

Teresa Wardell: Gender, Catholicism and Social Welfare in Melbourne

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Abstract: Teresa Wardell was a leading figure in Catholic social welfare provision in Melbourne during the mid-20th century. She was part of the push to expand the recognition of social work expertise into the field of child welfare and also helped establish standards of practice for professional Catholic social workers in Australia. This chapter places Wardell within the broader history of social welfare and examines the ways in which she contributed to the development of her profession.

Keywords: Child welfare, social work, Catholicism, women, professionalisation, social service, welfare history

Introduction

The period from 1930 to 1970 was one of radical transformation of social welfare provision in Victoria as the clerks, philanthropists and religious personnel who had established welfare networks in the 19th century were replaced by professionals with increasingly specialised fields of training. This transition was not an easy one. As Dorothy Scott and Shurlee Swain have shown, great conflict could arise within welfare organisations when committees employed trained social workers to augment the work of welfare inspectors whose authority was based on practical experience.¹ Robert Lawrence's classic history of Australian social work also characterises this period as one during which the first generations of formally educated Australian social workers battled to have their skill and authority recognised, though the importance of trained almoners (social workers employed within hospitals) was fairly well accepted in Melbourne by the 1930s.² This view is complicated by Elaine Martin, who offers a gendered analysis of the development of Australian social work. She argues that social work's quest for status amongst the professions was hampered both by society's perception of it as a feminised field and by the attrition of women from the workforce, particularly after marriage.³ Histories of social work in other English-speaking countries present the process of social work's professionalisation as similarly fraught.⁴

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This broad narrative of professionalisation is useful but it is important to understand that, while the authors position themselves as telling a national story, the dominant voices are typically Protestant and secular welfare providers.⁵ Scholars who have examined the history of Catholic social welfare provision in Australia argue that Catholic social services were vibrant, important, and followed their own turbulent path towards professionalisation. They contend that Catholic social services could not avoid engaging with the trend of professionalisation in the wider welfare community but that this conflicted with organisations' structures of authority and aspects of their underpinning principles.⁶ Damian Gleeson argues that it was important for Catholic social services to have people who were prepared to lead the way in negotiating these challenges and identifies Teresa Wardell as an important figure in the development of Catholic social welfare in Victoria during the mid-20th century.⁷ Wardell was one of the first people to push for trained social workers having a greater influence on the delivery of welfare services to Victoria's Catholic community, and she also helped pioneer a framework of practice for Melbourne's Catholic social workers that was both professional and in accordance with their faith. Her papers, which are stored in fifteen boxes at the University of Melbourne Archives, suggest that her experiences and outlook were significantly coloured by her gender, faith and belief in the value of formal training and education for welfare workers. In particular, the tensions between her desire to position herself as both a professional social worker and a woman of faith pushed her towards new territory in terms of practice within her fledgling profession.

Early Life and Training

Born in 1896 into a well-regarded Melbourne Catholic family, Teresa Mary Wardell was one of ten children. Her paternal grandfather was the esteemed architect, William Wilkinson Wardell; her father was deputy master of the Royal Mint and her mother also came from a family of professionals.⁸ She attended the Convent of the Sacred Heart Melbourne day school, and received her first Holy Communion at St Joseph's, South Yarra, in 1907.⁹ Wardell's first chosen profession was nursing. She trained at Melbourne's St. Vincent's hospital, gained her qualifications in 1921 and worked at the hospital for a time.¹⁰ Letters of recommendation that remain in her archived papers suggest that she was considered a capable nurse by her superiors and liked by her patients.¹¹ This, along with her family's status, helped her gain good private nursing positions, including one as attendant and companion to Dame Nellie Melba.¹² In 1934, at almost 40 years of age, she chose to train for a career in

social work, and, in this second profession, Wardell really distinguished herself as a leader.

According to notes made by Wardell in her later years, she had never been interested in working as an almoner, despite the fact that at the time she moved into the welfare field there were few positions held by trained social workers outside of Melbourne's hospitals.¹³ However, there were signs that some people within Victoria's welfare network were following international developments. In the opening decades of the 20th century, there were movements amongst both British and American welfare workers who sought to distance modern welfare provision from the openly morality-based reformist agenda of 19th-century evangelical charitable work. They sought to make a claim for social work as a profession with standards based on scientific principles and to position themselves as custodians of expert knowledge about the family, domesticity and the person as a social being.¹⁴ In Victoria, Stanley Grieg Smith (who was the secretary of Melbourne's influential Charity Organisation Society for almost 50 years, beginning in 1909) was a notable proponent of the growing body of professional social work literature, and he circulated these ideas amongst both his staff and the broader welfare community.¹⁵ In child welfare, the area in which Wardell would come to distinguish herself, the 1920s saw the growth of markers typically associated with the rise of professionalisation—these included the production of more detailed case records for each child and the emphasis placed on applying 'scientific principles' of institutional management.¹⁶

