee, and an indication of their determination to get the business done."⁵²⁹ Given that Brennan had been active for over thirty years, in articulating the inequalities experienced by married women, with regard to their nationality; it is not surprising that she and others were keen to "get the business done."⁵³⁰

Truly at home in St Joan's Social and Political Alliance

At the time that Brennan was on this Parliamentary Committee she was also very actively involved in the Victorian section of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance. It was especially through this organisation that Brennan found a strong point of connection

⁵²⁵ Minutes of Executive Committee Meetings on 6th May, 3rd June and 5th August 1946, Box 3, Minutes of Council Meetings on 13th June and 8th August 1946, Box 4: National Council of Women of Victoria, Papers, YMS 16241, Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. (Records not fully processed at date of access.) The process of nomination involved both the National Council of Women of Victoria and the National Council of Women of Australia.

⁵²⁶ NAA: A446 1960/67025, Nationality of Married Women, Item 129. "Report of Committee Appointed by Minister for Immigration to Consider the Practical and Legal Difficulties Involved in the Possession, by Husband and Wife, of Different Nationalities," 6th August 1946, 2.

⁵²⁷ NAA: A446 1960/67025, Nationality of Married Women, Item 129. "Report of Committee Appointed by Minister for Immigration to Consider the Practical and Legal Difficulties Involved in the Possession, by Husband and Wife, of Different Nationalities," 6th August 1946, 5.

⁵²⁸ Mann, "The Evolution of Commonwealth Citizenship, 1945-1948 in Canada, Britain and Australia," 307-308.

⁵²⁹ Hansard: Commonwealth of Australia. House of Representatives. No. 49, 1948. *Parliamentary Debates*. December 1, 3762. Lyons, E. http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/hansard80/hansardr80/1948-12-01/toc_pdf/19481201_reps_18_200.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=1940s I was able to locate this reference to the relevant committee due to the information contained in Jatinder Mann's paper referred to above, especially notes 62-73.

⁵³⁰ Hansard: Commonwealth of Australia. House of Representatives. No. 49, 1948. *Parliamentary Debates*. December 1, 3762. Lyons, E. http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/hansard80/hansardr80/1948-12-01/toc_pdf/19481201_reps_18_200.pdf;fileType=application/pdf#search=1940s

between her Catholicism and her concern for women's rights. This will now be discussed as representative of the unification of Brennan's faith commitment and her advocacy for women.

It was customary in the early twentieth century for women to host "at homes", gathering to support certain groups or campaigns. Brennan seemed to be very much at home in St Joan's Social and Political Alliance and was an active member of this group for many years. It provided her with an ideal context to express her active interest in women's rights and Catholicism. Brennan referred to St Joan's Social and Political Alliance as "an organisation combining two causes very dear to her heart, the Church and woman's freedom."⁵³¹ For most of the years that she was involved she served as the president of St Joan's (Vic.).⁵³² Involvement in St Joan's (Vic.) provided Brennan with a forum, voice and authority, as a lay Catholic woman, to promote the equality of all women. Considering that intersectionality provides a means for acknowledging the multiple dimensions of identity and experience it is useful to also apply this to the varying experiences of what it means to be Catholic in any particular context.

The St Joan's Social and Political Alliance had its origins in an activist group of women called the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society (CWSS), which was established in 1911 in England. Although not supportive of militant methods to gain the vote for women, the primary focus of the CWSS was directed towards obtaining women's suffrage in England.⁵³³ After legislative changes in 1918 granted some women the vote, the CWSS remained committed to the extension of the franchise to include all adult women, but broadened its objectives to include the "political, social and economic equality between men and women and to further the work and usefulness of Catholic women as citizens."⁵³⁴

⁵³¹ "International Notes: Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, July-August, 1946, 43. Kennedy also made reference to this statement by Brennan but notes it as being linked to a statement in the September 1937 edition of the *Catholic Citizen*. See Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 102.

⁵³² As there was a national President of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance in Australia, and prior to the establishment of the New South Wales section of the Alliance, the president of the Victorian section was sometimes referred to as the Vice-President and at other times as the President.

⁵³³ St Joan's International Alliance, *A Venture in Faith: A History of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance: Formerly The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, 1911-1961*, (London, England: St Joan's Alliance: [Reprinted 1980], in *Women and Social Movements, International-1840 to Present*, eds. Kathryn Kish Sklar and Thomas Dublin, 5. Accessed online 14 February 2016 at: https://search.alexanderstreet.com/view/work/bibliographic_entity|document|1642216. See also Francis Mason, "The Newer Eve: The Catholic Women's Suffrage Society in England, 1911-1923," *Catholic Historical Review* 72, no. 4 (1986): 623.

⁵³⁴ St Joan's International Alliance, *A Venture in Faith*, 11; and University of Melbourne Archives, Records of Teresa Wardell, 1986/0123, Unit 7, 1986.0123.00073, St Joan's Alliance, Scrapbook,

In 1923 the CWSS was renamed the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance. To facilitate the free association with other women's organisations internationally, the word Catholic was not included in the new name.⁵³⁵ A French section of the Alliance was established in 1931. Additional foundations were made in other countries constituting an international organisation called St Joan's International Alliance.⁵³⁶ Importantly, as it was not therefore an official entity within the Church, St Joan's acted in its own right when making any sort of representation. This was very significant, and allowed members to associate with key thinkers and organisations in the women's movement providing frameworks within which to consider campaigns and social commentary. Although they enjoyed an operational level of independence, however, the members of St Joan's were in total communion with the doctrinal code of the Catholic Church. This was very clear in their attitude to key issues of the period such as birth control and divorce.⁵³⁷ The Alliance was not defined by such topics however and consistently provided leadership and representation on a range of women's topics that drew attention to the civic identity of women, particularly married women, in this period.

