Past and present

There’s a proverb that says, “you can’t know where you’re going until you know where you’ve been.” In essence, that is why Australians and New Zealanders continue to celebrate Anzac Day. The arguments about the necessity of the war and bloodshed are somewhat irrelevant. The fact is the events at Gallipoli almost a century ago are an important part of both nations' history and identity.

As Seventh-day Adventists, it’s important to understand the history of our Church. That’s why the Australian Union Conference is producing Tell The World—a film exploring the defining moments in Adventist Church history. In Australia, your offering this week will assist in the production of Tell The World. Click here to find out more.
War and peace

Adventists have traditionally taken the non-combatant option when it comes to war—to support their country’s war effort but without bearing arms. A commitment to non-combatancy, however, does not mean sitting idly on the sidelines in the midst of conflict.

Greater love hath no man

The Anzacs were willing to give up their lives for what they believed in. As Christians, we too are caught up in the middle of a war—a spiritual war. The question is, what are we willing to sacrifice for the sake of our mission?
God doesn’t need our money

Do you hold on to your money with a tightly clenched fist? Or are your hands wide open, ready for God to take and give as he pleases?

More Features
Again this year, the approach of Anzac Day is leaving me conflicted. For a long time I’ve leaned towards the view that the flaunting of military uniforms, guns and flags on Anzac Day is sick irony; akin to taking Titanic survivors for a jolly ocean cruise on the anniversary of their disaster. Surely April 25 should be a day when we recognise the folly of war; being as it is a commemoration of the doubtfully motivated, poorly led and devastatingly unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign that left more than 100,000 dead and at least three nations’ characters altered forever. It should be a day when we pledge not to forget the horror of man’s inhumanity to man, or the lessons learned in the pointless escalation that was World War I. It should be a day to question the military establishment, not to honour it.

However, I’ve also come to understand the need for bereaved relatives to find meaning in the loss of their war dead. I understand that those young soldiers, naive though they may have been, sacrificed their lives for something bigger than themselves and, in doing so, displayed a divine spark in their spirits that we should all yearn to possess.

And not all wars are equal. It’s sobering to consider what the South Pacific and Australia would look like today if the fanatical, torturing Imperial Japanese forces hadn’t been pushed back during World War II. This bleak alternate future was avoided because men left the safety of home behind, picked up guns and fought to the death in resisting the invaders.

I’d like to think that if I were confronted by a situation where a person was being violently attacked, I would intervene physically. Surely to stand by would be cowardice. So does this same logic hold when applied to war? If my nation decided to defend against a genocidal bully, would it be cowardice for me—a healthy adult citizen—to refuse to wield a weapon on behalf of my country?

Adventists have traditionally taken the non-combatant option: to support their country’s war effort but without bearing arms. Perhaps it’s time to rethink this: in a case of an unjustified war, a non-combatant soldier would still be supporting the violence; in a morally necessary war, a non-combatant would expect the other soldiers to do all the dirty work of killing. In both cases, this smacks of hypocrisy.

In some situations, however, there may be a third non-combatant option. I think of Martin Luther King Jr’s non-violent protesters, singing hymns, calling for justice and refusing to back down when faced with batons, fire hoses and prison. I think of the “human shields” who travelled to Iraq on the eve of bombings by George W Bush’s “coalition of the willing”. I think of the Christian activists right now attending troubled checkpoints on the Israel-Palestine border, bearing witness to the conflict and calming it by their mere presence as internationals.
Could these principles of active non-violent resistance be useful in our part of the world? Would we as Adventists be prepared to put our bodies on the frontlines of conflict in situations of family violence in Australia? Drunken street rampages in New Zealand? Tribal clashes in Papua New Guinea?

I hope I'm never faced with the dilemmas posed by armed conflict. But we don’t have to wait for a war for our commitment to non-combatancy to be tested. It’s not a matter of looking for trouble; it’s about seeking divine courage and guidance on the road to peace. That will be my prayer this Anzac Day.

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A solemn, respectful peaceful
ness lay over the large, pillared chamber. As quiet as a church, the cavernous room echoed with my footsteps. Others milled around in different corners of the building, yet I was left alone with my thoughts and had tuned out the world.

The impressive memorial—a constant reminder of horrors past—seemed to crown this bustling metropolis, looking out over Australia's second largest city, Melbourne. I had not been to Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance before but, being new to Melbourne, I decided I had to see it.

In the middle of the floor of the main chamber is an open square, surrounded by wreaths. The inscription at the bottom of the square reads, "Greater love hath no man," in crisp, golden letters. On November 11, Remembrance Day, at exactly 11 o'clock, a ray of sunlight filters through the roof and illuminates one word: Love.

The phrase sums up the sacrifice the Anzacs made for peace, for their homes, families and friends, the reason for the memorial, for the ceremonies and for the days of remembrance. Anzac Day—in Australia and New Zealand—has always been a great occasion to remember the sons, brothers and fathers lost to war and to celebrate the mateship we pride ourselves in.

