Commemorating Anzac Day

David d'Lima JP BTh Dip Ed

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- The grave of John Simpson at the Gallipoli cemetery

N'Oublions Jamais l'Australie
"Let us never forget Australia"

- inscribed on the school in Villers-Bretonneux, after 1,200 Australian soldiers died bringing liberation to that French village during the First World War.

Understanding the significance of the Anzac tradition

The Australian and New Zealand Army Corps served bravely at Gallipoli and beyond in conflicts they did not understand, yet they brought freedom to several nations and were instrumental to developing the Australian identity. Lessons may be applied as we look back on the Anzac tradition to appreciate how God has utilised Australia and its people, while we highlight the gospel that is featured subtly within each Anzac Day ceremony.

Held each 25th April to mark the 1915 Anzac landing at Gallipoli, Anzac Day is an outreach opportunity for churches that can raise the issues of death and dying, nation-building, the Australian identity, and how foolish choice may sometimes provoke the response of justified warfare.

Furthermore, God's people can explain the meaning of the commemoration: The *Last Post* and the *Rouse* signal remembrance, but they also prefigure the last trumpet that will call us to rise into eternity. The flag is flown at half-mast with sadness, one flag's depth below the peak to make room for the invisible *Black Ensign*, but it is raised in joy at noon to denote the hope of resurrection.

Christians may also describe how God has used Australia as the instrument of his grace (through such activities as the various Anzac deployments), and we can give a warning that our nation risks losing its status as a vessel of God: Australia's peaceful history and its role to build up other nations may only continue if we engage in a process of personal and national repentance and reformation, seeking and receiving the favour of Almighty God.

Encouraging the community to seek the blessing of Almighty God

After the poet Jack O'Hagan wrote the lyrics of the song *God Bless Australia* to the tune of *Waltzing Matilda* in 1961, that prayerful song was broadcast at the nightly close of ABC television transmission, until the late 1970s:

Here in this God-given land of ours, Australia,
This proud possession, our own piece of earth,
That was built by our fathers, who pioneered our heritage,
Here in Australia, the land of our birth.

Chorus: *God bless Australia, our land Australia,*
Home of the Anzac, the strong and the free,
It's our homeland, our own land, to cherish for eternity,
God bless Australia, the land of the free.

Here in Australia, we treasure love and liberty,
Our way of life, all for one, one for all,
We're a peace-loving race, but should danger ever threaten us,
Let the world know we will answer the call.



Gathering people on Anzac Day

Invitations featuring those patriotic lyrics along with images of **rosemary** may be utilised to gather people for Anzac Day dawn services and breakfasts. Dinners could feature lamb with rosemary (sprigs of which grow at Gallipoli) and also highlight connections with Christ our Passover Lamb. Referring to sunset and sunrise (a resurrection motif) the *Ode to the Fallen* can be recited joyously at such meetings, honouring the dead who are asleep in Christ:

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old;
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them.



As a resurrection motif, each new day is denoted by the **Rising Sun Badge** since each soldier sleeps in death (at the going down of the sun) before rising. Featuring bayonets radiating from and protecting the crown on which is the cross of Christ, on the upturned brim of the soldier's slouch hat, each badge represents the Anzac tradition of serving Crown and Country. Those details can be noted in expressions of thanks to Australian soldiers on Anzac Day, through postcards that can be mailed to them via the Department of Defence.

Anzac Day and the nation as a vessel of God

Another theme to share on Anzac Day is the nation's responsibility to engage in repentance and reformation, recognising how God seeks to bless the people anew, and continue using Australia's nation-building work in overseas lands. Through military deployment (especially in peace-keeping activities) we may see Australia serving as a valued vessel in the hands of God - who alone can *"announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up"* (Jeremiah 18:9).

Almighty God has greatly utilised Australia to establish other nations. Israel especially owes a debt to Anzac forces that delivered the city of Beersheba, leading to Jerusalem's liberation and the resurrection of the Jewish nation. Beersheba was in fact freed on Reformation Day (31st October) 1917 - the day that Britain decided to provide the Jews a homeland. The Anzacs during two world wars also helped liberate many other countries. Australia in 1975 gave Papua New Guinea independence, and led several countries cooperatively to establish and build the nation of East Timor in 2002.

But our country cannot remain in the favoured position as a vessel useful to Almighty God, our maker and sustainer, if we persist in rebellion. Our very existence as a people is at risk when our land engages in national sin.

Yet God desires to forgive and to restore, as we turn from wrongdoing. Our prayer is that each individual will receive the gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and that as a consequence of personal reformation, our nation would embrace values and practices that are pleasing to God. Only then will he bless and heal the land, and may continue to utilise our nation in ways that are valuable to his own glorious plan and purpose.

At a special service or civic occasion, Christians may gather people from the local area to share the commemoration of Anzac Day. This could provide an opportunity not simply to look back as we honour our military heroes, but to working toward securing the future. This should always commence with a personal pilgrimage of repentance and salvation, and must then include a recognition of the paramount need for God's blessing to remain on the nation (if corporately the people will respond in repentance and faith).

Greeting cards distributed in the neighbourhood could share a personal and national perspective on Anzac Day, detailing the opportunity for everyone to come to faith in Christ, and for each nation to acknowledge him as Lord.

Upholding the Anzac ideal

Australians enjoying freedom and prosperity have arisen to mark the Anzac legacy. So the number of Australians spending Anzac Day at Gallipoli grew from 200 (in 1988) to 20,000 (in 2005) following a great increase of interest. In 1995 a tradition commenced when Essendon and Collingwood played the first AFL Anzac Day game. Along with a flag ceremony and the honouring of veterans, silence is kept by a crowd of over 90,000, preceded by the *Last Post*, and the *Ode to the Fallen*, followed by the *Rouse*.



The Anzac Day Trophy is engraved with the names of VFL players who died on active service. Its footing is made of wood taken from a munitions wagon used at Villers-Bretonneux in France and its columns include metal from Gallipoli. In the tradition of Anzac soldiers who played sport on the first Anzac anniversary in 1916, the **Anzac Day Medal** (a bronze cross made of battlefield metal) is awarded to the player who best exemplifies the "Anzac spirit" of *skill, courage, self-sacrifice, teamwork and fair play*.



Exalting Christ on Anzac Day

Churches could highlight the gospel within Anzac Day events including the Dawn Service or other commemorations that feature the playing of a bugle, a flag ceremony, a minute of silence, service personnel in uniform, the laying of wreaths, wearing sprigs of rosemary, and reciting the *Ode to the Fallen*. Sunday Schools could bake Anzac biscuits, and children's choirs may sing *God bless Australia*. A screening of the Anzac Day football match along with a community BBQ is another outreach possibility.



Such events may describe **John Simpson Kirkpatrick** (1892 - 1915) as he reflected Christ. Lasting for only 24 days, Simpson and his donkey rescued many soldiers at Gallipoli. Dead at 22, he was regarded as "like Christ" - who said of himself: *"Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends"* (John 15:13), and *"I am among you as one who serves"* (Luke 22:27).

Family Voice AUSTRALIA
4th Floor, 68 Grenfell St, Adelaide SA 5000
ddl@fava.org.au www.fava.org.au
Phone: +618 8223 6383

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