The conformity that the members of St Joan's had, with regard to the moral code of the Catholic Church, represents a significant difference between a woman such as Brennan and others who readily identified as feminists. Brennan articulated a strong stand on equality for women but there is nothing to indicate that she aligned herself with the more liberal views about women's sexuality that emerged over her lifetime. Her depth of personal commitment as a Catholic would seem to indicate that she could not countenance anything which she perceived to be contrary to core Catholic teaching. There does not seem to be any evidence that she became isolated from other women who may not have shared all of her views. Indeed on many levels it would seem that the women's groups

Second Annual Report. The mandate of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance was printed on the document that was prepared for the Third Annual Meeting of the Victorian section, in 1939, as follows: "To band together Catholics of both sexes in order to secure political, social and economic equality between men and women, and to further the work and usefulness of Catholic women as citizens." Kennedy refers to the Victorian section of St Joan's as having a second stated object as being: "To promote the political, social and economic welfare of native races (especially the Australian Aboriginal) and particularly of native women". See Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 245. I have not been able to access the source for this additional object referred to by Kennedy.

⁵³⁵ St Joan's International Alliance, *A Venture in Faith*, 12; and Elaine Clark, "Catholics and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage in England," *Church History* 73, no. 3 (2004): 662.

⁵³⁶ St Joan's International Alliance, *A Venture in Faith*, 13-14; and Clark, "Catholics and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage in England," 665.

⁵³⁷ St Joan's International Alliance, *A Venture in Faith*, 12.

that Brennan was connected to would have been of a like mind on many aspects of sexual morality for women. Given her orthodoxy in Catholic matters there would seem to be no conflict for her in maintaining a Catholic stance on sexual ethics whilst also promoting an emancipated view on equality for women. Although it may be puzzling from a contemporary stance it did not emerge as a source of tension for Brennan. It is possible that further research in this domain may indicate that Brennan's stance reflects the capacity for individuals to be able to cope with apparent dissonance. It also adds to an appreciation of how feminism is not experienced universally but is very much nuanced by local political and personal factors.

When an individual, or a group, choose to identify closely with a certain figure, it is instructive to notice the possible associations with regard to a common cause or worldview. Joan of Arc was an inspirational figure for many women involved in the suffrage movement in England.⁵³⁸ Many years before she met any women from St Joan's Social and Political Alliance, Brennan referred to Joan of Arc as "that patron saint of valiant women."⁵³⁹ Her strong devotion to Joan of Arc was noted by others.⁵⁴⁰ Although a legendary figure within and beyond the Catholic Church, Joan of Arc was not canonised until 1920. There are many complexities surrounding her life and the ways in which she has been represented across the centuries.⁵⁴¹ Nevertheless, it would seem reasonable to assert that her life story embodies both interiority and civic zeal. In 1918 when Brennan was reflecting on the end of the war she quotes from Joan of Arc and then writes. "It is fitting that in the ancient town of Rouen, Joan's own city, there should have been established a soldiers' hospital wholly staffed and equipped by women."⁵⁴² Brennan's sense of admiration for Joan of Arc continued across her lifetime. Nearly forty years later, Brennan gave a "scholarly and stirring" presentation on the subject.⁵⁴³

It is possible to postulate that in the representations of Joan of Arc that Brennan would have absorbed earlier in her life, and through her association with St Joan's Social and

⁵³⁸ Carolyn Christensen Nelson, "The Uses of Religion in the Women's Militant Suffrage Campaign in England," *Midwest Quarterly* 51, no 3 (2010): 227-229.

⁵³⁹ Brennan, "Victory and Peace," *Woman's Social Work*, December, 1918, 1.

⁵⁴⁰ "Anna Brennan," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1962, 76.

⁵⁴¹ Larissa Juliet Taylor, "Joan of Arc, the Church, and the Papacy, 1429-1920," *Catholic Historical Review* 98, no. 2 (2012): 217-240.

⁵⁴² Brennan, "Victory and Peace," 1.

⁵⁴³ "Anna Brennan," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1962, 76; and "St Joan's In Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1957, 76.

Political Alliance, she had a clear sense of how a woman could be true to herself and true to her faith. The fact that this integrity could be costly would not have been lost on Brennan. Her admiration for Joan of Arc provides another insight into what might have contributed to Brennan's sense of women rightfully exercising leadership and by virtue of their steadfastness asserting their autonomy and trust in their personal convictions. That Joan of Arc was to become Saint Joan of Arc meant that within the Catholic community she was certainly considered worthy of emulation. This is connected to the appreciation that the commitment to a religious world view needs to be inclusive of the affective components of personal spirituality.

Brennan became a member of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance during her time in England (1930).⁵⁴⁴ Brennan was introduced to the Alliance by the lawyer Chrystal Macmillan who was one of the leading advocates on the rights of married women to their own nationality.⁵⁴⁵ Brennan maintained a link with the English group after her return to Australia. Another Australian woman called Margaret Flynn had a strong connection with the members of St Joan's in England, and they encouraged her to establish an Australian section. Flynn set out to "gather together the scattered members of the Alliance in Australia and make a Society worthy of the Mother Society in England."⁵⁴⁶ When a new Australian section of St Joan's was formed in 1936 the *Catholic Citizen* reported:

With great joy we welcome the good news from Melbourne of the foundation of the Australian section of St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance, which received the blessing of his Grace the Archbishop of Melbourne on May 30th, St. Joan's Day.⁵⁴⁷

Dame Enid Lyons was appointed the first General President in Australia, having joined the organisation when she was in England for the King's Jubilee in the preceding year.⁵⁴⁸ Given such prestigious connections St Joan's (Vic.) was able to assert a public profile and

⁵⁴⁴ "St Joan's Alliance," *Argus*, 30 July 1936, 14; and "Anna Brennan," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1962, 76.