The quote has been borrowed, its context changed and its origins forgotten by many, even those who can complete it. "Greater love has no-one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13*). In this verse, Jesus speaks to His disciples, not only predicting His imminent death and sacrifice but also exhorting them to lay down their own wilful selves and become loving servants and friends.

As Christians, we are reminded of the spiritual battle in which we are engaged and the sacrifices Christ made on our behalf. "Looking upon the crucified Redeemer, we more fully comprehend the magnitude and meaning of the sacrifice made by the Majesty of heaven."1 The whole of heaven, the focal point of the universe, the Creator of the world
was put on the line in order to redeem us.

On days like Anzac Day, we are not called upon to condone or condemn the horrors of warfare but to remember the sacrifices made and ensure the same mistakes are not made again.

In the same way, the celebration of the cross and the knowledge of our redemption should ensure we pray not to fall into the same sinful traps as those that plagued us before we accepted the sacrifice. Yet, we can join Paul in saying what we do not want to do, we still do (see Romans 7:18-20). The memory of Calvary puts the responsibility on us to accept the grace we have already been given and separate ourselves from sin, closing the gap back to God.

Both Moses—patriarch of Israel—and

Paul—early father of the Christian faith—understood this sacrifice and were willing to take it up. In Exodus 32:32, Moses tries to bargain with God for the lives of his people: “But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.”

Similarly, Paul in Romans 9:3 says, “For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my brothers, those of my own race.” This is no trivial lip-service. The self-sacrifice demonstrated in these sincere heart-pleadings is immense and Christlike. These men have truly understood the concept of love.

The question is, are we willing to make that sacrifice, to take up our cross and follow Him? To give of our time, our money, our health, even our lives to see the gospel reach the world? It is time our worship and acceptance of the sacrifice made for us filled up more of our lives than a few hours on Sabbath morning.

If those Anzacs could bleed for home

and country, and Christ could bleed for all humankind, when will we join the fight to ensure the faith we cherish is more than just ritual and memorial, but a living sacrifice lived and fought every day?


*Bible quotations are from the New International Version.*
God doesn’t need our money

http://record.net.au/items/god-doesn-t-need-our-money

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Not long ago I met a friend at a café. We had a pleasant time with pleasant talk and at the end we walked to the cash register to pay our pleasant bill. En route to the till I felt a prompting from God to pay for my friend’s meal. Being the spiritual giant that I am, I quickly did a calculation.

After all, I’d only had a drink. My friend had a meal plus a drink multiplied by the fact that she's from a double income family with only a couple of kids whereas hubby and I have one income to share and three eat-you-out-of-the-house teens/tweens. When I pressed the equals sign in my head I came up with a big, fat, juicy zero. So I breezed through my transaction, happy that I’d saved the massive amount of about $16. We said our goodbyes and as I hopped in my car, that’s where the Lord met me. I had this terrible heart realisation that I’d intentionally and defiantly disobeyed God and His direction in my life. It was a terrible feeling and after much remorse, I resolved as I drove away to be more generous.

Within minutes I needed to pull into a local service station. As I entered I couldn’t help but notice a distraught, unkempt looking man standing near a stern service station attendant who was filling out some paperwork. The attendant was not being particularly pleasant to the older man. I couldn’t help but overhear that the man had filled his car with petrol and was unable to pay for it. I knew this was a God moment. I almost leapt over the counter in my hurry to seize the opportunity to be obedient to God. I said to the attendant, “I’ll pay for this gentleman’s fuel” and I zealously handed him my card. After he scraped his jaw off the ground and ran the transaction through, I was left to face the somewhat less-distraught man.

He looked incredulously at me for a while and then, as he thanked me, he looked almost teary. He stumbled over his words promising to pay me back. I told him this was my gift to him and that I hoped one day he’d be able to pay it forward. I left on a high—to be obedient to God was such a pleasure. I was so excited that I was given a second chance so quickly.

What a great reminder to intentionally hold onto our finances with God first in our minds. We hold our finances loosely, in the palms of our hands, fingers outstretched. This allows God to place money in our hands and take money out and have us pass money to others as He chooses. We have found that if we grip the money we are given tightly with a clenched fist, we get so focused on tightening our grip with the little money we have, we miss the extra financial blessings that God could have appropriated our way; blessings we would have received if we had lived with our palms open.
I'm learning that the God who owns "the cattle on a thousand hills and the wealth in every mine" doesn't actually need our money; He already has everything. He does desire us to listen to His promptings and answer others' prayers with our generosity. God desires our obedience and wants to remodel our character into His image. He's constantly moving us forward toward the abundant life, and an abundant life is one that has much to give.*

*Thanks Jason Seiber for that last bit of wisdom I learned from you.

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