There was, however, no formal course of training in social work available in Melbourne until 1929. The Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners was founded in that year; it offered a two-year course covering general social work and also almoner training, and from this organisation the present-day University of Melbourne School of Social Work dates its beginnings.¹⁷ As in Britain, Melbourne's almoners had strong links to the local branch of the Protestant Charity Organisation Society, and, although the diploma offered by the institute was formally a secular one, it emerged from the Protestant welfare tradition.¹⁸ The Protestant model of charity was built around the concepts of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor, which distinguished between people who were seen as victims of poverty, despite trying to be hardworking and thrifty, and those who were considered to be in need as a consequence of their sloth, sexual immorality, drinking or indulgence in other 'luxuries'.¹⁹ The evangelical theology that inspired this model held that individuals had to accept the teachings of Christ before their lives could be redeemed, and thus that personal salvation had to precede social reform.²⁰ Further, it claimed a moral superiority for the 'saved' and helped justify their

intervention in the lives of the impoverished.²¹ The professionalisation of this model meant that welfare workers adopted new tools that they believed allowed them to operate under ‘scientific principles’, but it did not challenge the basic assumptions about which people welfare services were designed to assist.²²

A different ethos underpinned Catholic social welfare. It rejected the view that impoverishment was a marker of sinfulness. On the contrary, it held that suffering was part of God’s plan for humanity; it noted that Christ had always sided with the poor, and represented charitable work as a way for the affluent to serve God.²³ This religious teaching meant that both Catholic parishioners and those responsible for distributing relief tended to understand the purpose of charity as relieving distress wherever it was found. The Catholic view was far less suspicious of the poor than was the Protestant one; indeed the poor were seen as being brought closer to God through their misery.²⁴ The practical result of these ideas was that Catholics tended to believe it was more important to ensure that all genuine cases of need were relieved than to prevent any charitable funds from being allocated to potentially ‘unworthy’ people.²⁵

In America, the professionalisation of social work also stemmed from Protestant philanthropy, and, during the early decades of the 20th century, there was much debate amongst Catholic welfare services as to the possibility of reconciling social work’s ‘scientific principles’ with the religious obligations of charity.²⁶ One outcome of this debate was that, in the early 1920s, several Catholic colleges and universities in the United States established degrees to train social workers who could conduct their work in a manner that was ‘Christ-like as well as scientific’.²⁷ Some Australians, such as Norma Parker and Constance Moffat, chose to travel to the United States in order to study social work at Catholic institutions, though their credentials were not recognised in Melbourne until they completed an abridged version of the local course.²⁸ Other Catholics, including Teresa Wardell, who chose to study at home had only one course of formal training available to them. The dominance of affluent Protestant women in almoner work translated into their preponderance amongst students undertaking the course offered by the Victorian Institute of Hospital Almoners, and this continued after 1933 when the course became a two-year diploma in social work administered by the Victorian Council on Social Training. Indeed, when Wardell began her social work training in 1934, she was the first Catholic woman to commence the full two-year course in Melbourne, Parker and Moffat having only completed a shortened course in Melbourne.²⁹

Ten years after she had commenced the course, Wardell was awarded the diploma, her certificate stating that she had completed ‘the academic work required of her during 1934–1944’ and that she had practical experience with a number of welfare agencies.³⁰ Wardell’s completion had been delayed for at least two reasons. She twice failed a subject on modern political institutions; Gleeson notes that Wardell’s forthright manner led to friction with her teacher in this subject but also argues that she and other Catholic social work students who struggled with this subject may well have objected to the content relating to communism.³¹ Although Wardell was not officially recognised as a trained social worker until 1944, her strong performance as a student at the Catholic Social Service Bureau, combined with her family’s profile within Melbourne’s Catholic community, helped secure her a job with that agency in 1936. The volume of work required of her during this time was a second factor delaying the completion of her formal training.

Beyond Melbourne

Over the course of ten years spent working at the Catholic Social Service Bureau, Teresa Wardell devoted much energy to establishing a strong Catholic social welfare service in Melbourne, and mentored younger social workers who came to work at the Catholic Social Services Bureau.³² In 1946, she chose to leave Melbourne and took a position in child welfare with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Association.³³ During 1946 and 1947, she was posted to China and this period of her overseas work stands out as a missionary phase in her career. Although Wardell was employed by a secular organisation, her work fits a common model of mid–20th century lay missionary service. In the decade following World War I, Christian missionaries working across the globe rapidly transformed their work from an evangelical effort aimed at conversions to a humanitarian response to poverty and suffering—God’s work would be done by recognising the value of every soul.³⁴ Particularly after World War II, religious charitable organisations saw themselves as competing with secular ones like the United Nations both in securing prominent roles in international relief and in retaining lay people of faith, who were becoming more likely to perform their missionary service within secular agencies.³⁵ The regular journal that Wardell maintained during her China posting reflects her view of herself as performing Christian service as she worked with women and children who were victims of poverty and war, and, though she was not overtly proselytising, she associated spiritual enlightenment and Christianity with the ‘knowledge of civics, health and wholesome living’ she was trying to impart.³⁶ Her own religious observances

remained important to her during her time in China; the note ‘mass as usual’ began the entry for many days in her diary.³⁷

Wardell’s China diary also resonates with the genre of missionary autobiography and journal writing. Numerous passages have the air of an adventure story, a common feature of this genre.³⁸ Her account of leaving Sydney read:

It was very eerie being driven out ... thro’ darkened outer suburban streets to Mascot. We seemed the only ones leaving the aerodrome. After being weighed in, together with our luggage, and our papers examined, we were led across in the darkness to the waiting plane.³⁹