⁵⁴⁵ "International Notes: Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, July-August, 1946, 43; and Karen Knop and Christine Chinklin, "Remembering Chrystal Macmillan: Women's Equality and Nationality in International Law," *Michigan Journal of International Law* 22, no. 4 (2001): 525.

⁵⁴⁶ "God-Speed," *Catholic Citizen*, February 15, 1936, 10. See also Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 98-99.

⁵⁴⁷ "Notes and Comments," *Catholic Citizen*, July-August 15, 1936, 61.

⁵⁴⁸ "St Joan's Alliance," *Advocate*, September 23, 1943, 15; and "St Joan's Alliance," *Catholic Press*, May 7, 1936, 15.

a level of respectability. That the organisation maintained close links with the original foundation in England is clear: they used the *Catholic Citizen*, the official organ of the Alliance produced by the English section. The regularity, tone and contents of the contributions to the journal by the sections of St Joan's in Australia, were in harmony with the English group's views and position.⁵⁴⁹ As Kennedy has noted, women in the Victorian branch of the organisation valued their association with the larger organisation, were strongly connected to many other women's groups and had a firm sense of their mandate to engage in social reform as Catholic women who could set their own agenda.⁵⁵⁰

The differences between the Victorian and the New South Wales section of St Joan's in Australia reinforces the need to pay close attention to how local factors shaped the specific way that Brennan operated as a Catholic lay woman. In 1946, ten years after the Victorian group started, a New South Wales section of St Joan's began. Jean Daly, who was instrumental in the formation of the New South Wales section, expressed the view that a focus on equality for women was a very notable aspect of the group in Victoria.⁵⁵¹ By contrast, the St Joan's Alliance in New South Wales was very caught up in challenging Jessie Street's influence and in developing its connection to national and international organisations for women. The differences between the specific issues that were focused on by the St Joan's Alliance in Victoria and the section in New South Wales shaped the way the groups developed.⁵⁵² The New South Wales section encountered some considerable resistance to its foundation and operations from the Catholic hierarchy in Sydney.⁵⁵³ The Victorian section of the Alliance seemed to be relatively unfettered by the Church hierarchy. From an intersectional stance this difference is worth noting as it emphasises the need to pay close attention to the specific local context of what it meant to be an active Catholic lay woman in the Church and beyond.

The focus and interconnectedness of St Joan's (Vic.) to other organisations meant that it operated in a context that took it beyond the local Catholic community. As noted by

⁵⁴⁹ This comment is based on my examination of the *Catholic Citizen* from 1936-1962.

⁵⁵⁰ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 98-107, 256.

⁵⁵¹ "A Record and Description in the 1950's of the Happenings Between Santamaria and Jean Daly," 4, Box 2, Folder 5; and "Curriculum Vitae," 1, Box 3, Folder 5: Jean Daly Papers, 1935-1986, with Associated Papers, 2001-2011, MLMSS 9429, Collection of the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales.

⁵⁵² Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 244-255.

⁵⁵³ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 238-244, 252.

Kennedy, it reproduced the type of engagement in social concerns and feminist consciousness that was very evident in the early years of the Catholic Women's Social Guild.⁵⁵⁴ It also shared in the hope of other women's organisations that the capacities that women demonstrated during the war would result in increased opportunities for women after the war. However, Kennedy argues that after World War II the energies of St Joan's (Vic.) diminished when it seemed that women's organisations in Australia and beyond were still a long way from gaining greater equality for women.⁵⁵⁵ The emphasis that St Joan's (Vic.) placed on its connection to women's organisations in the wider and international community and how this was consistent with Brennan's mode of engagement, is of most relevance to this study of the integration of her Catholicism and her focus on women's rights.⁵⁵⁶ She was active in St Joan's (Vic.) for twenty-six years and held a number of important leadership roles, including the role of President (also at times referred to as the Vice-President) for a total of twenty one years (1938-45; 1948-62)⁵⁵⁷ and was confident in her promotion of St Joan's Social and Political Alliance as "a feminist organisation" within the Catholic Church.⁵⁵⁸

From its beginnings St Joan's (Vic.) never shied away from its feminist stance. This is apparent in the topic of a paper given by one of the members on "the evolution of British feminism."⁵⁵⁹ An overview of some key aspects of the activities of St Joan's (Vic.) is helpful in contextualising Brennan's role in the group. The issues St Joan's (Vic.) was actively involved in included a commitment to women's equality, the rights and welfare of Aboriginal women, equal pay for equal work, the nationality of married women and concerns about any increase in the rate of divorce.⁵⁶⁰ The members were clear about their role to influence social policy. In its first year St Joan's (Vic.) voiced its concerns to the Commonwealth Government about "the exploitation of Aboriginal Women by Japanese Pearlers at Bathurst and Melville Islands".⁵⁶¹ In the face of inaction, St Joan's (Vic.)

⁵⁵⁴ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 106.

⁵⁵⁵ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 186.

⁵⁵⁶ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 103.

⁵⁵⁷ "Anna Brennan," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1962, 76; and University of Melbourne Archives, Records of Teresa Wardell, 1986/0123, Unit 7, 1986.0123.00068, Report for 1963.

⁵⁵⁸ "Miss Anna Brennan Says: The Feminist Demands Not Only Rights, But Responsibilities," *Tribune*, August 11, 1955, 1.

⁵⁵⁹ "St Joan's Alliance in Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1937, 92.

⁵⁶⁰ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 102-106, 181-186, 255.

⁵⁶¹ "Australian Section of St Joan's Alliance," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1936, 92.

favoured the appointment of women Protectors to deal with this problem.⁵⁶² When it was considered that some steps had been taken to attend to this matter, St Joan's (Vic.) sent a note of affirmation to the Commonwealth Government.⁵⁶³ This sort of correspondence indicates that St Joan's (Vic.) was maintaining an active watching brief on the Commonwealth Government in this area and was not just involved in an academic analysis of the issues. It also indicates a degree of collective confidence in the role of the St Joan's (Vic.) by its members.

