



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR  
**CHRISTIANITY AND CULTURE**

WISDOM FOR THE COMMON GOOD

## **You Shall Not Kill**

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Amidst wars and rumours of wars, can people of faith help the human family hear afresh what the creator is saying to us? “You shall not kill”.

Our context is one of wars and rumours of wars. The suffering is vivid wherever we look – Ukraine, Myanmar, many places in the Middle East and Africa. More, even worse may lie ahead unless we focus our will to face this reality and change direction. In recent days, after the missiles launched by China towards Taiwan, there was ominous language about deepening conflict, even war.

<http://www.theage.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/australia-can-expect-more-of-xi-s-fighter-jets-less-polite-diplomacy-20220811-p5b937.html>

In this context, what can people of faith do to prevent more suffering; more innocent, dead children in the arms of grieving parents?

There is a saying of the philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein:” If something can be said, it can be said simply. And if it can’t, then it should be consigned to silence”.

Speaking simply, can we go back to basics and build a new and universal coalition of peacemakers aiming to stop people killing one another?

This simple message has been with us for a very long time.

“You shall not kill” (Exodus 20:13).

Moses wrote it as Yahweh gave the commandment to him. Moses came back down Mt. Sinai with this and the other commandments he had received from the creator of heaven and earth. “All the people shook with fear at the peals of thunder and the lightning flashes, the sound of the trumpet, and the smoking mountain; and they kept their distance” (Exodus 20:18.) Such experiences of our vulnerability focuses minds, at least for a while.

The few survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki felt an obligation, on behalf of the thousands killed instantly, to keep minds focused on why nuclear weapons should never again be used. I remember listening to one survivor as he delivered a huge petition to those at a UN Special Assembly regarding nuclear disarmament. His face shone, as we read, was also true when Moses came back down Mt Sinai.

This week one of the candidates to be the next UK Prime Minister was applauded as she conveyed her readiness to use nuclear weapons.

<https://mobile.twitter.com/implausibleblog/status/1562181596903530496>

Jesus carried forward the commandment given to Moses (Matthew 19:18; Luke 18:20). Jesus took us deeper into how the killing begins. It begins in our heart. Jesus links killing to the anger that hates. Jesus, therefore, urges us to pursue reconciliation (Matthew 5:21-24).

The early Church had this wisdom reinforced. “Everyone who hates is a murderer, and murderers, as you know, do not have eternal life in them” (1 John 3:15). Jesus guides us to guard our heart and to be forgiving, for otherwise “out of the heart come evil thoughts”. Killing, murdering, is the first evil intention that is mentioned (Matthew 15:19).

Jesus' wisdom is our existential reality. Our thoughts do shape our words and actions. The pattern, over time, will shape our character and our destiny. We will become what we think, as the sages remind us. The thinking about killing has led to exactly what we see. Poignantly, Jesus prayed forgivingly as his own killing took place. Jesus said then, “...they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34)!

Three reflections follow from this scriptural summary.

Firstly, don't we now know what we are doing? The question is, can we summon the collective will to stop the killing? Can there even be a day when no one gets killed?

The preamble to the Constitution of UNESCO declares, “Since wars begin in the minds of men and women, it is in the minds of men and women, that the defences of peace must be constructed”. Can we make it front of mind to stop the killing? This past week we have seen more pictures of grieving young parents holding their dead children killed in war zones. Nothing justifies this. Nothing...

A second reflection:

<https://greekherald.com.au/opinion/jim-clavens-grecian-adventure-a-review/>

Every family on the planet will have a story which conveys the need to stop the killing. Our father took photos during WW2. A war historian, Jim Claven, saw their significance and gave them context in his book, *Grecian Adventures* (to be launched on 20 October).

Like many children, my brother David and I never asked our father enough questions, including about the war. But there was a time he wept when talking about having friendly, happy banter with some New Zealand soldiers in the morning but finding them all by their truck that afternoon, shot dead.

There was the time he spoke of the terror of machine-gunning planes flying low and how, one day, hearing them coming, he jumped into the ditch on the left of the road. Some blokes went left, some went right. All those who went right got killed.

Once, as we entered the gate of the Royal Melbourne Agricultural Show a firecracker went off. It was part of a celebration, but our father fell to the ground screaming. We were shocked. I was very young. He mumbled that, momentarily, he thought he was back in the unpredictable terror of war.

Over the years I met many of our father's contemporaries in my pastoral ministry. Sometimes, later in life and after the busy years of family and work, the terror would return in nightmares.

My turn came with the Vietnam War. I was an Economics student at University when it was possible I might be conscripted by ballot. But that war did not seem like confronting the hypnotic psychopath called Hitler. It did not seem to be a just war. Notwithstanding his own experience of war's killings, our father and his contemporaries felt we should go. The propaganda of the day convinced them.

It is a long way back to what Moses was told on Mt Sinai and what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount about loving enemies and praying for those who persecute us. In the poetic phrase of TS Eliot, "between the idea and the reality falls the shadow".

As in our family, so in millions of families, the consequences of humankind's wars are vivid. In Australia we are now focused on the suffering revealed in the interim Report of the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicides. (Rate of veteran suicide is a national disgrace. Not enough is being done to help the 6000 defence force veterans each year, many still in their 20s, who face the challenge of adjusting to civilian life).

<http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-opinion/rate-of-veteran-suicide-is-a-national-disgrace-20220811-p5b95u.html>

Since the late 1980's I have worked to help refugees because of how their lives are affected by violence and war. There are now estimated to be around 90 million displaced people and contemporary wars are adding to the number.

Last week we held a Global Prayer and Remembrance Service for Myanmar and to remember the four democracy activists executed by the military regime.

<https://youtube.com/watch?v=LH-6wd-3S9U&feature=share>

The anguish is heart breaking, as Christopher's song conveys. Likewise, as we read of the numbers continuing to die in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, the UN frameworks on disarmament and sustainable development are only partial and are currently under stress from a ferocious arms race, the cost of which diverts resources from beneficial human services. It causes more of the poor to starve, even as the weapons kill.

The point of these statements of the obvious comes next as a third reflection. But, just to complete this more personal story, I was not conscripted in that ballot and therefore did not have to be a

conscientious objector. The obligation to take this seriously woke me up and did shape my subsequent direction. I have never had to respond to an order to kill someone else.

The third reflection gives grounds for hope. There is an emerging universal consciousness marked by empathy and compassion. <https://wccm.org/events/unified-consciousness/>

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/7502392-the-empathic-civilization>

The necessity is for this to now be evident in unambiguous religious and political leadership. We must simply say, as a coalition reflecting the diversity of our human family: “You shall not kill”.

It is an astonishing time to be alive. We now know so much about our planet. We are seeing light that left its place in the cosmos 13 billion years ago. There is so much to encourage our wonder and delight. The fruit of ingenuity is longer life expectancy for many. We can see what is needed to protect biodiversity and prevent catastrophic climate change. With leadership of character and competency, all our problems can be solved.

To reach an era in which every being can flourish, wouldn't it help immensely if a coalition of faithful people were simply and consistently saying, “please, let us stop killing each other”.

“You shall not kill” is what the creator conveyed to Moses. It is unambiguous. And then the creator came, God amongst us born of Mary. Jesus, full of grace and peace, elaborated our understanding and then, after his own killing, was raised on the third day. That God wants us to stop killing is evident. In resurrection faith we do have the capacity to fulfil the divine will. The point of this reflection is to renew our will to do this. I keep before me a photo of our grandchildren, so as to stay focused.



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