From the air, she described Sydney Harbour as ‘a fairy land of lights’, and noted her ‘disappointment at not having travelled by sea’, again indicating her personal sense of exhilaration at the prospect of the events to come.⁴⁰ Without doubting that Wardell genuinely saw herself as embarking on an adventure, it is also worth noting that this trope was one that women of Wardell’s generation felt comfortable in employing as a mechanism for imagining and recounting their experiences on ‘foreign turf’.⁴¹

Wardell was also escaping the pressures and restrictions of her Melbourne life. As Alison Mackinnon has argued, professional women of the early 20th century were typically conscious of how much people around them read into their behaviour. They often felt they needed to decide between accepting the role of radical trailblazer or affirming their commitment to older, traditional middle-class values despite apparently shunning the sacred virtues of marriage and motherhood—the former potentially provoked questions about their femininity and the latter left room for challenging their ability to operate on an equal footing with professional men.⁴² Wardell opted for the more conservative of the two avenues. Her distance from home during her posting in China does, however, seem to have given her a sense of freedom; one of her colleagues from this period later described her as ‘a lot of fun’, a far cry from the ‘forthright’ Wardell who emerges from her Australian correspondence.⁴³

During this time, Teresa Wardell wrote several reflections concerning gender, regarding both her own experiences as a woman and her views on the advancement of women across the globe. This was not an interest that had emerged suddenly; Wardell was a founding member of the Victorian branch of the St. Joan’s Alliance (established in 1936), an organisation whose stated goal was ‘to secure the political, social and economic equality between men and women and to further the work and usefulness of Catholic women as

citizens'.⁴⁴ Also beginning in 1936, she kept a scrapbook of news clippings related to various women's achievements in professional and political contexts and kept adding to this collection until at least 1955.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, her experiences overseas provoked some responses that help position her perspective in the contexts of feminism and imperialism.

Writing from Tsingtao (Qingdao) in China, Wardell celebrated the ways in which 'women in the English speaking countries' had gained from the employment opportunities that opened up for them during World Wars I and II.⁴⁶ 'After the war, these same girls and women were not satisfied to return home and be idle. They had tasted freedom ... Their lives had been enriched by outside contacts and they felt there was a place for them.'⁴⁷

These ideas have resonance with the feminist agenda that would come to flourish in the 1960s and 1970s, but Wardell also adopted some concepts from the maternalist feminism of mid-20th century Australia.⁴⁸ For instance, she supported the notion that women brought an approach to society that was potentially socially healing. She felt that 'the world would be in a much better state if women had more say in the making of the laws on their country and even in international affairs' since a woman's 'greatest asset' was her innate and 'powerful influence for good'.⁴⁹ In the year she went to China, 1946, Wardell turned 50. By this time, she had not married (nor did she ever) and had clearly demonstrated her desire to have a long career in the paid workforce.⁵⁰ Nevertheless, she described the family home as 'a woman's first and greatest concern'.⁵¹ In her later writings, Wardell maintained that women needed stimulation beyond the home but also stressed that women's work as housekeepers was part of their service to God.⁵²

Her travel diaries suggest that her lived sense of gender was one that championed equality on many fronts but also valued feminine niceties. There were times she revelled in being treated as a peer by men. During a stop in Darwin on her way to China, she noted with satisfaction: 'We lined up with the men to receive our bacon and eggs, toast and tea. Everywhere we women are being accepted as service personnel and just fall into line with the men'.⁵³ However, the next day in another Royal Air Force camp, she complained that the conditions were 'not good', 'all rather primitive', and snipped that the officers made no offer for the 'women to have a wash'.⁵⁴

Wardell was a middle-class Australian woman of her time, identifying herself as 'British' and operating in an intellectual tradition about women's emancipation that had concern for the welfare of all women but could not understand that the white middle-class vision of female emancipation might

not represent liberation or empowerment for all women.⁵⁵ She advised Chinese women to organise themselves into advisory groups prepared to stimulate ‘the interest of women in improving their homes [and] learning the latest methods in the care of children’ and believed that with the industrial development of the country would come opportunities for women to influence public and political life.⁵⁶ Wardell was also influenced by discussions about women’s rights that were circulating amongst women involved with international organisations such as the United Nations.⁵⁷ This meant that she made baseline claims about what rights, treatment and living conditions all women should expect, but also that she did not have a framework for understanding why women who had been abused by male relatives or forcibly sent into prostitution were reluctant to accept her offers of escape.⁵⁸

Teresa Wardell never overcame her anxiety about the potentially threatening ‘otherness’ of the Chinese peasantry, as Lachlan Strahan has also observed, but she did form good professional relationships with her Chinese colleagues.⁵⁹ Although her diary records that she sometimes struggled with unfamiliar living conditions, she was in no hurry to return to the comforts of home. In March 1947, when her position in China with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration ended, Wardell made a brief visit to San Francisco before returning to accept two more postings in Asia.