By 1955 St Joan's (Vic.) was able to list the following connections. "The Alliance co-operates with the Australian Association for United Nations; the National Council of Women; the Victorian Aboriginal Group; the Travellers' Aid Society; the Pan-Pacific Women's Association. The Alliance is represented on the Standing Committees of A.A.U.N. — Human Rights; Status of Women; W.H.O.; E.C.A.F.E.; and F.A.O."⁵⁶⁴ In its annual report for 1958 St Joan's (Vic.) noted that Brennan was their representative at a reception for the Queen Mother.⁵⁶⁵ Again this speaks of a sense of engagement in the wider community. Brennan's appointment, to the Australian Parliamentary Committee investigating aspects of the nationality of married woman, was an achievement noted favourably by the English section of St Joan's.⁵⁶⁶

Concerns about divorce

Although the women of St Joan's (Vic.) were united with other women's groups about many social welfare issues, particularly those matters that concerned the civic status of married women, they were not supportive of many proposed changes to matrimonial law that might have led to an increase in divorce.⁵⁶⁷ Quartly and Smart have noted that uniform divorce law was a contested issue across the various councils of the National Council of Women but they also note that from the 1920s, the national councils were in favour of federal divorce laws, as a solution to the considerable hardship women could

⁵⁶² "St Joan's Alliance in Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, January 15, 1937, 5

⁵⁶³ "St Joan's Alliance in Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, June 15, 1937, 56. This watching brief role is also evident when newspaper cuttings about Government action in this matter are sent to St Joan's in England. See "St Joan's Alliance in Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, September 15, 1937, 72.

⁵⁶⁴ "St Joan's Alliance, Victoria," *Catholic Citizen*, August 15, 1955, 55.

⁵⁶⁵ University of Melbourne Archives, Records of Teresa Wardell, 1986/0123, Unit 7, 1986.0123.00068, St Joan's Alliance, Victorian Section, Report for 1958, 2.

⁵⁶⁶ "The Goal in Sight," *Catholic Citizen*, September, 1946, 56.

⁵⁶⁷ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 185.

experience due to inequalities in marriage.⁵⁶⁸ Brennan expressed concern for the welfare of children in divorced families and was also very protective of the reputation of women who had been deserted and spoke of knowing “many heroic deserted wives.”⁵⁶⁹ In 1944 Brennan was the speaker at a meeting of the National Council of Women of Victoria on the topic of “Divorce and the Family.”⁵⁷⁰ With a spike in divorces following hasty marriages to Allied servicemen, St Joan’s (Vic.) in 1944, expressed concern about proposals to make it easier for such women to obtain a divorce.⁵⁷¹ Their statement on this issue reflects their disquiet about the fate of young women who may have naively entered into marriage and also an anxiety that easier divorce might lead to more of these ill-considered wartime marriages.⁵⁷² In this context St Joan’s (Vic.) argued that “the women are left to bear alone the burden of a situation into which, in many instances, they have been innocently betrayed.”⁵⁷³ This type of statement speaks of a real sympathy for those involved in the breakdown of a marriage in the unusual circumstances of war.

In 1947, however, as Australian society reverted to the social mores of peace-time, St Joan’s (Vic.) strongly opposed moves towards uniform divorce law across the Australian states, arguing that such changes would lead to an increase in the rate of divorce.⁵⁷⁴ Brennan helped to draft a position statement that outlined the organisation’s strong opposition which was distributed to Government ministers and the Catholic hierarchy. This statement clearly presented national and international law and articulated real concerns about the breakdown of family life.⁵⁷⁵ Brennan participated in a radio debate arguing against the introduction of Commonwealth divorce law publicising the matter to the general community, and ensuring that Catholic voices were presented in the public discourse.⁵⁷⁶ Such public campaigns reflected the ways in which she blended her

⁵⁶⁸ Quartly and Smart, *Respectable Radicals*, 102, 98, 173-174, 275-276.

⁵⁶⁹ “Dangers of Divorce,” *Age*, October 29, 1924, 11.

⁵⁷⁰ Minutes of Council Meeting, 10th August, 1944, National Council of Women of Victoria, Papers, YMS 16241, Box 4: Australian Manuscripts Collection, State Library of Victoria. (Records not fully processed at date of access.)

⁵⁷¹ “Easier Divorce Proposals Disturbing,” *Advocate*, January 19, 1944, 17.

⁵⁷² “Easier Divorce Proposals Disturbing,” *Advocate*, January 19, 1944, 17; and “St Joan’s Alliance in Australia,” *Catholic Citizen*, April 15, 1944, 16.

⁵⁷³ “Easier Divorce Proposals Disturbing,” *Advocate*, January 19, 1944, 17.

⁵⁷⁴ For some of the background to these proposed changes see Henry Finlay, *To Have but Not to Hold: A History of Attitudes to Marriage and Divorce in Australia 1858-1975*, (Annandale, New South Wales: Federation Press, 2005): 203-204, 304-305.

⁵⁷⁵ “St Joan’s Alliance in Australia,” *Catholic Citizen*, December 15, 1947, 87; and “Proposed Australian Divorce Act,” *Catholic Citizen*, December 15, 1947, 84.

⁵⁷⁶ “St Joan’s Alliance in Australia,” *Catholic Citizen*, December 15, 1947, 87.

professional role as a lawyer with her personal religious conviction about significant issues.

