

# ON THE ROAD

Journal of the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand

No. 46, August 2010

# Election Special



# Contents

## OTR 46, August 2010

**From the Editor** ..... 2

**The View From Ephesians 4**  
Mark and Mary Hurst..... 3

**President's Report**  
Doug Sewell..... 4

## The Federal Election

**Vox Populi** ..... 5

**Politics Beyond the Parties**  
Doug Hynd..... 7

**Australia's Anabaptist Politician**  
An interview with Jim Longley..... 10

**Why I Don't Vote**  
Simon Moyle ..... 12

**Greenish**  
Nathan Hobby ..... 14

**My Life as a Christian Anarchist**  
Joshua Hobby ..... 16

**Living in the Resurrection**  
Doug Hynd..... 18

## General Articles

**The Global Anabaptist Wiki**  
Jacob Swartzentruber ..... 21

**Violence and Non-violence**  
John Buckley ..... 22

**On The Road Submissions** ..... 26

**Contributor profiles**..... 26

## From The Editor

Nathan Hobby



Our readers' poll in this issue suggests we are a rather homogenous group when it comes to voting intention. But if you took too much notice of that, you'd be on the wrong track. This issue celebrates the diversity of Anabaptist political responses to the 2010 Australian Federal Election.

In this issue you'll hear from a former Liberal politician, a non-voter, a Green voter and a Christian anarchist. You'll be encouraged to look for political engagement beyond party politics and live in the light of the resurrection.

It's a good diversity. I find myself reading each of these responses sympathetically, agreeing with much of what is said. There are threads connecting them even as they come to different conclusions. All our writers are writing as disciples with a post-Constantinian mindset. They offer an alternative to the loudest account of faith and politics heard in Australia, New Zealand and the USA: the hope for a 'Christian' nation, and a focus on 'pro-life' issues, narrowly conceived.

Also in this issue, take note of the call to be involved in the Global Anabaptist Wiki (p.21)—I'm always honoured to hear from Mennonites in the USA who see us as part of the family.

Issue 47, produced in time for the 2011 conference in New Zealand, will focus on the legacy of Anabaptist thinker, John Howard Yoder. See the back page for more details on submissions.

# The View From Ephesians 4

**'To Prepare All God's people for the Work of Christian Service'**

Mark and Mary Hurst, AAANZ staffworkers



*God has taken his place in the divine council; in the midst of the gods he holds judgment: "How long will you judge unjustly and show partiality to the wicked?"*

*Give justice to the weak and the orphan; maintain the right of the lowly and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked."*

*- Psalm 82: 1- 4*

*Give the king your justice, O God, and your righteousness to a king's son. May he judge your people with righteousness, and your poor with justice... For he delivers the needy when they call, the poor and those who have no helper. He has pity on the weak and the needy, and saves the lives of the needy. From oppression and violence he redeems their life; and precious is their blood in his sight.*

*- Psalm 72:1-2; 12-14*

God is concerned about the people on the bottom of society – the weak, orphans, widows, and the poor. The Psalms tell us that national leaders should be as interested in these folk. Are they? Are we concerned about the poor?

When Ron Sider spoke recently in Sydney he mentioned that very few ministers preach about the needs of the poor. If our churches are not talking about the needy and acting on their behalf why should we expect national leaders to care?

In recent books, Sider talks about developing a biblical perspective on politics and then judging candidates and political parties by this standard. The Psalms are a good place to begin to see what God expects from leaders.

Much of politics today is driven by the personalities of the candidates. The media likes to play on their flaws. We hear a lot in Australia about Tony and Julia but too little about issues that matter.

Beyond concern for the poor are issues like justice, creation-care, and peace that should guide us in selecting national leaders. These are not new issues for this journal or for people connected to AAANZ but ones we should keep in mind as we vote.

# Advance Australia Fair

## President's Report

Doug Sewell, AAANZ President



Australia heads into the final week of a federal election campaign where the outcome is far from clear, except for one thing. Television, radio, newspapers and letterboxes are filled with a crescendo of nationalistic slogans proffered by both major parties.

What stands out to me is the increase in nationalism that accompanies the election. Each side of politics seeks to out do the other with how much Australia and our comfortable way of life needs to be protected. Whether it be 'a sustainable Australia, a stronger economy, budgets in surplus' or 'end the waste, pay back the debt, stop the big new taxes and stop the boats' the focus is about a narrow-minded national self-interest.

There is an unwillingness to seriously consider Australia's role within a global environment. Our mutual obligations to reverse climate change and tackle the millennium development goals of eradicating extreme poverty have been swept to the side. By moving forward, Advance Australia Fair has come to mean a fair Australia at the expense of fair for all, whether Australian or not.

In what ways, then, can Anabaptists contribute locally to the national election campaign? Walter Wink wrote; 'The gospel is not a message of personal salvation from the world, but a message of a world transfigured, right down to its basic structures.'

Although the 16th century Anabaptists believed in a separation of church and state, this did not mean they withdrew from challenging the injustices of both the state and the church. Michael Sattler, an Anabaptist

leader and martyr of South Germany, said, 'True Christians are those who carry out Christ's doctrine in their lives.' At his heresy trial in 1527, Sattler took a controversial stance and sided with Muslim Turks, then threatening to invade Europe, and urged the churches to relate to them only in Christian love in keeping with the call by Jesus to love. Sattler's defense against those he called 'the so-called Christians' who judged him was not guided by a parochial nationalism. He regarded the kingdom of God's love as not being bound by any borders.

As individuals we can write to our local candidates, especially in the last week of the campaign, reminding them to:

- Uphold Australia's commitment to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals and to increase the quantity and quality of our foreign aid, particularly to address infant mortality. A \$0.20 increase in aid for every \$100 of gross national income could save 240,000 children under the age of five years.
- To stick to our global climate change obligations by implementing a number of methods to reduce emissions. Australia's role is crucial to keeping other nations on target. To not adequately address climate change is to abandon the plight of developing nations. Today, I read again of the immense distress of millions of Pakistanis facing their worst floods in living memory.
- To welcome refugees with the biblical call for compassion and hospitality. The number of boat people arriving in Australia is miniscule, yet many treat them out of proportion as a ubiquitous faceless invasion, whereas God sees each, as we should too, as a desperate person in need of a home.

The 'Fair' in our national song probably refers to the beauty of Australia. We should utilize the ambiguity of English and advocate for the word to instead mean seeing Australia as a place that encourages fairness of mind, fairness in compassion and fairness for all.

# Vox Populi

*The Voice of the People on the Australian Federal Election*



## 1. As a disciple of Jesus, do you any comments about the federal election?

I pray that wisdom guides our leaders, that they are compassionate toward everyone, especially those without a voice. I pray that we the people show them our desire for that, by being wise and compassionate ourselves.

It's sad that the candidate identifying as a Christian is in favour of 'turning the boats back'. I guess it would be even worse from the point of view of witness for Christ if the atheist was more compassionate. But both the realistic options are making a point of their lack of compassion is a sad place to be as a country.

What I find troubling about this election is that both sides of the mainstream are focused upon winning the support of the marginals and swinging voters—largely those that do not have a view on anything, motivated by the most trivial and passing of concerns. Because politics is now decided by these most non-aligned and most superficial, democracy in this country is little more than a facile popularity contest between celebrities, and between those that do not have anything more than a sound bite to say.

How can a society have integrity if this is what determines its government?

Most concerned about lack of action on climate change and the use of refugees as election fodder. Any decision of mine on voting will be to keep the Coalition out of power.