Advancing the Profession

During the years following her time in China, Teresa Wardell’s passion for building her profession became more evident. In 1947, she commenced working for the United Nations in the Philippines, and the case records she created while in this position demonstrate the extent to which professional techniques and approaches informed her work. The records were structured according to contemporary social work principles, adopted a distanced (thought to be objective) tone and sought to produce social ‘diagnosis’ and ‘treatment’.⁶⁰ All these things were hallmarks of early professional social work, which was attempting to distinguish itself from the morally driven charity work associated with 19th-century ‘friendly visitors’ and claim a professional authority based on methodical approaches to casework.⁶¹ In 1948, Wardell left Manila and pursued her professional interest in juvenile delinquency, visiting Catholic welfare organisations in America and then taking a position in Singapore.⁶²

By 1949, when Wardell returned to Melbourne, local social workers had expanded beyond their earlier concentration in hospitals and were aiming to

be recognised as authorities in fields such as child welfare, prisons and family support services. Wardell became part of this push when, in 1951, she was appointed as the Children's Welfare Department's first classification officer. This job was, in effect, the department's first social work position.⁶³ Wardell's notes relating to her work in this position reflect the significant impact that psychoanalytic theories had had upon her approach to her work since her return to Australia.⁶⁴ There were at least two stimuli for this. First, Melbourne's psychiatric services were expanded during the post-World War II years so that, by the 1950s, psychiatric assessments could be provided for children considered delinquent or emotionally disturbed.⁶⁵ Second, the psychosocial approach to casework, which added psychoanalytic analyses to the concept of social diagnosis, was circulating in Melbourne by the early 1950s and influenced social workers across a number of child welfare agencies.⁶⁶

Wardell's interest in therapeutic casework did not fit easily with the approach of existing staff in the Children's Welfare Department. For the first half of the 20th century, the government's child welfare office had essentially operated as an administrative hub, relying on voluntary organisations to provide most of the institutional placements for children and the inspection of foster homes. This office was typically staffed by men making a career in the public service who had no formal training in social welfare; their approach was essentially administrative. In mid-20th century Victoria, private agencies took responsibility for most of the children under state guardianship. The government had only one receiving home, colloquially known as 'the Depot', which was supposed to provide temporary accommodation for children awaiting another placement.⁶⁷

Part of Wardell's job with the Children's Welfare Department was to assess the teenage girls at the Depot, but she discovered that her understanding of the nature of the work she was to perform clashed with the hierarchical bureaucratic operation of the department. Wardell saw herself as having an independent professional relationship with the girls and believed that she was in the best position to determine fair and productive courses of action for each of them. By contrast, the Depot's medical superintendent saw himself as having ultimate control over all of the institution's inmates and he resented Wardell's intrusion. In mid-1952, when the department's secretary, E.J. Pittard, was called upon to determine the extent of each party's authority, he sided with the superintendent, writing that Miss Wardell should be cautioned against making arrangements with the girls 'without the knowledge and approval of the Department'.⁶⁸

Wardell was unwilling to take a backward step and, in October 1952, she protested to the secretary about the conditions in the Depot's girls' reformatory section. She described physical deprivation and even violence being inflicted upon the girls in an attempt to curb defiance and added that 'the whole thinking behind the conditions permitted does not bear any relation to present day needs and belongs to an era of at least half a century ago'.⁶⁹ She concluded that much of this was a consequence of the actions of well-intentioned but unenlightened staff, but also directly condemned both Pittard and the medical superintendent 'in no uncertain terms' for refusing her advice and assistance.⁷⁰ Although she wrote that she regretted the necessity of submitting her 'forthright statement of the situation' and insisted that it was not 'written in any spirit of self esteem' but purely because she was 'very worried', her recommendations advanced her capacity as a trained social worker to rectify the situation. She wrote:

I am the only person in the Children's Welfare Department who by training and experience can speak with authority on these matters and I would be failing in my duty if I stand by and do nothing. It is specialised work and should be recognised as such ... I am beginning to wonder why I was appointed—certainly my qualifications and experience are not being used or recognised.⁷¹

This letter went so far as to claim that the extant circumstances would never have eventuated had her advice been heeded earlier and emphasised the refusal of the superintendent to allow Wardell to help train the institution's staff.⁷²

Like other trained social workers entering welfare agencies whose staff had learned 'on the job', Wardell discovered great resistance to her attempts to alter practices and fall into line with contemporary social work ideology, particularly when this challenged the established authority of a particular institution or agency.⁷³ As she pursued her protests about the conditions within the Depot's girls' reformatory, it became clear that Pittard's attitude stemmed in large part from a reluctance to side with a woman over a man. While in other child welfare matters he was quite progressive and interested in using modern ideas to influence policy, he chastised Wardell's persistent criticism of the Depot's operation, writing that it was 'high time Miss Wardell appreciated' that he, 'as Secretary of the Department', preferred 'to be guided in such matters by the views of the Medical Superintendent, rather than those of a Social Worker'.⁷⁴ Wardell also encountered explicit gender inequity within the department. In September 1952, a man holding the same position as Wardell was granted a cost of living salary increase yet Wardell was not. The

following January, she appealed to Pittard but the final decision was that her salary would not be raised.⁷⁵ Despite the low status the department accorded social work and the difficulty Wardell had in effecting change, she continued to pursue her goal of modifying Depot practices until May 1953, when her work with the department ended, her position not being renewed.⁷⁶

For the rest of the 1950s, Wardell turned her attention to the project of expanding support and professional development for Catholic social workers in Victoria. She planned a trip to the United States to study development in the field of juvenile delinquency and to visit a collection of Catholic welfare organisations. Father Eric Perkins, director of the Catholic Social Service Bureau, wrote a letter of introduction for Wardell explaining that, since there were no Catholic social work schools in Australia, there was 'a great need' for 'access to books and pamphlets giving the Catholic approach to various problems associated with Social Work'.⁷⁷ Catholic charitable services in the United States had been negotiating the tensions between professional social work, voluntary charity and the authority of the Religious within the church since the late 19th century, and Catholic welfare workers had established a national peak body in the 1920s. Evidently aware that American organisations had made significant progress in negotiating these tensions, Father Perkins added that he had asked Miss Wardell to return with information about the 'knowledge and experience gained by the best Catholic Social Workers in the United States'.⁷⁸ Judging by the pamphlets and bibliographies contained within Wardell's papers, she was successful in establishing international connections that continued to facilitate the exchange of information between Catholic social workers in the two nations for many years to follow.

