

Mixed feelings on Anzac Day

As another Anzac Day comes around, I find myself once again with mixed feelings. As I watch the solemnity of the ceremonies, I cannot help but feel moved at the selfless sacrifice of the diggers who gave their lives so willingly. At the same time however, I cannot bring myself to fully embrace the pride of the occasion. As I watch movies like Gallipoli and see the idealism of youth going out to fight the enemy and save our country, I am struck by the idea that there must have been a better way. Couldn't there have been an alternative than to have our young men die so that we might be free? Dare I say it, do we have to be thankful for this? In the minds of many people, including many Christians, if ever there was a justification for war it was the Second World War and the fight against Hitler's madness. Common sense says that if we had followed the path of appeasement in the face of Hitler's plans, then it would have been too late, many more lives would have been lost and Europe would have been overrun by a fascist dictatorship. However the gospel is not one of common sense, and I dare to believe that there could have been a better way, incredibly naive and arrogant as that may sound coming from one who was born half a generation after the war ended and who did not have to live through it.

However I also know what love can do, not just in individuals but to nations. It is seen in the extraordinary way of non-violence demonstrated so courageously by Martin Luther King and Gandhi, great men who led movements that transformed their nations. It is seen in the Velvet Revolution in the Czech Republic in October 1989 as Wenceslas Square in Prague was packed with thousands of people when the masses turned out in the demonstrations against communism. What happened in Prague in 1989 was just a part of a tidal wave that swept across eastern Europe as a whole system of government collapsed, seemingly overnight. In Prague it became known as the Velvet Revolution because of its totally non-violent nature. Anzac Day is always a day of mixed emotions for me. It is a day when we remember that greater love hath no man, than to lay down his life for his friends. As I come to think about another Anzac Day, I am challenged not to be judgmental about this day and feel that it is glorifying war. I am challenged instead to remember that it was at places like Gallipoli that "the best Australians were loyal to their mates in every circumstance (one laid down his life by giving his gas mask to a friend)"¹. It is on Anzac Day that I am challenged to remember that it was at places like Gallipoli that bravery and sacrificial service came to the fore through the actions of Simpson, "who was shot while carrying wounded men from the front with his donkey"². This is the love of Jesus in bloody, life-threatening, gutsy action.

On Anzac Day I feel emotion as I remember the loyalty and sacrifice of our diggers. It reminds and convicts me of how I am called to live my life, in service to others no matter what the cost. However I also feel sad that there seems to prevail an attitude that there was no other way and that these men had to be sacrificed, that it was inevitable. I dare to believe in a different way. Let Anzac Day be a reminder to us that the circumstances in which these brave sacrifices took place must never happen again. Let us fight with all our might to beat our swords into ploughshares and let nations remember war no more.

by Nils von Kalm
24 April 2007

1 Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years* (Canberra: ANU, 1974), p. 58 & 101, in Cronshaw D, *Credible Witness*, Urban Neighbours of Hope 2006, p. 113

2 Sir Irving Benson, *The Man with the Donkey: John Simpson Kirkpatrick, the Good Samaritan of Gallipoli* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1965, in Cronshaw D, *Credible Witness*, Urban Neighbours of Hope 2006, p. 113