It's a shame poverty is not a sexy issue. I would prefer politicians to keep issues of personal faith a private matter.

As a Christian I'm disappointed with how both major parties are responding to the plight of the poor and vulnerable.

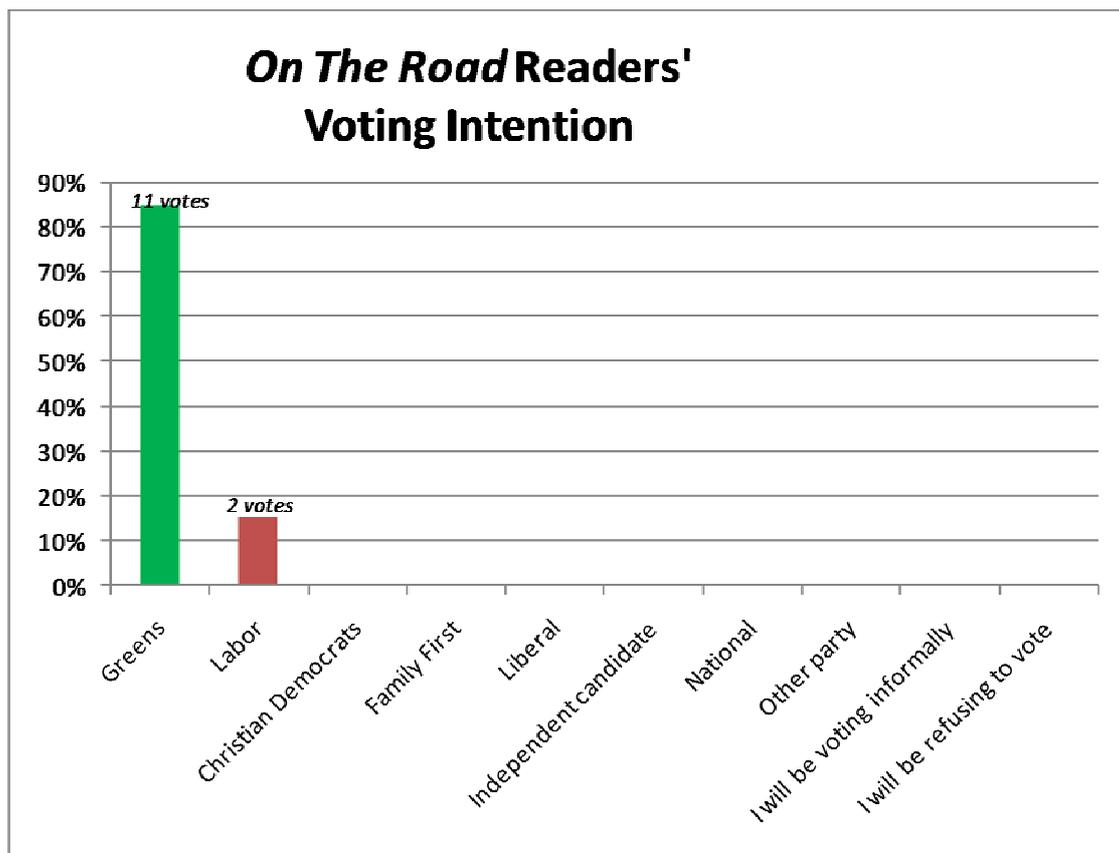
- Matt Stone

There is a need for followers of Jesus to try and give a voice to those who don't have leverage in our system, creation, the homeless, the first peoples of this country, the mentally ill, the poor across the world. Also a need to not give too much importance to politicians, they are fallible, broken human beings like us. what they do is important - we should view them as people like plumbers, necessary but not to be overly deferred to.

- Doug Hynd

## 2. Which party do you intend to vote for at the Australian federal election?

The poll question was open to all subscribers of *On The Road*, but only thirteen voted, so it is not a large sample. However, it certainly shows a clear trend. If it was up to OTR readers, Australia would have its first Green government and Bob Brown would be prime minister.



### Comments

'But I am open to swinging.'

'I always vote with the view that I am making a small contribution to a debate and that the party I vote for is one with what I assess to be the least worst package of policies and attitudes, all things considered.'

'I am not sure I'll vote for the Greens, because I don't yet know my other candidates. I cannot vote for my Liberal candidate with a clear conscience.'

# Politics beyond the parties

## Micah Challenge and Voices for Justice

By Doug Hynd



Engagement in the political process is not solely a matter of how you vote in an election, or whether you join a political party. There are ways of seeking ‘the peace of the city’ that are outside the limits of what we focus on in our public debate—electoral politics and the party system. Debate by Christians about political involvement which limits the debate to the issue of which party is more ‘Christian’ is far too limiting.

It lead to a focus on partisan politics as the only form of politics that matters and creates a debate conducted within a framework that emphasises the priority of the state over the undergirding claims of our participation as Christians in the *ekklesia* as the people of God, that is to say, the politics of Jesus.

It also makes some big assumptions about the politics and democracy that Christians should challenge. Substantive discussion of what Australians actually understand by, and value about the democratic process has tended to affirm that Australian democracy is an achievement and is a value in a tone which suggests that it has a quasi-sacred status.

The contrast between this general affirmation and the public debate about the actual practice of politics, surely a central element in the democratic process could hardly be more striking. Perusal of the daily papers on the subject of politics and the shortcomings of our politicians reveals a bottomless well of cynicism. We generally do not trust or

respect politicians and are extremely sceptical about the working of our political institutions. The mirror image of this cynicism and disillusionment is curiously a utopian faith that if we could get the right people into politics all would be well, a faith which is evidenced by the recurring surges of populism and election of independents.

The gap between these elements of public debate exposes a curious fault line in our political culture which I think is worth reflecting on. And be prepared to vigorously challenge.

I want to assert that Christians have little stake in affirming democracy as an unquestioned value or static achievement in itself—particularly if it is simply identified with the right to vote and choose between a variety of political parties. The issue for Christians is not about an uncritical endorsement of the specific mechanisms and processes associated with democracy.

What Christians should care about is whether democracy is actually achieving a degree of openness and pluralism in Australian society and whether it provides us with means to limit if not disperse the accumulation of political, cultural and social power by government, business or other agencies. That is to say, democracy is a process which is the subject of a continuing struggle and can never be a final achievement.

Democracy and its processes are important for Christians, then, in so far as they provide space for the church to be the church. Curiously enough, the church can contribute to the maintenance of openness in society by living up to its calling as a community committed to living out the peace and reconciliation of God and acting as a challenge or irritant to the prevailing social structure.

I was reminded of the importance of this by Jacques Ellul the French social critic and theologian who argued that the role for the church in society had to do with keeping things open, preventing a society from closing in upon itself. The church ‘... maintains among the powers a disequilibrium but a creative disequilibrium.’

An example of this task of being a disturbing challenging force can be found in the role played by the Irish Catholic community in the development of Australian democracy. It was the fact of the expression of their identity through the church and a

variety of other social organisations which helped ensure the opening up of Australia to a degree of social and religious pluralism. The debates occasioned by the social reality of the Irish community that was in tension with the prevailing ethos of the Protestant ascendancy powerfully shaped the form of democracy that we have inherited.

Christians in Australia have no stake in supporting unthinking affirmations of democracy which carry encoded in them a message that our current social arrangements are beyond criticism. There are always forces at work which are seeking to close down the challenges to the injustice in our society. Nor do Christians have the need to resort to a cynicism as though we are surprised at the self

interest and self seeking that manifests itself in the actual political process.