After her voyage to the United States, Wardell returned home and made some definite steps towards extending professional support for Catholic social workers in Melbourne. She enquired with the Catholic Social Workers Association, which aimed to 'study, in common, and in the light of Catholic principles, the doctrinal, scientific and practical questions connected with Social Service', about the possibility of founding a Victorian branch.⁷⁹ The response was one of great enthusiasm.⁸⁰ Wardell and Father Perkins worked together to establish a Victorian group, which met regularly to discuss issues of relevance to Catholic social workers from religious, professional and psychological perspectives. Wardell's notes on one of the group's early topics of discussion, homosexuality, provide an example of the way in which they approached the task of combining professional and religious thought. They read:

Homosexual ... [a]fraid abnormal and a freak—need sympathy but must not give in to tendency. There is a separate problem, moral and psychological. Marriage [is] no solution. Much neurotic anxiety could be removed or reduced by removing sin but [this is] not a final solution. There is a danger in removing sense of sin. All that is immoral is not subject for penal action.⁸¹

These ideas reflect those of the broader society of the 1950s, which understood homosexuality as a ‘problem’, and also the growing psychological and psychiatric opinion that there could be a ‘cure’.⁸² In these respects, there is not necessarily anything particularly Catholic about this view. However, Wardell’s note signals the notion that religious morals, here the concept of sin, should be part of a Catholic social worker’s tool-kit, and that they could be employed with therapeutic effect.

The members of this Victorian branch of the Catholic Social Workers Association heard from priests and psychiatrists and discussed literature as they explored the Catholic approach to topics that included professional confidentiality, Freud, punishment and justice, and marriage guidance. The group was informed by a relatively conservative Catholic position concerned with developing an ethical framework for social workers, but seeing the worker’s most important role as helping clients to become better Catholics.⁸³ Wardell’s notes, which cover the period from 1956 through 1960, suggest that this group was not just defining how they were different from other social workers but conceiving of Catholic social service as a whole. They were negotiating the intersection of three competing ideas: the belief that the relief of distress was God’s work; a long-standing Catholic view that one of the most important outcomes of welfare provision was returning people to the church; and a basic principle of therapeutic social casework that identifying and treating psychological issues was the way to help people in the longer term.

As Teresa Wardell approached the end of her career, she devoted more of her time to serving on advisory committees and peak professional organisations, and also held a position as fieldwork administrator in the University of Melbourne’s Department of Social Studies. During the 1960s and 1970s, Wardell accepted a number of leadership roles within social work organisations and Catholic groups, and, although her own Catholicism remained a central part of how she positioned herself professionally, the relationship between her personal faith and her positions on social issues was complex. Her involvement in the 1970s with groups such as the Latin Mass Society positions her in a fairly conservative part of the church, but it would

be wrong to assume that Wardell became less progressive on all social issues as she aged.⁸⁴ For instance, she continued to position herself as an advocate of liberal reform policies in relation to women with criminal convictions, and even opposed the Catholic church's official position by maintaining that obstructing the reunification of adopted children with their biological parents was not in the interests of social justice.⁸⁵ Despite her advancing age, she maintained familiarity with professional literature and stayed in contact with a range of welfare groups until her death in 1984.⁸⁶

Conclusion

Throughout her career, Wardell's Catholicism had a significant impact on the work she chose and on the way she approached it. Gleeson largely positions Teresa Wardell as someone driven by a determination to improve conditions for others, and he understands social work as an avenue that emerged for unmarried women to serve the church outside religious orders—a parallel track.⁸⁷ He cites a note made by Wardell towards the end of her life that explains her move from nursing to social work in words that resonate with the 'calling stories' of prominent 19th-century evangelical Protestant child rescue workers such as Thomas Barnardo and, in the Melbourne context, Selina Sutherland.⁸⁸ Although Wardell's account is not as melodramatic as those aforementioned, her claim to have suddenly realised that social work was something she ought to be doing after seeing an advertisement in the newspaper has a smattering of divine intervention about it.

Nineteenth-century charismatic evangelical philanthropists crafted personas that reinforced the authority of their work by intimating that it was a religious calling and duty, and, from comments made in her later life, Wardell seems to fit comfortably within a similar paradigm.⁸⁹ However, one should be cautious in concluding that Wardell either understood or represented her work as a calling throughout her career. In 1954, when Wardell was interviewed on a New York radio station, she was asked how she came to be a social worker and she replied: 'I was a nurse through the years and I realised the necessity for trained social workers in my home city, so I decided to do the course'.⁹⁰ She explained that she had worked for ten years as the executive secretary at the Catholic Social Service Bureau, but her account of her trip to the United States emphasised her visits with state welfare agencies and her hope to direct what she had learned towards legislative reform. She did not directly mention her contact with Catholic welfare agencies, though they had been a major part of her trip.⁹¹ Evidently, context played a role in how Wardell portrayed her work. In certain settings, it was important for her to emphasise her

professional approach and status, and, in other instances, a religiously driven commitment to reform was more productive. It is also apparent that at least some of her colleagues and employers perceived her as driven by self-promotion.⁹²