In 1948 St Joan's (Vic.) considered its work in opposing divorce to be a real "highlight" of its advocacy work.⁵⁷⁷ The opposition by St Joan's (Vic.) to certain legislative changes in divorce was shared by others in the wider society such as the Anglican Mothers' Union which opposed divorce throughout the 1930s in England and Australia.⁵⁷⁸ What is of particular interest is the confidence of the members of St Joan's (Vic.) to make a contribution to the public discussion as Catholic women speaking in their own right. In that sense they were agentic beyond their own community. Some of this advocacy involved adopting a more conservative position on an issue even when there was normally a sense of alignment with the advocacy of a larger women's organisation such as the NCWV.⁵⁷⁹ This demonstrates a capacity to assert a stance shaped significantly by their religious worldview. The ability to maintain a religious position on a social concern, whilst not becoming totally isolated from other women's organisations, was also evident in other women's organisations. In England, the Anglican Mothers' Union and the Catholic Women's League, were able to voice their opposition to issues such as divorce, without becoming alienated from other women's groups.⁵⁸⁰

An important aspect of Brennan's involvement in St Joan's (Vic.) relates to the National Council of Women of Victoria. Specifically, Brennan's taxing experience in 1920, over the affiliation of the Catholic Women's Social Guild with the NCWV, did not deter her from seeking the affiliation of St Joan's (Vic.) with the NCWV during her presidential term in 1940.⁵⁸¹ On this occasion there was no demand from Archbishop Mannix for St Joan's (Vic.) to disaffiliate. The context for this change in autonomy represents a great deal about the many different ways of being Catholic and for the women in St Joan's (Vic.) what independence could actually mean. The decision of St Joan's (Vic.) to affiliate

⁵⁷⁷ "Australia.—Victoria Section," *Catholic Citizen*, March 15, 1948, 23.

⁵⁷⁸ With regard to the English context see Caitríona Beaumont, "Moral Dilemmas and Women's Rights: The Attitude of the Mothers' Union and Catholic Women's League to Divorce, Birth Control and Abortion in England, 1928-1939," *Women's History Review* 16, no. 4 (2007): 465-472. For a reference to the Australian context and the Anglican Mothers' Union see O'Brien, "Militant Mothers: Faith, Power, and Identity in the Mothers' Union in Sydney, 1896-1950," 43-44.

⁵⁷⁹ Quartly and Smart, *Respectable Radicals*, 277. Particular reference is made here to the oppositional stance taken by St Joan's (Vic.) with regard to uniform divorce laws.

⁵⁸⁰ Beaumont, "Moral Dilemmas and Women's Rights," 481.

⁵⁸¹ University of Melbourne Archives, Records of Teresa Wardell, 1986/0123, Unit 7, 1986.0123.00072, St Joan's Alliance History. See page 9 of the handwritten history.

with the NCWV in 1940, speaks of a group who were confident in their own authority to unite with other organisations in order to achieve their mandate. It is indicative of the complexity of identity and representation that St Joan's (Vic.) could maintain close ties with the NCWV, but the Catholic Women's Social Guild was unable to do so, even though Brennan was a key player in both groups.⁵⁸²

The members of St Joan's (Vic.) were not separated from life within the Catholic community in Melbourne. They held their first meeting in 1936, in the Central Catholic Library.⁵⁸³ Fr Hackett was very involved in this library and he was supportive of the new organisation.⁵⁸⁴ Members of St Joan's (Vic.) would gather for a special Mass for the feast day of St Joan of Arc.⁵⁸⁵ A report from St Joan's (Vic.) was included in the relevant Diocesan Report for the "World Congress of the Lay Apostolate in Rome" in 1957.⁵⁸⁶ The various ways that the members of St Joan's (Vic.) were connected to different aspects of Catholic Church life, indicates that they were able to belong actively to the Church, without foregoing their right to act within the terms of their own mandate. Although closely involved in the liturgical and cultural life of the Catholic community, St Joan's (Vic.) adopted an inclusive and collaborative attitude to others not of their denomination.⁵⁸⁷

In 1957 St Joan's (Vic.) celebrated twenty one years of its foundation in Australia. In preparation for this event, Brennan, as president, wrote to the Apostolic Delegate the Most Reverend Romolo Carboni S.T.D., in response to his request for some suggestions for his address for the occasion. She mentioned several topics. Firstly, as women have a duty to engage in the wider community, their promotion of religion acts as a foil to those who do not promote a religious world view. Secondly, that women can join with men to have an impact in the public domain or they may do so by being involved in groups for women

⁵⁸² Kennedy, "Catholic Women in Action: The Nature and Functioning of Five Lay Catholic Women's Organisations in Sydney and Melbourne circa 1920-1950," 213 at note 146. In noting Brennan's leadership role at this stage, Kennedy argues that the affiliation of the St Joan's (Vic.) with the National Council of Women, did not meet opposition from Archbishop Mannix in 1940, mainly because St Joan's was not an official entity within the Catholic Church and due to the changed circumstances between 1920 and 1940. She also notes Mannix's support for lay activism.

⁵⁸³ University of Melbourne Archives, Records of Teresa Wardell, 1986/0123, Unit 7, 1986.0123.00072, St Joan's Alliance, History. See page 1 of the handwritten history.

⁵⁸⁴ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 98-99.

⁵⁸⁵ "St Joan's Alliance, Victoria," *Catholic Citizen*, August 15, 1955, 55.

⁵⁸⁶ "St Joan's Alliance in Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, November 15, 1957, 76.

⁵⁸⁷ "St Joan's Alliance in Australia," *Catholic Citizen*, April 15, 1938, 34. See also a comment made by Mrs Gladys Henry in "Activities of St Joan's Alliance," *Tribune*, August 18, 1955, 3.

only, especially those that had a concern for mothers, children, young girls and delinquents. Thirdly, that “equal pay for equal work should be recognised and that the Holy Father’s pronouncements on the above subject be enlarged upon.” After mentioning these issues she added: “That in carrying out the above, stress should be laid upon the right of the laity to initiate their own associations without the suggestion of the hierarchy.”⁵⁸⁸ Brennan here clearly articulated key aspects of the unification of her understanding of the role of Catholic women in the wider community. Her last suggestion that the laity should have a degree of independence about the establishment of their own organisations is particularly interesting as it is so supportive of the way that St Joan’s (Vic.) operated. It also reflects a high degree of agency on Brennan’s part that she included this in her letter to the Apostolic Delegate.