Our fundamental stories in the Scriptures carry in them the assumption that we live in a fallen and violent world. We have no reason to be surprised or disillusioned when these manifest themselves in the struggle for social power even within the relative openness of the democratic process.

What we need to do is to continue the experiment of building a community which is committed to reconciliation, shedding the recurrent temptation to violence in our relationships. Such communities are called to open up our

imagination to envisage new ways of relating and dealing with our differences. Such communities can play a vital role in helping keeping the democratic process democratic.

My line of argument suggests engagement which attempts to bring to the attention of the government and political parties issues that they would prefer to ignore. We need to do this in a polite and well-informed but nagging way.

My friend Simon Moyle and others in groups with a calling to challenge the role of the military in our society provide one example of a faith-empowered politics that challenges the assumptions as to what should be on the political agenda. What they are doing demands an article in its own right. That will have to wait for another day.

Let me briefly draw to your attention one political intervention that I have been engaged in that works as a movement outside the party system, seeking to influence the public agenda. Voices for Justice has

What we need  
to do is to  
continue the  
experiment of  
building a  
community  
which is  
committed to  
reconciliation

been a program run by Micah Challenge over the past five years to bring people from churches and communities to Canberra to lobby politicians to give greater priority to the needs of the global poor.

This lobbying is supported by an ongoing program of community-based action by church groups along with study, worship and community education. This year over 300 people spent two days in worship, pray and learning about lobbying before going on to spend two days in Parliament House visiting over 130 Parliamentarians.

Micah Challenge is a global movement of Christian agencies, churches, groups and individuals which aims to deepen people's engagement with the poor and to help reduce poverty as an integral part of our Christian faith. Micah Challenge takes its name from Micah 6:8, 'What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?'

#### **Micah Challenge has two main purposes:**

**1. To prayerfully encourage Christians to walk humbly with God and seek His heart for people in poverty.** Micah Challenge firstly aims to deepen the commitment of Christians to the idea of an integrated gospel of good news and to proclaim and demonstrate the love of Jesus to a world in need.

**2. Outward Action: to inspire and equip Christians to do justice and love kindness by being prophetic voices to our government and community on behalf of the poor and oppressed.**

Micah Challenge aims to be a prophetic voice calling upon and influencing leaders around the world to defend the rights of the poor and oppressed (Ps 82). Micah Challenge supporters aim to remind decision makers of their promise to achieve the

Millennium Development Goals on global poverty by 2015. Micah Challenge provides a gathering point and a platform where all Christians can raise their voices together to effect real change in national and international policy.

Micah Challenge Australia gives local expression to the international movement. It is a coalition campaign, made up of all the major Christian development agencies as well as mission agencies, churches and individuals.

Micah Challenge is about building communities of faith and action that engages in politics. Along with its companion campaign Make Poverty History, it has helped shift the agenda of the debate in Australia that has led to substantial increases in Australia's overseas aid and more effective targeting of it. There is now a bi-partisan commitment to 0.5% of Australia's Gross National Income to go to overseas aid by 2015. More needs to be done to shift the level of aid to 0.7% but political engagement by Christians is making a difference.

Amanda Jackson has provided a brief account of the initiative in "Voices For Justice" pp.127-132 in *Another Way to Love* edited by Tim Costello and Rod Yule (Acorn Press, 2009) For details go to [www.micahchallenge.org.au](http://www.micahchallenge.org.au).

# Australia's Anabaptist politician: An Interview with Jim Longley

*AAANZ member Jim Longley was a Liberal member of the NSW parliament from 1986-1996 and served as Minister for Community Services, Aboriginal Affairs and Ageing from 1992-1995. He presently works for the Commonwealth Bank, while also continuing an MA through the Associated Mennonite Biblical Seminary (Indiana, USA).*

*I thought it would be an invaluable contribution this issue on the federal election to hear Jim's perspective on life from the inside of politics, so here are some questions I put to Jim and his responses.*

*- Editor*

## **1. What are some of the challenges party politics presents a disciple, especially one coming from an Anabaptist perspective?**

As a participant in the political process the major challenge is as in all other occupations, namely to be faithful. Although the tendency is to look for the differences either between political parties or between political roles and non-political, the big differences are seen in the ongoing daily actions entailed in every job: integrity in the work you are doing and the relationships that you have with colleagues.

Information asymmetry especially in a media-dominated society means that we know far more about failures of politicians than in the population at large – including ourselves! Personal honesty and humility is a good place to start for all of us.

The issues dividing political parties will change over time, and so being aware of what are the key policy areas, and especially identifying as policy those issues which are being neglected and developing responses which are not just ideologically satisfying (i.e. satisfy your political party) but which lead to real improvement is vital. It is important to avoid superficial responses.

The next great challenge is to build consensus. Although most legislation goes through Parliament with the support of both sides, much policy is implemented by direct government action, and where there is bi-partisan support this is much more likely to happen, and in shorter timeframes. Building consensus through non-coercive genuine

conversation is very close to the heart of the Anabaptist understanding and both a major challenge and opportunity for disciples of Jesus.

## **2. How has your study of the Anabaptist tradition affected your political convictions?**

Much of the impact has actually been around process. So as above for instance a much higher priority needs to be placed on conversation (aka consultation), both in terms of genuineness and inclusiveness. Ensuring structural or systemic issues for people who are poor or have disabilities or suffering violence – those who are voiceless or marginalised - are identified and overcome, while still working to provide immediate help. We should always be re-engaging with the story of Jesus to look with new eyes at existing and developing problems.

Developing policy in areas that could benefit from Anabaptist distinctives such as reconciliation and peace-making is a high priority e.g. in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues, international relations and development aid, reducing recidivism, among many others.

## **3. What's the best the church can hope for in a government?**

As church, we should recognize more fully the benefits of being in a democracy, and both participate more and help the institution function more effectively, while still recognizing that the church community should be the model of society toward which we encourage others. The best that can therefore be hoped for is the best that the church community is! This is a daunting prospect, but is both exciting and grounding: recognizing from a Kingdom perspective that all are profoundly equal regardless of status, position, or wealth, and have a right to be heard and to receive compassionate treatment, translating shalom/justice into action.

We need to recognize the limits of democracy however, and be prepared to live as an example to the wider community.

The challenge accordingly is a double edged sword:

what is our own Jesus-community actually like? And how fast and what is the most Jesus-like way to encourage the wider community including the government to move in that direction? One of the core Anabaptist distinctives is exactly this understanding of a realized eschatology.

There is also a real question of reciprocity, viz. what is the best that a person in politics (Parliament or an adviser) can expect of the church? Honesty and integrity when reading the newspaper and social media and watching TV, in forming our opinions and formulating criticisms, deserves more genuine focus than it usually receives. It is all too easy to go along with the widespread unthinking cynicism that “all politicians are the same”. This is neither Scriptural nor accurate, and represents a counter-cultural challenge for all Christians.

#### **4. Do you have any comments on the federal election, observing it as both a former politician and an Anabaptist?**

This is arguably the most pragmatic election for a

considerable time. There appear to be few individual policy issues which present a clear divide between the parties in the early stages of the campaign. It says a lot about the importance Australians (including many Christians) place on government that the timing of the Leaders' debate was changed to fit in with Master Chef. Many more people will accordingly tend to revert to their usual voting style, rather than do the harder work of looking at those policy areas which they prioritise, and see which party is believably offering proposals closer to what they consider best, including the ability to implement their proposals.