Teresa Wardell stands out as a woman who established a long and significant career, and as one who did so at a time when mainstream Australian society did not think of employment as the place where women would create and define themselves. She stridently stood her ground and demanded to be recognised as an equal to her male counterparts. Her attitude towards women and femininity is difficult to categorise, but her willingness to engage in the daily grind of casework with women was at least a positive contribution towards those women she directly assisted. She also displayed initiative in developing a place for trained social workers within Victoria's Catholic social services. In 1953, Father Perkins wrote: 'No one has done more for Catholic Social Work here in Victoria than Miss Wardell', and, with something of an historical perspective available, it now seems that Teresa Wardell is indeed worthy of being considered a leader in the development of Catholic social work in Melbourne.⁹³

¹ Dorothy Scott and Shurlee Swain, *Confronting Cruelty: Historical Perspectives on Child Protection in Australia* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2002), 97–8.

² Robert John Lawrence, *Professional Social Work in Australia* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1965).

³ Elaine Miriam Wilson Martin, 'Gender, Demand and Domain: The Social Work Profession in South Australia 1935–1980' (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 1990).

⁴ In Britain and the United States, the beginnings of professionalisation are generally placed in the last decade of the 19th century, through progress was very slow until the interwar period. See: Kathleen Woodroffe, *From Charity to Social Work in England and the United States* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1962); Jane Lewis, *The Voluntary Sector, the State, and Social Work in Britain: The Charity Organisation Society/Family Welfare Association since 1869* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar Publishing Limited, 1995); Eileen Yeo, *The Contest for Social Science: Relations and Representations of Gender and Class* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1996); John Welshman, 'The Social History of Social Work: The Issue of the "Problem Family"', *British Journal of Social Work* 29, no. 3 (June 1999): 457–76; Linda Gordon, *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence: Boston, 1880–1960* (New York: Viking, 1988); Regina Kunzel, *Fallen Women, Problem Girls: Unmarried Mothers and the Professionalisation of Social Work 1890–1945* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993); Cynthia Bisman, 'Social Work Values: The Moral Core of the Profession', *British Journal of Social Work* 34, no. 1 (January 2004): 109–23. In Canada, the move gained momentum after the end of World War I.

See: Alvin Finkel, *Social Policy and Practice in Canada: A History* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006); Margaret Hillyard Little, ‘“Ontario Mothers” Allowance Case Files as a Site of Contestation’, in *On the Case: Explorations in Social History*, eds Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 227–41. In New Zealand, it was the 1950s before similar debates became prominent, though aspects of professional social work practice, such as the use of the case file, had been adopted by the 1920s. See: Margaret Tennant, *The Fabric of Welfare: Voluntary Organisations, Government and Welfare in New Zealand, 1840–2005* (Wellington: Bridget Williams Books, 2007), 74–83 and 122–92; Bronwyn Dalley, *Family Matters: Child Welfare in Twentieth-Century New Zealand* (Auckland: Auckland University Press in association with the Historical Branch, Department of Internal Affairs, 1998), 142–68.

⁵ In Australia, the classic example is the work by Lawrence, which uses the term ‘Australian social workers’ while referring exclusively to Protestants.

⁶ Jill Barnard and Karen Twigg, *Holding on to Hope: A History of the Founding Agencies of MacKillop Family Services 1854–1997* (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2004); Damian Gleeson, ‘The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare, 1920–1985’ (PhD thesis, University of New South Wales, 2006).

⁷ Damian Gleeson, ‘The Forgotten Wardell: Victorian Welfare Reformer’, *Victorian Historical Journal* 79, no. 1 (2008): 107–21.

⁸ University of Melbourne Archives, ‘Teresa Wardell Collection Guide’, accessed at <http://www.lib.unimelb.edu.au/collections/archives/collections/pdfs/wardell.pdf>.

⁹ School certificates and First Holy Communion Certificates, Series 1/1 (hereafter 1/1), Accession Number 86/123, Teresa Wardell Collection, University of Melbourne Archives (hereafter TWC, UMA).

¹⁰ Nurse’s Certificate, 1/1, TWC, UMA.

¹¹ Reference letters, 1/1, TWC, UMA.

¹² Memoirs of Dame Nellie Melba by Miss Teresa Wardell, transcript of oral history interview, conducted 6 March 1981, 1/1, TWC, UMA.

¹³ Notebook 1981, Series 8, TWC, UMA.

¹⁴ Yeo; Woodroffe; Photograph, ‘Teresa Wardell with Mr & Mrs Olding and Miss Woods (all of Sydney)’, Fifth Australian National Pilgrimage 1962, 1/1, TWC, UMA.

¹⁵ Shurlee Swain, ‘Smith, Stanley Greig (1884–1970)’, *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, accessed at <http://adbonline.anu.edu.au/biogs/A160328b.htm>.

¹⁶ For a discussion of the influence of professionalisation on welfare case records generally, see: Franca Iacovetta and Wendy Mitchinson, ‘Introduction’, in Iacovetta and Mitchinson (eds), 3–11. For descriptions of changes in Victoria specifically, see: Nell Musgrove, ‘“The Scars Remain”: Children, their Families and Institutional “Care” in Victoria 1864–1954’ (PhD thesis, University of Melbourne, 2009), 10–17; Barnard and Twigg, 106–08.