The wider Catholic context

The years of Brennan’s association with St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance, from 1930 to her death in 1962, corresponds to the time in Australian Catholic history when the laity’s role in the Catholic Church is often referred to within the general framework of “Catholic Action”. What is meant by the broad term “Catholic Action” is somewhat nebulous and its development in the Catholic Church, in the twentieth century, was shaped by various changing ecclesial and social factors.⁵⁸⁹ For the purposes of this study the term Catholic Action, refers to the many ways that the laity in Australia, within the hierarchical structure and under the authority of their Bishops, were encouraged to assume a more active role within the Church and the wider society. How this was actually expressed varied across different sections of the lay and clerical community. The differences between Melbourne and Sydney were notable.⁵⁹⁰

As St Joan’s (Vic.) was not officially an entity within the Catholic Church, it did not come within the purview of Catholic Action.⁵⁹¹ This is not to argue that there was any sort of

⁵⁸⁸ University of Melbourne Archives, Records of Teresa Wardell, 1986/0123, Unit 7, 1986.0123.00074, St Joan’s Alliance, Scrapbook: Letter from Miss Anna Brennan to the Most Reverend Romolo Carboni S.T.D., 27 June, 1957.

⁵⁸⁹ David Ranson, *Between the ‘Mysticism of Politics’ and the ‘Politics of Mysticism’: Interpreting New Pathways of Holiness within the Roman Catholic Tradition* (Adelaide: ATF Theology, 2014), 145-165.

⁵⁹⁰ Duncan, *Crusade or Conspiracy? Catholics and the Anti-Communist Struggle in Australia*, 97-99, 195-196.

⁵⁹¹ Kennedy, “Catholic Women in Action: The Nature and Functioning of Five Lay Catholic Women’s Organisations in Sydney and Melbourne circa 1920-1950,” 221.

strict boundary or separation employed. At this time opposing the influence of communism dominated Catholic life and culture. The establishment of the Catholic Social Studies Movement or the “Movement” (as it became known) and the events in the 1950s leading to the “Split” in the Labor Party, are still being investigated.⁵⁹² St Joan’s (Vic.) was not subsumed by the focus on combating communism that dominated many aspects of Catholic life.⁵⁹³ Brennan was not linked to the power base of Catholic Action or “The Movement”. However, her involvement in St Joan’s (Vic.) provided her with a means of being an active advocate for social reform as a lay Catholic woman.

Brennan saw the potential for women like her to be active ambassadors for a Catholic perspective on social issues even if this was not always under the auspice of an official entity within the Catholic Church. Members of St Joan’s Social and Political Alliance were publicly known as Catholic women and upheld a Catholic stance doctrinally. This highlights something of the complexity of how agency is expressed and constructed. Those who saw the Church as being in relationship to the wider world rather than being in conflict with the world, were possibly able to engage in social reform alongside like-minded groups, without needing to remain in a Catholic silo. Brennan’s experience in St Joan’s (Vic.), her links to the NCWV, her advocacy work in the law and through parliamentary enquires, shaped her view of what might be achieved by Catholic women.⁵⁹⁴ Her public influence was dedicated to reaching the wider community not to convert others to her denomination but to assert her view that Catholic women had a place in the public discourse.

⁵⁹² Bruce Duncan, “Santamaria and the Legacy of the Split: Fifty Years On,” *Australasian Catholic Record* 83, no. 2 (2006):140-153.

⁵⁹³ Kennedy, *Faith and Feminism*, 255.

⁵⁹⁴ For Brennan’s connection to the National Council of Women see Quartly and Smart, *Respectable Radicals*, 114, 173,198.

Conclusion

There is no personal virtue attached to being born at a particular time or place but the specific way an individual engages with his or her wider world can be both revelatory about the individual and informative of the wider context. In this sense Brennan's life speaks both of her and beyond her. It speaks of her because as a Catholic lay woman she chose to be an engaged citizen. It speaks beyond her as many years after her death the unification of her faith and social action has contemporary relevance. This is not primarily with regard to developing a suitable paradigm for the justification of activism, for those who operate from a faith perspective, but it is an argument for being inclusive about the relevance of religion as constitutive of the representation of certain individuals.

The postmodern quest to overcome the limitations of binaries is especially relevant in the context of not juxtaposing Brennan's Catholicism to other dimensions of her life. In the context of the writing of history, the feminist commitment to inclusivity is honoured by an analysis that does not relegate religion as being outside the purview of the historian's domain. This investigation of Brennan's life indicates that her Catholicism was grounded in a firm adherence to social action as being intrinsic to her sense of herself as a Catholic, that it is more apt to speak of a unification of faith and action rather than integration. I have been mindful in undertaking this study that it has been important to commit to an analysis of Brennan's life and times and not to permit my esteem of her achievements to veer towards a hagiography.

One of the tensions in undertaking this thesis has been the fact that there are so many strands that can be tugged to unravel Brennan's subjectivity. It is interesting to note that much has been written in the Australian context about women's suffrage, the various "waves" of feminism, women and higher education and the impact on women during and between World War I and World War II. Brennan's life spans all of these years. As the focus of this thesis was limited to investigating Brennan's involvement in social reform as a Catholic lay woman only some of these issues have been addressed contextually.