From an Anabaptist perspective, this makes the discussions more difficult because less clear cut. But it does provide the opportunity to say that the needs of others and how they are being heard and catered for is more important than local 'pork barrel' projects or other proposals which are designed to cater for either sectional interests or broader but selfish interests. It also raises the importance of the quality of the local candidates who are the actual people standing for election, and the degree to which they will support those policy priorities.

# Why I Don't Vote

By Simon Moyle



'Don't miss out on your chance to have a say in our future. Go to [aec.gov.au](http://aec.gov.au)' Prime Minister Julia Gillard tweeted the day before new voter registrations closed. I messaged her back, 'I do that every day Julia. Voting is 4 chumps.'

This will be the fifth election in a row at which I will not cast a vote. In a country with a compulsory voting system, this may sound akin to blasphemy to many. But primarily it has been reflection on what constitutes faithful Christian discipleship which has led me to this decision. Here's why.

My primary commitment as a disciple of Jesus is to following him. That means a life profoundly shaped by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ; and this often over against a world which wants to sell us a very different story. The world's greedy scarcity is transformed into God's generous abundance, retaliation into forgiveness and mercy, and domination into suffering servanthood. In my experience, our imaginations have been so colonised by the ways of the world that it has become difficult to even imagine any alternative, let alone one that sounds plausible. So the more I discover just how deeply shaped I am by the dominant culture, the more I realise the need for practices which shape me in the

very different ways of Christ.

Refusing to vote is one such practice. It is an assertion that in Christ I am under new governance, one that shifts my allegiance and transforms everything.

It also reflects a new recognition of the nature of power. In reality we all have 'a say in our future', every day, with everything we do and everything we don't. Privileging government as the only means of social change is a concept the gospels call into question. The assumption is that power is concentrated at the top, and the only way to change anything is to change the government or its way of operating.

This, it seems to me, stands in stark contrast to the way of Jesus. One of his early temptations, in fact, captured in the wilderness narrative, is precisely to this kind of top-down political power. Significantly, it is the devil who offers it to him. Jesus refuses.

Instead he consistently chooses the way of embodied politics, eschewing controlling systems for compassionate relationships. Rather than using 'the system' to make changes, he acts as a one man political force within the body politic. His disciples are called to become the embodiment of his politics –

hence the pervasive metaphor of the church as the 'Body of Christ'. 'The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones are called benefactors,' Jesus reminds them, before adding, 'But not so with you. Rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves.' They are to do this because, as Jesus says, 'I am among you as one who serves' (Luke 22:24-30).

It's not that Jesus is biding his time with this method until he can really take over and run the system – rather Jesus reveals that God's nature—and therefore real power—lies in servanthood. This way of suffering servanthood has brought down the powers and principalities of the world, and the church is to demonstrate that here and now.

This stands in such stark contrast to the world's systems of command and control that in order to begin to undo their effects, I need to openly and practically reject them. My refusal to participate in this system is a symbolic gesture of rejection of the way of domination, and a formative gesture which beckons me to further embodiment of the politics of Jesus.

Please understand I don't think it's wrong *per se* for Christians to vote – rather, for me this is an issue of formation not unlike choosing to be shaped by the cycles of the church year rather than the financial or secular year. It's a humble recognition that I am all too susceptible to being seduced by the story of the world, to what it sees as important and valuable, rather than being shaped by the narrative of Jesus

Christ.

It is also not an isolationist or personal pietist ethic – far from advocating separation from the world, this encourages me to engage more deeply with it. As I'm no longer merely asking others to act on my behalf, the responsibility is on me to act. As Wendell Berry has argued in his essay "The Idea of a Local

Economy", a proper concern for the world cannot merely be practiced by government or other proxies. All the crises we face can only be solved if people, individually and in the context of their communities, take responsibility themselves for acting. In doing so we discover that these crises are not of the government's making, they are crises of our own lifestyle and that of our families and local communities.

Of course, it's not an either/or situation – I don't doubt it's possible

to engage both voting and faithful Christian discipleship. I hope one day to feel sufficiently formed in the way of Christ to hold a both/and stance with more confidence. For the moment, I'm using the time I would ordinarily spend trying to weed out the spin from the substance of an election campaign on policy issues I can take direct action on – combating climate change through gardening, opposing war through nonviolent resistance, and caring for the vulnerable through hospitality. That's change I can believe in!

...a proper  
concern for the  
world cannot  
merely be  
practiced by  
government or  
other proxies

# Greenish:

## Why I Don't Think the Greens are an Anti-Christian Party

By Nathan Hobby



On their Facebook profiles, many Christians leave the field for their political views blank. My most theologically astute Facebook friend has 'Jesus is Lord' for both his religious and political views. He's exactly right – our confession that Jesus is Lord needs to take precedence over any denominational/theological loyalty and over any party/ideological loyalty. But it's not an answer that makes much sense to people; if they want to know at all, they want to know who you vote for, which political movement you align yourself with. So despite wanting my political views to be, in practice, 'Jesus is Lord', for the moment the field on my facebook page says 'Greenish'. I'm not a card-carrying Green. I don't agree with everything the Greens say, and I won't uncritically support them. But so far, through eleven years of voting, I've always put their candidates first.

It's not a popular position for a Christian; indeed, for most evangelical, pentecostal and fundamentalist Christians, it's unimaginable. A website called One Vote run out of Perth is urging Christians not to vote for 'anti-Christian parties like the Greens' (2010, section 3). I'm not so much writing this article to convince you to vote for the Greens, but to explore why, as a Christian, I am voting for an 'anti-Christian'

party.

Interestingly, in an article in the Australian on 12 June 2010, columnist Angela Shanahan writes:

...Christians, like most people, have Right sympathies and Left sympathies, and the factors that inform their votes can range beyond those boundaries.

I think she's right about that, although having come of age in the Howard years, I'd like to imagine the Right sympathies in me are confined to my little finger, or somewhere else unimportant. But despite agreeing with her there, the rest of the article challenges my 'greenish' sympathies.

The title of her article gives away her central message—'Christians must boost immunity to Greens virus'. Shanahan describes ethicist (and – I didn't realise this – former Greens candidate) Peter Singer as the 'philosophical godfather of the Australian Greens'. She is warning 'the left-leaning Christian humanitarian brigade' that supporting the Greens means supporting Singer's explicitly anti-Christian philosophy:

The new 'green ethic' according to Singer, directly contradicts the old Christian,

biblically based ethic of man [sic] at the centre of creation.

What is important to Brown and Singer is to establish the green philosophy as an alternative to the traditional Christian view: 'an alternative tradition', a green ethic that is concerned for 'the interests of individual non-human animals'.

The non-human centred view of the world leads the Greens, according to Shanahan, to have too much respect for animals while lacking the respect for the sanctity of human life which presumably Labor and Liberal are meant to demonstrate.

In Singer's account, endorsed by Shanahan, the philosophical basis of both the Liberal and Labor parties is essentially Christian, simply by placing humans at the centre of creation.

They are correct in so far as the Bible's account of the world does place humanity at the centre of creation - as caretakers of creation, we should note. The Greens do not necessarily place humans at the centre of creation, but they do show more concern for being good caretakers of creation than the other parties. But this is only a small part of what a truly Christian ethic might look like anyway. For Anabaptists, a Christian ethic is not the worldview which Western civilisation has been operating under for centuries, now under threat by godless Greens.