¹⁷ For a full chronology of the development of social work education at the University Melbourne, see: ‘Melbourne School of Health Sciences, Social Work: About Us’, accessed at http://www.socialwork.unimelb.edu.au/about_us.

¹⁸ Lawrence, 6–7.

- ¹⁹ For an historical examination of the influence of these principles on the development of social work education, see: Katherine A. Kendall, *Social Work Education: Its Origins in Europe* (Alexandria, VA: Council on Social Work Education, 2000). For their operation in Melbourne's Charity Organisation Society, see: Richard Kennedy, *Charity Warfare: The Charity Organisation Society in Colonial Melbourne* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1985), esp. 14–15.
- ²⁰ John Murphy, 'Suffering, Vice, and Justice: Religious Imaginaries and Welfare Agencies in Post-War Melbourne', *Journal of Religious History* 31, no. 3 (2007): 288.
- ²¹ Anne O'Brien, *Poverty's Prison: The Poor in New South Wales 1880–1918* (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1988), 190.
- ²² Mark Peel, 'Charity Casework and the Dramas of Class in Melbourne, 1920–1940: "Feeling Your Position"', *History Australia* 3, no. 3 (2005): 83.1–83.15; Nell Musgrove, "'Filthy' Homes and 'Fast' Women: Welfare Agencies' Moral Surveillance in Post-Second World War Melbourne", *Journal of Australian Studies* 27, no. 80 (2003): 111–19; Scott and Swain, 82–4.
- ²³ O'Brien, 192–3; Murphy, 288.
- ²⁴ O'Brien, 192–3.
- ²⁵ Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), 93; Gleeson, 'The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare', 86.
- ²⁶ Oates, 89–94.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 90–1.
- ²⁸ Gleeson, 'The Forgotten Wardell', 111.
- ²⁹ Gleeson, 'The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare', 208.
- ³⁰ Teresa Wardell Diploma in Social Studies, 1/1, TWC, UMA.
- ³¹ Gleeson, 'The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare', esp. 208–17; Gleeson, 'The Forgotten Wardell', 109.
- ³² Gleeson, 'The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare', 206–11.
- ³³ Wardell left the Catholic Social Services Bureau on good terms, but she had been exhausted both by the volume of work required of her and the constant battle to be given the resources she needed to operate as she saw necessary. *Ibid.*, 213–17.
- ³⁴ Peter Kallaway, 'Education, Health and Social Welfare in the Late Colonial Context: The International Missionary Council and Educational Transition in the Interwar Years with Specific Reference to Colonial Africa', *History of Education* 38, no. 2 (2009): 217–46; Rebecca Gill, "'The Rational Administration of Compassion': The Origins of British Relief in War", *Le Mouvement Social*, no. 227 (2009): 9–26.
- ³⁵ Canon John Nurser, 'The "Ecumenical Movement" Churches, "Global Order", and Human Rights: 1938–1948', *Human Rights Quarterly* 25, no. 4 (2003): 841–81; Ruth Compton Brouwer, 'When Missions Became Development: Ironies of "NGOization" in Mainstream Canadian Churches in the 1960s', *Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (2010): 661–93.
- ³⁶ Quotation from Typescript Article 1, written by Teresa Wardell while in China, 2/7, TWC, UMA. See also: Teresa Wardell Diary 1–8, 2/1, TWC, UMA. For another scholar who reaches the same conclusion from his reading of Wardell's diary, see:

Lachlan Strahan, *Australia's China: Changing Perceptions from the 1930s to the 1990s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39–40.

³⁷ Teresa Wardell Diary 1–8, 2/1, TWC, UMA.

³⁸ Emma Wild-Wood, 'The Making of an Africa Missionary Hero in the English Biographies of Apolo Kivebulaya (1923–1936)', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 40, no. 3 (2010): 273–306; David Killingray, 'The Black Atlantic Missionary Movement and Africa, 1780s – 1920s', *Journal of Religion in Africa* 33, no. 1 (2003): 3–31.

³⁹ Teresa Wardell Diary 1, 2/1, TWC, UMA.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Sidonie Smith, 'The Other Woman and the Racial Politics of Gender: Isak Dinesen and Beryl Markham in Kenya', in *De-Colonizing the Subject: The Politics of Gender in Women's Autobiography*, eds Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992), 415.

⁴² Alison Mackinnon, *Love and Freedom: Professional Women and the Reshaping of Personal Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 117–49.

⁴³ Correspondence, 14/4, TWC, UMA.

⁴⁴ 'Australian Women's Register: St Joan's International Alliance', accessed at <http://pandora.nla.gov.au/pan/59722/20060616-0000/www.womenaustralia.info/biogs/AWE0925b.html>.

⁴⁵ Scrapbook, 14/14, TWC, UMA.

⁴⁶ Typescript Article 2, written by Teresa Wardell while in China, 2/7, TWC, UMA.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; Typescript Article 1, written by Teresa Wardell while in China, 2/7, TWC, UMA.

⁴⁸ For works examining the history of feminism in Australia, see: Gisela Kaplan, *The Meagre Harvest: The Australian Women's Movement 1950s – 1990s* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1996); Marilyn Lake, *Getting Equal: The History of Australian Feminism* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1999).