It is helpful to outline various elements of Brennan's life which assist in an appreciation of what energised and sustained her in her commitment to women's rights as a lay Catholic woman. Brennan's parents emigrated from Ireland in the shadow of the famine years. It cannot be fully known how this impacted on the next generation in the family

but from their arrival in Bendigo, Michael and Mary Brennan were diligent in their efforts to ensure that their children could benefit from all that Australia had to offer. In her formative years Brennan was connected to a world beyond that of the Catholic community. Given her father's civic involvement and the family connection to the activities of the area, she would have seen how a common goal to develop the local community was considered normative. Brennan displayed a similar confidence in the ability of people from different backgrounds to work together for a common purpose.

Although all the specific details of the domestic arrangements are not known, as the youngest female sibling in the family, Brennan was free enough of household responsibilities to devote herself to her university studies and the development of her career. However it was her personal enthusiasm to pursue her education that positioned her to take advantage of this opportunity. This is not to present her just as a high achiever but as someone who must have had an inner awareness of her own intellectual capacity in addition to an acute consciousness of what women around her at this time were achieving.

Brennan began her studies at the University of Melbourne in medicine and one of the most interesting observations that she made was her sense of undertaking something that would be useful to other women. This may seem a simple altruistic sentiment but it can also be regarded as indicative of Brennan's responsiveness to women's issues. A really pertinent component of her life and times is that in her early adulthood the issue of women's suffrage was very prominent in Australia. Brennan was studying law when suffrage was finally obtained by women in Victoria and there is no doubt that she would have been very aware of the significance of the power of the ballot box for women. Although the struggle for equal rights for women was only just emerging at this time, Brennan began her professional life at a time when the potentiality of what women could achieve was certainly vibrant. The fact that Brennan obtained a university education meant that she became a member of an elite group of women. This did not translate into a sense of elitism but it certainly positions her differently from other women who did not have the same level of education.

Brennan's status as a single woman has been dealt with in some detail in this study as it seems such an important component of her identity. Her singleness meant that she was able to devote herself to her professional life and to the many groups that she was

connected to in one way or another. Although there are many factors contained in any discussion about singleness and marriage it is possible to see how in a generalist sense Brennan had a sense of her personal destiny and vocation to social service.

Closely linked to Brennan's attainment of her law degree was the particularly supportive structure provided by her family who paid the fees of their siblings and this was also true in her case. This of itself represents a view in the family that Brennan should be provided for as the male members had been. It is also important to note that Brennan's studies, her professional life and her advocacy were sustainable because of the enabling structures that were operative in the family unit. A critical aspect of this support was that Brennan was able to undertake her articles in law, in the firm in which her brother Frank was a partner. She became a partner herself in the new firm that Frank went on to establish. All of this family contextual detail is relevant in presenting Brennan as a woman who was able to make a considerable contribution to the wider community because it represents the depth of communitarianism that she was immersed in within her family structure.

Outside the family, Brennan's associational connections were a key component of her life. These associations traversed Catholic and non-Catholic groups at times when sectarian tensions were heightened. There are two different strands to this element of the discussion. Brennan's links to groups like the Princess Ida Club, the National Council of Women and the Lyceum Club in Melbourne provided her with a rich network of friendships and would have instilled in her the great benefits of solidarity and collegiality. The second important element is that her initial association was in her capacity as an individual. Therefore, it was she who saw the benefit of belonging. Brennan's firm commitment to women's rights was bolstered by her links to women who were very aware of the emerging role that educated women such as themselves had in obtaining greater equality for all women.

The intersections between Brennan's involvement in Catholic and other organisations are central to appreciating the unification of her commitment to women's rights and her Catholicism. One of the major outcomes of the nineteenth century papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, was an appreciation in the Catholic community that the social concerns of any society needed to be responded to by the Church. Implicit in this was an appreciation of the need to respond to injustice by applying Catholic principles to social problems. *Rerum Novarum* spoke of the need for the Church to be actively involved in the marketplace of

human concerns and not piously remote or disengaged from the harsh realities for those who were disadvantaged by social or economic structures. Brennan's expression of Catholicism was imbued with this sense of the appropriateness of being immersed in society, offering structural changes rather than simply applying the salve of relief. Her connection to the Jesuits in Melbourne, especially through her active involvement in the Catholic Women's Social Guild from 1916-1920, provided her with an opportunity to see how social problems could be responded to by lay Catholic women who were informed about the causes of social distress.

Therefore, the specific aims of this Guild were totally consonant with Brennan's allegiance to her faith and to her engagement in social reform especially regarding issues affecting women. She was very clear about the role that Catholic women had to play to the post suffrage community to bring about greater equality for all women. Catholic women were not involved in the quest for suffrage in Australia as a denominational entity but Brennan and others could clearly see that as a group post suffrage Catholic women had a legitimate right to assert their view on social questions from a Catholic perspective. She resigned from the Catholic Women's Social Guild rather than acquiesce to pressure that the Guild disaffiliate from the National Council of Women of Victoria. The critical factor here is that Brennan's worldview was such that for her the greater good was to be found in an affiliation with an organisation which seemed to share many of the aims of the Catholic Women's Social Guild. Therefore, this incident represents her commitment to the cause of women as being worthy of her allegiance beyond the impact of sectarianism or hierarchical control.

From her early primary education and throughout her life Brennan was immersed in groups beyond the Catholic community. This provided her with the capacity to be faithful to her spiritual and cultural home as a Catholic whilst being strongly linked to many non-Catholic groups. It may also be the case that her concern about women's rights required her to see this as the primary issue and one which included but went beyond her religious affiliation. It is clear that Brennan did see the value of a Catholic woman's perspective on social issues but it is a central argument of this thesis that she did so in a sense of collegiality rather than with the fervour of one trying to reform existing women's organisations.

Given that Brennan was very focused on women's rights her lens seemed to be set on the broader issue of women in society. Although she was capable of asserting her own authority as a lay Catholic woman, most of her energies seemed to be targeted on the larger social issues, such as the nationality of married women, and as such any differences were subsumed by a sense of the greater good. Those like Brennan, who saw the Church as being in relationship to rather than being in conflict with the wider world, were possibly able to engage in social reform alongside like-minded groups, without needing to remain in a Catholic enclave. Brennan's view of how to be a Catholic impelled her to be active in the wider community not to convert others to her denomination but to assert that her view as a Catholic woman had a place in the public discourse.