A fully Christian ethic can only be embodied in a community of disciples who are following Jesus – a community living the practices John Yoder spells out in *Body Politics*. But some of the themes I realistically hope to see in a Christ-like ethic in parliamentary politics are:

- a concern for the marginalised and downtrodden
- love for enemies and a desire to make peace, not war
- contentment with living simply
- an attempt to speak plainly rather than 'spinning' everything

I see these things most strongly in the Greens. They are the ones speaking out loudest for asylum seekers, the homeless and indigenous people. They are the ones who opposed the Iraq War the most strongly and have a reduction in military expenditure as one of their goals (The Australian Greens 2010). They are the ones rejecting the gospel of eternal economic growth at any cost. And they are the ones who seem least manipulative in their media dealings. They also see climate change as an urgent problem, living up to Kevin Rudd's claim that it is the 'great moral

challenge of our time'. These are all such important policy and ideological issues for me that I'm prepared to overlook my disagreement with Green policy on abortion.

The Greens are also criticised by Christians for their strong stance on secularisation. Anabaptists would have sympathy with a Green critique of Constantinian notions of a 'Christian country'. Does praying the

Lord's Prayer before parliament make parliament more Christian, or weaken the radical nature of the prayer? But what about chaplaincy in schools, which Greens have said should be replaced with counsellors? (Although it doesn't seem to be part of their official policy.) I think chaplains do good work in schools, and I wouldn't be supporting moves to dismantle the program. Yet for Anabaptists there are a lot of questions about church and state in this issue. It is another area where I might be at odds with the Green policy, but still not strongly

enough to turn me away from them.

I find it upsetting that a party which stands firmly against greed, militarism and injustice can be labelled as 'anti-Christian'. I hope that Angela Shanahan's fears come true, and there's a growing body of Christians who succumb to the greens virus. Not completely, but just enough to be 'greenish'.

## References

The Australian Greens 2010, *Peace and Security*, The Greens, viewed 14 August 2010, <<http://greens.org.au/policies/human-rights-democracy/peace-and-security>>.

One Vote 2010, *Please Vote For Someone With Christian Values!*, One Vote, viewed 14 August 2010, <[www.onevote.com.au](http://www.onevote.com.au)>.

Shanahan, A 2010, "Christians Must Boost Immunity to Greens Virus", *The Australian*, 12 June 2010, viewed 14 August 2010, <<http://www.theaustralian.com.au/politics/christians-must-boost-immunity-to-greens-virus/story-e6frgczf-1225878344697>>.

Yoder, J 1992, *Body Politics*, Herald Press, Scottdale.

## Further reading:

Green candidate Jim Reiher's article, 'Who Should a Christian Vote For?' *John Mark Ministries* <<http://jmm.aaa.net.au/articles/18402.htm>>.

Frank Brennan's article, 'Why a Conscientious Christian Could Vote for the Greens' *Eureka Street* <<http://www.eurekastreet.com.au/article.aspx?acid=22755>>

They are the ones rejecting the gospel of eternal economic growth at any cost.

# (A Selected History of...)

## My life as a Christian Anarchist

By Joshua Hobby



I'm a politically disillusioned twenty-seven year old. I think I might have been a politically disillusioned seventeen year old. I remember printing some t-shirts for my graduating class (during exam study prep time) that were underhanded criticisms of the way the system functioned.

I was an anarchist without knowing it.

I didn't love or hate authority, but was critiquing the way power was being used. I reacted to the way the Education Department constructed this way of measuring us all up against each other. We study and work hard to get this magical Tertiary Entrance Rank; we work hard to fit our brains into their boxes. Ranking our value as individuals against one another. It's kinda a clichéd subversion - critiques of ourselves as being trademarked is a well worn path.

But many of my friends bought into it - that this is where life was at. What's important is to study hard to get into uni to get a good job to...

I didn't buy into it then, and I don't now. Sure there must be some measurement, but I wasn't going to be drawn into that path. I didn't understand how Christians reconciled how they were different from society. How is the path actually different from someone who professes faith and someone who does not? With an air of arrogance I decided that God's plan for me was different (I just didn't know what that was). Seeking faithfulness had to look different

from the world around me.

I am a Christian Anarchist because there is no other way for me to be faithful. Anarchism and Christianity share some things at their core:

- a non-acceptance of the way things are
- a belief in participatory democracy; a generous extension of the Priesthood of all believers
- a strong critique of the use of power & of those in power

The times that I am asked to talk about these things - as a committed Christian Anarchist - it's a little hard to know where to start.

Anarchism has a bad name. It most likely conjures images of violence, people smashing windows or crazies with bombs. These images are nothing like what I am talking about.

Many of the people I think of as anarchists do not necessarily use the label 'anarchism'. People like Gandhi who led whole countries to nonviolent revolution. Women like Dorothy Day - even with her strong socialist standing - who started the Catholic Worker; surely as grassroots an organization as one can imagine. Farmers like Wendell Berry who prophesy against our treatment of the environment and call us wake up and see the pain at our distance from the earth.

Perhaps the label anarchism has parallels to the word Christian. I believe both grossly misunderstood and often misrepresented. Both are labels I use, and am in the process of amending (in small ways).

In first year uni I took a unit called Political Ideologies. My Lecturer said that he thought this would be the most important class many of us would take as it helps set our ideas about the world. Our lecturer said that there were few times in history any anarchist group had any type of 'control' over society (this is, of course, because of their general dislike of power). One time was during the Spanish civil war. The second example he gave was the Anabaptists; who during the Reformation rejected the joining of church and state. Their call was to a deeper reliance and faith in God. Their rejection of the way of power and domination over others are powerful examples for us still.

The upcoming Australian election does present issues for anarchists. Australia clearly has a type - one type - of democracy at a government level. Representative democracy - where we go to a place a tick a few boxes

It's hard to be different, but I think it's impossible to be the same and live.

once every few years - is a good and important thing. I think possibly because it's a step toward a society where people have more say in their lives generally, a move from where society has been in the past (where elites and kings ruled) toward one where Christ is Lord.

A more radical reading and understanding of the situation is that we vote all the time. Where we eat and what we buy, how much we buy. Whether we walk or drive or buy local or Californian oranges. We are participating in society and supporting particular people, particular corporations. These mundane choices are really about having a say in what type of world we want to live in. It is this type of power we need to wake up and realise that we own. What if all the

Christians in Australia stopped buying new (non fair-trade) clothes? What if all Australian Christians began to speak out against injustice? What if all Australian Christians gave radically to the poor?

It's hard to be different, but I think it's impossible to be the same and live.

# Living in the Resurrection

## Biblical roots for Christian political engagement

By Doug Hynd



Engagement in politics, broadly understood, is not some optional add-on for those Christians who are interested in that sort of thing. Rather, it grows out of the very core of our commitment to discipleship and is rooted in the call to live in the resurrection.

Resurrection is a way of living - not simply a theological or doctrinal proposition with which we agree and then carry on with our lives as though nothing has happened. Let me put it as provocatively as I can. What we need are not “Bible believing” or even “resurrection believing” Christians” but *Jesus following, resurrection living disciples*.

I have been able to find relatively little reflection and guidance about what a resurrection shaped discipleship looks like. And this is really strange, because the idea is central to the New Testament. Beyond the stories of the resurrection of Jesus in the Gospels, we have Acts and the epistles that are shaped profoundly by the arguments that they contain and the stories they tell on what living out a resurrection shaped faith is all about.