⁴⁹ Typescript Article 2, written by Teresa Wardell while in China, 2/7, TWC, UMA.

⁵⁰ From the late 19th century in Australia, there was an increasing acceptance of the idea that women should be educated for white-collar work, but professional women rarely remained in employment after marriage. Thus it was typical for long-serving social workers, both Protestant and Catholic, to remain unmarried, but it is worth noting that the attrition rate due to marriage was higher amongst Protestants than Catholics. See: Anne O'Brien, *God's Willing Workers: Women and Religion in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005), 215–17; Gleeson, 'The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare'; Martin, 'Gender, Demand and Domain'.

⁵¹ Typescript Article 2, written by Teresa Wardell while in China, 2/7, TWC, UMA.

⁵² Handwritten lecture notes, series 8, TWC, UMA.

⁵³ Teresa Wardell Diary 1, 2/1, TWC, UMA.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Wardell uses the phrase 'we Britishers' to describe herself—see: Teresa Wardell Diary 1–8, 2/1, TWC, UMA. On cultural/racial blindness of mid–20th century Australian feminism, see: Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White*

Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism (Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 2000), esp. 94–125.

⁵⁶ Typescript Article 2, written by Teresa Wardell while in China, 2/7, TWC, UMA.

⁵⁷ Jessica R. Pliley, 'Claims to Protection: The Rise and Fall of Feminist Abolitionism in the League of Nations' Committee on the Traffic in Women and Children, 1919–1936', *Journal of Women's History* 22, no. 4 (2010): 90–113.

⁵⁸ Wardell Diary 1-8, 2/1, TWC, UMA; Exercise book of notes made in Manila 1947–8, 3/4, TWC, UMA.

⁵⁹ Strahan; Letter from Chinese National Relief and Recovery Administration Regional Director, 8 March 1947, 2/4, TWC, UMA.

⁶⁰ Case records and case notes, 3/2 and 3/4, TWC, UMA.

⁶¹ For the classic text expounding this position, see: Mary Richmond, *Social Diagnosis*, 1945 ed. (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1917).

⁶² Series 14, TWC, UMA; 'Teresa Wardell Collection Guide'.

⁶³ Gleeson, 'The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare', 194.

⁶⁴ Series 4 and 8, TWC, UMA.

⁶⁵ *Mental Hygiene Branch, Department of Health Annual Report 1949–1960* (Melbourne: Government Printer).

⁶⁶ Musgrove, "'Filthy' Homes and 'Fast' Women", 111–19.

⁶⁷ For a more complete description of Victoria's child welfare structures, see: Musgrove, "'The Scars Remain'", 53–81.

⁶⁸ Correspondence from Pittard, 4/2, TWC, UMA.

⁶⁹ Letter to Pittard, 4/2, TWC, UMA.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ For a similar clash in another agency, see Scott and Swain.

⁷⁴ On Pittard, see: Donella Jaggs, *Neglected and Criminal: Foundations of Child Welfare Legislation in Victoria* (Melbourne: Phillip Institute of Technology, 1986); Letter from Pittard to the Medical Superintendent Receiving Depot, 4/2, TWC, UMA.

⁷⁵ Letter from Wardell to Pittard regarding salary, 4/2, TWC, UMA.

⁷⁶ Letter from Pittard to Dr Tewsley, 4/2, TWC, UMA.

⁷⁷ Letter of introduction, 1/1, TWC, UMA.

⁷⁸ Ibid. On debates between key players in Catholic social services, see: Oates, 89–94; M. Christine Anderson, 'Catholic Nuns and the Invention of Social Work: The Sisters of the Santa Maria Institute of Cincinnati, Ohio, 1897 through the 1920s', *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 1 (2000): 60–88; Daniel J. Walkowitz, 'The Making of a Feminine Professional Identity: Social Workers in the 1920s', *American Historical Review* 95, no. 4 (1990): 1051–75.

⁷⁹ The Catholic Social Workers Association Constitution, 6/2, TWC, UMA.

⁸⁰ Correspondence, 6/2, TWC, UMA.

⁸¹ Catholic Social Workers Guild handwritten notes, 6/2, TWC, UMA.

⁸² Joy Damousi, *Freud in the Antipodes: A Cultural History of Psychoanalysis in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2005).

⁸³ Catholic Social Workers Guild handwritten notes, 6/2, TWC, UMA.

⁸⁴ Series 7, TWC, UMA.

⁸⁵ Series 8 and 11, TWC, UMA.

⁸⁶ This chronology based on TWC, UMA. Also see: Gleeson, 'The Forgotten Wardell', 107–21.

⁸⁷ Gleeson, 'The Professionalisation of Australian Catholic Social Welfare', 139.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 208. For an account of Selina Sutherland's 'calling story', see J.C. Jessop, *Selina M. Sutherland: Her Life Story and Work*, 2nd ed. (Melbourne: Sutherland Homes for Children, 1967).

⁸⁹ Shurlee Swain and Margot Hillel, *Child, Nation, Race and Empire: 1850–1915* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), chapter 2.

⁹⁰ Radio interview, New York, 1954, 1/1, TWC, UMA.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Letter from Pittard to Dr Tewsley, 4/2, TWC, UMA.

⁹³ Letter of introduction, 1/1, TWC, UMA.