Brennan's literary gifts and interests are noted in this thesis. Much of the advocacy of lawyers rests on their capacity to elucidate the meaning of words in particular contexts and a confident facility with language is indeed a valuable skill for those in the legal profession. The various accounts of Brennan's participation in public gatherings attest to her eloquence and awareness of the power of the spoken word. Brennan also saw the potential of the written word as a means of advocacy. In her prose, the rights of women are vividly articulated, by the emphasis that she places on matters affecting women or can be inferred by the commentary that she inserts into a text to articulate whatever she perceived was necessary for women's equality to be fully realised.

It is possible to see how Brennan holds a position at both the margins and at the centre of various power dynamics. In the context of the wider society, as a post suffrage woman, Brennan is often the outsider canvassing and promoting the rights of other women. As a professional woman and intellectual she had the capacity to assert herself and did so as an individual and as a member of various organisations. Although she was well integrated into many aspects of life within the Catholic community of her times, it was through her active involvement with the St Joan's Social and Political Alliance that the unification of Brennan's Catholicism and commitment to women's rights seems most apparent.

By focusing on Brennan's life and times this thesis assists in redressing the lack of attention that has been given to the experience of Catholic lay women in Australian Catholic history. The conviction that Brennan held, about the rights of women, was grounded in her religious world view that women and men were created equal. In aiming to avoid a dualism between the secular and the religious, this study has demonstrated how

a representation of Brennan's life requires a type of analysis that does not relegate religious allegiance to the periphery of experience. Therefore, within an intersectional framework but with a specific focus on the significance of religion as a component of identity, this thesis contributes to the field of knowledge by highlighting Brennan's agentic capacity as a lay Catholic woman. Whilst acknowledging the manifest ways that power is asserted or resisted the recognition of the enabling elements of religious identity have also been identified.

The structural causes of marginalisation are always important in the study of history but the factors that shape how a person engages in the wider community add another important layer to the discussion. Therefore, this thesis shows how critical it is to examine how religion can be integrated into the representation of a woman like Brennan. She was very confident about asserting the need for Catholic women to claim a voice in the public domain and she exemplified this through her involvement in social reform and advocacy. As such this study aligns with the emerging scholarly discussions on the importance of a stronger incorporation of the significance of religion within feminist discourse, showing that Brennan saw strength in her identity as a Catholic lay woman.

In discussing why religious allegiance is important from an intersectional perspective it is possible to locate the discussion within a framework that places a lot of emphasis on the structural and hierarchical aspects of institutions. One of the more subtle but interesting findings of this analysis of Brennan's life has been the importance that she placed on the individual having an integrated faith life. In that sense Brennan sounds like a very modern advocate of a holistic spirituality that honours the intellectual and affective dimensions of belief.

Brennan died in 1962 in the same year that the first session of the Second Vatican Council began. Just as all social movements do not emerge in a vacuum so major events in the Catholic Church, such as the Second Vatican Council, need to be understood with reference to preceding factors and influences. The final declarations, decrees and constitutions of the Second Vatican Council need to be read with close regard to an appreciation of various aspects of the hermeneutics associated with intratextuality and intertextuality.⁵⁹⁵ Whilst the limitations inherent in a retrospective analysis are fully

⁵⁹⁵ Ormond Rush, *Still Interpreting Vatican II: Some Hermeneutical Principles* (Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 2004), 40-51.

appreciated, it is possible to consider Brennan's form of social engagement, as a Catholic lay woman, in light of the view about the role of the laity that emanated from the Second Vatican Council.⁵⁹⁶ In particular the Council was very supportive of a closer engagement between the Church and the wider world and a greater promotion of the laity as ambassadors of the Church's mission. It is often through analysing the components of someone's life that the pebbles of their experience seem to bounce back from the walls of a later age with a forceful echo. In this regard Brennan's life as a Catholic lay woman seems attuned to the model of Church that was acclaimed through the Second Vatican Council.

Brennan lived her life with zeal and was energetic to the end. This gleaner has caught only a glimpse of her subject. Born under the long arc of a cruel famine but alive to the potentiality of life in Australia, Brennan died having embodied a sense of what it meant to live "for the service of humanity."⁵⁹⁷ Most importantly she did so as a woman whose religious allegiance enabled her to hold the sacred and the secular in harmony rather than juxtaposing them in a false binary. In her reflection on the Biblical woman Ruth, Joan Chittister, a contemporary American Benedictine woman, has stated:

The moment a woman becomes conscious of the way her world goes together, she is obligated to say her truth for the sake of all the women yet unborn. Then, because of her, their own lives may be better than hers was. Otherwise, her role as the other image of God is lost, and the world will see no more of it in the future than it did in the past.⁵⁹⁸

Anna Brennan certainly spoke her truth and her generativity of intellect and spirituality has borne much fruit. The essence of what drove her to promote women's rights was her foundational belief in the *imago Dei*.

⁵⁹⁶ Vatican II, *Apostolicam Actuositatem* (Decree on the Apostolate of Lay People), in *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, ed. Austin Flannery, new rev. ed. (Collegeville, Indiana: Liturgical Press, 1992), 766-798. This sense of a more active role for the laity is evident in this document from the Second Vatican Council.

⁵⁹⁷ This phrase is from an address that Brennan gave in 1920. "Catholic Women's Social Guild: Fourth Annual Conference," *Advocate*, April 15, 1920, 24.

⁵⁹⁸ Joan Chittister, *The Story of Ruth: Twelve Moments in Every Woman's Life*. Art by John August Swanson (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 67.

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