The reason the New Testament writers don't constantly mention that their mission or discipleship is shaped by the resurrection is that it was taken for granted; it didn't need to be constantly spelled out.

### Theological hints about resurrection living

One Christian tradition has given expression to the significance of resurrection living; it comes to us

through a single yet powerful phrase from in the *Schleitheim Confession* in 1527, one of the earliest statements from the radical peace church tradition of the reformation period. Entry into Christian discipleship is for ‘...all those who desire to walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ’.

What a wonderful, hopeful description of the Christian life. Yet walking in the resurrection was no easy matter for the radical Christians of the sixteenth century, with their commitment to make the church independent of the state and their refusal to bear arms. It was not a matter of a spiritual high detached from the hard realities of life. Many of those involved in drawing up the Schleitheim confession were killed within a matter of months.

To walk in the resurrection is to walk in the path of the resurrected crucified Jesus. The one who was resurrected is the same Jesus who healed the sick, who affirmed the value of those cast out from society, who ate with those of dubious reputation, who challenged the religiously comfortable and confronted the Roman Empire with a non-violent witness to God as the true ruler. The Jesus who was resurrected, in whose resurrection we are called to walk, is the Jesus who suffered capital punishment at the hands of the Roman Empire. Walking in the resurrection is to live as those for whom violence and injustice do not have the last word

Let me underpin the significance of Jesus and the resurrection with a quote from Tom Wright in his wonderful little book *Simply Christian* when he says:

If it is the case that Israel's vocation was to be the people through whom God would rescue

his beloved creation; if it is the case that Jesus believed himself as God's messiah to be bearing Israel's vocation in himself; and if it really is true that in going to his death he took upon himself and in some sense exhausted the full weight of the world's evil – then clearly there is a task to be done. ... When Jesus emerged from the tomb, justice, spirituality, relationship and beauty rose with him. Something has happened in and through Jesus as a result of which the world is a different place, a place where heaven and earth have been joined forever. God's future has arrived in the present. (pp.99-100)

The arrival of God's future in the resurrection of Jesus is also picked up in a sermon on the resurrection Tom Wright preached several years ago:

With the resurrection of Jesus, God created a new world and sent Jesus' followers off to announce it to the world. If you go to the resurrection chapters in Luke 24, or in Matthew, or Mark, or John, and say, "What do the evangelists think this stuff means; why are we telling this story?" The answer is not, "Jesus is risen again, therefore, we can go to heaven when we die and be with him." It's interesting they never say that, those resurrection chapters. Rather, they say, "Jesus is risen from the dead. Therefore, God's new creation has begun, and you are commissioned to go off and make it happen." That's the emphasis. And it's a new world of justice and freedom; it's the exodus world, the return-from-exile world, the world where Jesus already reigns as Lord, it's the world with good news for all, especially as in the New Testament, for the poor.

- "The Resurrection: A Sermon" Nov 11, 2001, [www.thefallschurch.org/](http://www.thefallschurch.org/)

Resurrection and living in the resurrection is about working for justice, freedom and God's new creation.

## Scripture passages

In **2 Corinthians 5:16 – 6:10** we have Paul's sustained account of what resurrection living was like in his experience, an account addressed to a community that saw itself as highly spiritual with wonderful, ecstatic experiences. A community that, Paul noted ironically earlier in his correspondence with them, thought that it had already arrived.

As we read this passage we should note that:

- To share in Christ's resurrection is to be

empowered by God to be witnesses to and participants in God's preaching of peace not as some purely inner spirituality but as part of a whole new creation

- To live in a way that is paradoxical in bringing into question the social norms of the time.
- We find here the start of a new creation that is lived out in the midst of confusion and pain, violence and political conflict.

**Philippians 3: 10-11:** 'I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death so as to attain the resurrection.'

Paul starts here with resurrection its power now— which moves to the sharing with Christ in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death so as to share in the resurrection. Paul begins with living the resurrection, so that he can live in the pattern of Jesus' life and death.

In different ways in both these letters Paul is focused on the resurrection but directs our attention to Jesus in his suffering and death. Resurrection is God's yes to the cross.

There is a deep connection between peacemaking and hope.

## Living the resurrection now – what does it look like?

So what does living in the resurrection look like? The danger is that we can end up thinking it is only the extreme moments that put our fingers on this resurrection living. So let me make some suggestions as to what living in the resurrection looks like in the day-to-day life that we currently lead.

The central issue is one of living in the resurrection as the practice of hope. There is a deep connection between peacemaking and hope. We do not have to use violence to make things work out right. Patience, compassion and non-violence—all these are expressions or practices of hope.

The next practice is that of living beyond our means, which in this context is not about "maxing out" on our credit card. Rather it is a practice of living with open hands in both giving and receiving rather than needing to control or force the outcome.

Critically, resurrection living is embodied living. How could resurrection living be a 'spiritual' life detached from the life of the body? This embodied life was expressed by Jesus in the sharing of meals. Jesus is recognised after the resurrection in the breaking of

the bread, a meal shared with bewildered disciples. Resurrection living is about practicing for a new heaven and a new earth now

In his book *Living the Resurrection*, Eugene Peterson observes that we witness to the connectedness and preciousness of all life and engage in the practice of resurrection

... by gathering in congregations and regular worship before our life-giving God and our death-defeating Christ and our life-abounding Holy Spirit. We do it by reading, pondering, teaching, and preaching the Word of Life as it is revealed in our Scriptures. We do it by baptizing men, women, and children in the name of the Trinity, nurturing them into a resurrection life. We do it by eating the life of Jesus in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. We do it by visiting prisoners, feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, welcoming the stranger, healing the sick, working for justice, loving our enemies, raising our children, doing our everyday work to the glory of God.

Resurrection living is about living out God's coming kingdom now, practicing living the new creation now, wherever there are signs of brokenness, destruction and injustice trying to find practical ways to address them. This involves:

- Seeking the justice that God desires now.
- Living with the freedom that we are not controlled finally by the state or the powers of violence to be witnesses to God's coming kingdom of peace.

This is an approach to life that is profoundly political though it takes us well beyond the limited political options presented by the advertising blitz that we will endure till 21 August. Our engagement with electoral politics as Christians in the radical tradition should always be shaped by the wider, deeper and more compassionate vision that opens up for us in the resurrection.

As Simon Barrow puts it in a wonderful account of what the politics of Easter brings us through the resurrection:

The 'kingdom' of which Jesus speaks is an entirely new order of relationships grounded in mutual forgiveness, open table fellowship, the sharing of wealth, peaceable politics, healing for the sick, welcome for the stranger, and good news for the poor.

## Resources and References

*Simply Christian* by Tom Wright (SPCK, 2006)

*Resurrection, Discipleship, Justice* by Thorwald Lorenzen (Smyth & Helwys, 2003)

*Systematic Theology: Ethics* by James Wm. McClendon Jr (Abingdon Press, 1986) Chapter 9 "Resurrection Ethics"

"For they were Afraid" Sermon by Jim Barr (Easter 2006) <http://www.canbap.org/sermons/2006/sermon-20060416.html>

"Resurrection: The Ultimate Answer to Empire" Sermon by Rick Derksen (2003) <http://peace.mennolink.org/articles/rickderksen.html>

"Threatened with Resurrection" by Simon Barrow (Ekklesia, April 29, 2006) [http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/content/barrow/article\\_060429resuur.shtml](http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/content/barrow/article_060429resuur.shtml)

"How Easter Brings Regime change" by Simon Barrow (Ekklesia, April 14, 2006) [http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/content/barrow/article\\_060414easter.shtml](http://www.ekkleisia.co.uk/content/barrow/article_060414easter.shtml)

*Christianity Today*, April 10, 2006 "Life in a Country of Death" by Eugene H. Peterson, an excerpt from *Living the Resurrection*.

# The Global Anabaptist Wiki

## An Irresistible Shift Toward a Global Identity

By Jacob Swartzentruber



[www.anabaptistwiki.org](http://www.anabaptistwiki.org)

Close your eyes for a moment and let your imagination run wild. What if the tiny Anabaptist movement that began with a handful of baptisms in Switzerland in January, 1525, now numbered over 1,600,000 members in over 84 countries around the world? Now imagine that the highest percentage of membership growth was happening, not in Europe or North America, but in places like Africa, Latin America, and Asia. These regions now comprise over 60 percent of all Anabaptist-Mennonites around the world and the percentage is steadily increasing.

Open your eyes . . . look around. This precise scenario is now playing itself out before our very eyes. During the past fifty years, the vitality of the Anabaptist movement has found new expression in dozens of church plants, newly-emerging conferences and networks of like-minded Christians in countries all around the world.

The increasing diversity of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite community presents a host of exciting new opportunities for growth and spiritual enrichment. But the challenges of communication and identity-formation are enormous. Indeed, we are at a critical moment in the formation of the global Anabaptist-Mennonite community. How we choose to respond to this transformation could represent one of the greatest community-building events in the history of the Anabaptist movement.

Every Anabaptist-Mennonite congregation, conference and network has its own unique experiences, stories and theological perspective to share with the rest of the world, shaped by its local history and culture. Yet currently—despite the wonderful efforts of Mennonite World Conference—there is no easy way to bring together the experiences of all these diverse groups.

Now imagine an electronic network of Anabaptist-Mennonite groups, each joined to every other group around the world in a virtual global Anabaptist community. The Global Anabaptist Wiki ([www.anabaptistwiki.org](http://www.anabaptistwiki.org)) is a new initiative to make our history, convictions and faith stories more easily

accessible to each other. Sponsored by the Mennonite Historical Library at Goshen College in Goshen, Indiana, the web site is committed to helping individual groups:

- 1) Tell their own stories;
- 2) Post and preserve electronic archives and
- 3) Become better informed about other groups in the global Anabaptist fellowship.

Like all wiki-based projects, the Global Anabaptist Wikipedia is a collaborative venture that relies on the local, grassroots expertise of many people. Although a great deal of information has already been posted on the site, its long term success will depend on the gradual accumulation of content posted by users from Anabaptist-Mennonite communities around the world.

If you are interested in helping to develop and nurture a deeper sense of connectedness with the global Anabaptist church, there are a number of ways that you can help. First, submit a story that highlights a meaningful event in your faith journey—either as an individual or in the life of your congregation—that will help other people better understand how you are living out your Christian-Anabaptist convictions. Second, contribute information about your local congregation or conference which will allow visitors to learn more about your group. Third, if you would like to dedicate even more time and energy to this project, volunteer to become a group administrator for your country and assist other local users in contributing material to the site. Finally, take a few minutes to simply visit the site ([www.anabaptistwiki.org](http://www.anabaptistwiki.org)) and look at a few articles. Learning about other's stories goes a long way toward shaping a truly global identity.

The globalization of the Anabaptist faith presents an extraordinary opportunity for self-reflection, renewal and transformation. By developing a deeper sense of our place in the global community of faith, we are participating in God's vision of a church that knows no boundaries.

# Violence and Non-Violence

**Genesis 4 and Matthew 5:38-48:**

**a Sermon, St Stephen's Belrose, 25 April 2010**

*By John Buckley*



## Introduction

If this message was a TV program it would start with a warning. It would be rated PG and alert the viewer that the following program contains occasional violence (because that is my theme today: violence and non-violence), adult themes and some low level coarse language. No nudity as far as I know but material that may offend. It is, of course, ANZAC day, a day on which we remember our service men and women many of whom gave their lives in the service of this country. Feelings run strong on a day such as this and I am aware that I am at risk of giving offence. However I feel bound by a duty to ask what does our faith teach us about war and violence? What does the Bible have to teach us about this terrible aspect of human life?

Today I want to speak about two things: the universal problem of violence; and the Christian model of non-violence.

## The universal problem of violence – Genesis 4

### Explanation

In Genesis 1-11 we read a description of the universal state of affairs for the human race. Whereas Genesis 12 begins the story of a single man Abram and of his descendants, in Genesis 1-11 we read an account of the common experience of Everyman and Everywoman. This common experience includes the both the blessings of the created order and of healthy relationship and also the problems of sin and death. So Genesis 1-11 poses the problem and Genesis 12 – Rev. 21 provides God's response to that problem.

Let me remind you of the early chapters of Genesis. In chapter 1 we read the story of God's creation of all things, culminating in the creation of men and women

who alone are made in the image of God. In chapter 2 we read a retelling of the creation focusing in on the creation of human beings. Here we read of Adam and Eve placed together by God in paradise. In chapter 3 we read of the serpent who questions the goodness of God and successfully tempts Adam and Eve to eat what they were forbidden to eat. In response God drives these two from the garden and gives effect to his declaration that disobedience would result in death.

Now we commonly regard this event in Genesis 3 as the Fall of humankind, the single decisive moment when human beings lost the freedom to not sin. So it is a surprise to read in chapter 4 the story of Cain and Abel and to see that Cain has the freedom to do what is right: 'if you do what is right will you not be accepted?' (4:7). It seems to me that Genesis 4 is a second telling of the fall, just as Genesis 2 is a second telling of creation. Genesis 3 and 4 are similar in many ways. In both chapters

- Two people face a moral crisis
- God is the third party to the crisis defining it and passing judgment after the crisis passes
- The lure of sin is portrayed as a menacing presence (serpent, crouching at your door)
- The temptation to sin arises from The question of making a living from the earth (fruit, farming)
- The sinners are driven away (from the garden, from the land)
- With punishment there is also grace (fig leaf, the mark)

If Genesis 4 retells the story of the Fall, then it draws our attention to the importance of violence. In Genesis 3 the narrative concerns a man and a woman and the original sin arises in the context of that relationship. I think that is why we tend to regard sexuality as the area of our lives most affected by sin. But chapter 4 is about the rivalry of two brothers giving rise to murderous violence. In fact Genesis 3 is not about sex. It is about relationship with God and a failure to trust him and to obey him. Now if Genesis 4 was about sex it would make sense that we have this anxious emphasis on sexual sin. But Genesis 4 is not about sex. It is about violence.

If my reading is right, then violence is presented as the main expression of the sinful heart of humanity. The following chapters take up this theme. At the end of chapter 4, Lamech kills a man and boasts. In

chapter 6, God sends the flood because of the sinfulness of humanity: 'Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and full of violence...I am going to put an end to all people for the earth is filled with violence because of them...' (6:11,13). So Genesis 1-11 describes this common experience of violence. And it is inevitably an escalating violence By telling us of his Lamech's boast ('sevenfold...seventy seven fold') the narrative suggests that violence escalates exponentially.

It seems to me that Genesis 4 is a second telling of the fall, just as Genesis 2 is a second telling of creation.

So it seems to me that Genesis 1-11 draws our attention to the universal problem of violence: there is within the human heart this hateful and malicious tendency to strike out, to wound, to take up arms, to fight, to kill. The failure to trust God and to obey him leads us to take matters into our own hands. And this violence has tendency to escalate. The cycle of vengeance and retribution turns, leading to ever greater violence. This seems to me to be the inescapable description of humanity in Genesis 1-11.

There is a violence in the human heart and in human affairs and this is a fundamental problem for us, between us and in our relationship with God.

### Application

Violence is a universal problem. It affects all people in every age. Human beings it seems have this constant tendency to turn to violence. As Genesis 1-4 shows, it arises from a failure to trust God. When people distance themselves from God and take things into their hands they immediately turn to violence. That it seems to me is the message of Genesis 3-4. So what difference should that make to us?

Violence is a problem and always a problem. Violence is not a solution. Our thinking should be shaped by the biblical analysis of the human heart. Violence is moral failure. Violence is abhorrent to God. Violence is the sure sign of a lack of faith. Violence against other people is sin against God.

One of the consequences of violence is fear. Cain murdered his brother and then was afraid that others would murder him. We too can be reduced to fearfulness in the face of violence. And our fear can tempt us to tolerate violence so long as it is not directed at us. Someone else is being victimised or bullied. So we keep silent lest we too become the target. And so we make an anxious peace with the perpetrators of violence. We accept it. Tolerate it. And we are silenced by it. But violence is wrong.

Always wrong.

Our culture is riddled with violence. We regard depictions of violence entertaining. We make war. We invest untold billions into the making of weapons and the training of soldiers. Look closely at the video games your children are playing. The fun lies in vicariously taking up a weapon and killing animated depictions of other people.

In the midst of this ocean of violence we need to retain the conviction that violence is wrong. I think it is important that we train our consciences to be sensitive to the wrongness of violence.

Over the past few years I have sought to do this. I have taught myself that violence is not entertaining. I want to react when I hear a story about some violent event. I need to have the capacity to be shocked, distressed, outraged. So when it comes to violence as entertainment, I walk out. I am learning to respond viscerally to violence, to reject violence. To treat it as a great wrong and as utterly unacceptable. And I encourage you to do the same.

## The Christian model of non-violence – Matthew 5:38-39

### Explanation

I have described the way in which violence has a tendency to escalate. This it seems to me is one of the profound insights of Genesis 1-11. In view of this the Old Testament law established this important principle of an eye for an eye and as tooth for a tooth. This principle was a way of expressing the need to respond to violence in a measured and proportionate way. If someone punched you and knocked out a tooth you were entitled to punch them back but not to take a weapon and attack them with it. Or if someone took a weapon and attacked your face so that you lost your eye you were not entitled to take a greater weapon and crack their skull and take their life. In theory at least this part of the law was designed to restrain the escalating cycle of violence.

But when Jesus takes up this theme he goes much further than the Law. Hence Matthew 5:38-9. Using his standard pattern of “You have heard...but I say to you” Jesus instructs his disciples in a very different response to violence: “...do not resist the evil-doer...” and turn the other cheek. Whereas the Law

sought to restrain the impulse to avenge, Jesus forbids it entirely.

This impulse to avenge our selves is a primal response. I don't feel it often in relation to people. But I do feel it from time to time in relation to things. Sometimes late in the day when I am tired I might stand up somewhere and crack my head on the corner of a window or some kind of overhang. In that moment I feel a powerful feeling rise up within me. It is anger, rage; I want to strike out. The law sought to moderate this impulse but Jesus teaches us to restrain it completely.

I think it is important that we train our consciences to be sensitive to the wrongness of violence

Jesus taught non-violence. But he not only taught it. It was the way he lived. Do you remember the night he was arrested in the garden? The Roman soldiers came armed to Gethsemane. At a tense moment Peter took a sword and brought it down in the head of one of the servants accompanying the soldiers. The servant moved to one side and the sword sliced off his ear. What did Jesus do? He said to Peter ‘Put away your sword,’ and he reached forward and touched the servant's ear healing it. One of the gospels records Jesus saying that he had at his disposal

the armies of heaven. And three of them record the fact that he asked why they needed to come armed to arrest him as if he were leading a rebellion. In other words Jesus was a man of peace, not a man of violence. At this moment of tension he was choosing the way of non-violence. This was both his teaching and his practice.

### Illustration

Many years ago I knew a man who grew up in Britain in the years before the second world war. When that war broke out in 1939 his friends and his brothers were joining up to fight. They saw the need to defend their nation and were willing to risk their lives for that.

My friend was also drawn to this duty but as a conscientious Christian was also aware that Jesus taught this way of non-violence and non-resistance. What was he to do? It seemed immoral to simply refuse to sign up when others were risking their lives to protect his freedom. It seemed not only immoral but also cowardly to benefit from the sacrifice of others while claiming a higher moral ground than those who went to war. What was he to do?

His response was to sign up as a paramedic. He spent months at the front line risking his life armed only with a first-aid kit. He was captured at Arnhem (and

claimed the movie *A Bridge Too Far* was about him!) and served several years in a POW camp. So he shared the life of his fellow soldiers without himself acting violently. Some will say that his actions gave support to a military action. But I would argue that in the face of the great wrong of war he chose to involve himself as an agent of healing. In so doing he took up an entirely acceptable position as a conscientious Christian.

### Application

Here then is the model of Christian non-violence. For those of us who follow Jesus, we are to be people of peace and not violence. Our homes should not be places of violence. If there are any here who are acting violently at home, it has to stop. A violent home is not a Christian home. It must stop. It can stop. You do not act violently when you are together in the shopping centre and you can restrain your violence when you are at home. If you are the victim of such violence I just want to say that this is a very great wrong and that you do not need to put up with it. Tell someone and we can work together to put an end to it.

In my view, Christian parents should not hit their children. Now I know that raising children is a most demanding task. It pushes us and taxes us to the utmost. And I know that it is very difficult at times to stay calm and composed when your children are pushing and prodding and demanding. Even so, there are many ways to discipline kids. In my view, hitting a child is an act of violence. As they say, it takes a village to raise a child. It is difficult to raise your children without corporal punishment on your own. But it can be done. We raised four children without hitting them and they turned out fine!

Thinking more broadly, it is a moral challenge for us

that we are currently at war. Australia has over 1500 troops in Afghanistan. Most of these are occupied with reconstruction work and I feel very proud of this peacemaking work. But some 400 special forces are in that country to kill people. Australian citizens paid for by my taxes and yours are in a foreign nation killing and being killed. That is a moral question for me. I know of Christians in the US who illegally withhold that part of their taxes which would otherwise go to pay for the Department of Defense. They then give this money to peacemaking projects around the world. I am not suggesting we do this but I think it is helpful to hear about how other Christians respond to this dilemma.

## Conclusion

I grew up attending St Stephens Anglican Church in Willoughby. Where we sat in the church there was a beautiful stained glass window depicting four young people: three men and a woman. Each of these was in uniform representing the navy, army, airforce and a nurse. And below the figures was the text 'Greater love hath no man than this, that he give up his life for his friends'. It seems to me perfectly natural that the Church should look back on the sacrifice of its young people in the wars and see in them a representation of Jesus who also gave his life. This seems to me natural and fitting.

But what I want to know is why there was not alongside it another window illustrating the text: "Do not resist the evil-doer" or an image of a person turning the other cheek? I suspect that window was missing in my family church because it is a teaching of Jesus that has been missing in our tradition. I am glad on this ANZAC day to have been able to remind you of it.

