

PACIFISM CONVOCATION

Title: Should we celebrate Armistice Day?

Sub-title: Remembering Charles Strong

Pioneer Pacifist of the 19th Century

Sunday Nov. 11, 2018



- Program 10.00 Peace Service honouring Charles Strong
11.00 Charles Strong & Armistice Day – Robert Crotty
Launch – *Remembering Charles Strong*
12.30 Lunch
1.30 The Pacifism of Charles Strong
Moral Dimension – John May
Peace Women Dimension – Ruth Russell
Spiritual Dimension – Norman Habel
Political Dimension – Marion Maddox
4.00 Anti-War Armistice Day Declaration

Charles Strong Pioneer Australian Pacifist

Biography

1844 - Born at Dailly, Ayrshire (Scotland), completed MA at 18.

1885 - Founded the Australia Church in Melbourne, a radical church with a focus on social justice rather than doctrine, a bold church where pacifism in Australia was born and cultivated by both men and women

1899 – Opposed the Boer War as a war of conquest and repression, siding with the Boers and declaring the war contrary to the spirit of Christ

1899 – Delivered his famous Sermon on Democracy and War: *I cannot reconcile war and democracy, war and the Christianity of Christ...*

1905 – Founded the first Melbourne Peace Society and obtained a promise from Rose Scott to initiate a Peace Society in Sydney

1914 – Helped form the Melbourne branch of The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, working with Miss Eleanor Moore, also a member of the Australia Church

1915 – Opposed the invasion of Turkey at Gallipoli and WWI – son suffered in the war.

1916 - Refused to sing the national anthem at the end of church services

1917 – Circulated an anti-conscription manifesto against government policy: *A new religion is coming into being, it is the religion of the State; the State replaces God and the national flag replaces the cross...*

1920– Bewildered by death of his wife, his greatest ally and advocate

1920 – Controversial address 'Thoughts on Armistice Day'

Jesus said, 'Love your enemies; do good to them that hate you.' I do not find in the celebrations of Armistice Day any sign of this spirit, any prayer for Germans, Austrians or Russians. Are they not our brothers & sisters?

1942 – Died in Melbourne, 98 years of age after 70 years of pacifism

CHARLES STRONG AND ARMISTICE DAY

Robert Crotty

- The Australian attitude to war and peace in the early twentieth century: commitment to England, the two conscription referenda, the political acumen of 'Billy' Hughes versus Daniel Mannix and Charles Strong.
- Charles Strong was the minister of the Presbyterian Church in Melbourne. He became the first minister of the Australian Church and drafted a plan for a non-dogmatic Christianity, dedicated to good works. Amongst Strong's pressing social concerns was the question of war. It was in November 1920, when the war was over, that Strong delivered a sermon on the first Australian Armistice Day.

(Armistice Day) brings to us thoughts other than this. It brings the thought of our share in the guilt and shame of the great Christian war, in which Christian Governments, supported by Christian Churches, offered up millions of Europe's and India's best and bravest as sacrifice to Mars.

His conclusion runs:

I fear that Armistice Day did not bring any repentance, any sense of responsibility for the war, any sense of the awful scandal to Christendom which such a spectacle as that of the so-called Christian nations grappling with each other like devils, in the name of God and Christ, and 'the Cross' of Love, involves.

- Strong's attitude to the establishment of Armistice Day must be seen in the context of his attitude to war. Ideally there should be no war; his Christianity was incompatible with war. But he qualified his pacifism. He would condone the use of force in self-defence, a situation which he did not see as likely in modern society, particularly Australia. In the Australian context: why should Australia need to go to war if there was no-one attacking it? He wrote:

The country must be defended...Let it be defended by free men, not by slaves. Devise some scheme for its defence that will not infringe the great British principles of Religious Liberty and Democratic Liberty.

This was written prior to World War I. However, in the lead-up to World War II, the world situation changed. He was confronted with the Fascist regimes in Germany and Italy, the communist regime in Russia. Self-defence within the Australian context became a real need.

- He maintained a position that World War II needed to be fought, but only for the noblest of motives and with the deepest of regrets. It needed to be fought by free men. Gradually he had thought out what pacifism meant to him. It is within this context, and with a broad knowledge of the state of the world today, that we need to construct a Remembrance Day that would be in keeping with Charles Strong.
- What would Strong require of a Remembrance Day in 2018?
Is Strong's 'qualified pacifism', as against 'absolute pacifism' a legitimate ethical stance?
Would Strong have attended a Remembrance Day march today?

The Pacifism of Charles Strong

The Moral Dimension

John D'Arcy May

Pacifism may be called a Christian initiative, and from the very beginning it was posed as a moral issue. The scattered churches of the first three Christian centuries were by and large pacifist. Serving in the Roman army was condemned on the grounds that it was idolatrous, because it involved an oath of loyalty (*sacramentum*) to the Emperor, who was by then regarded as divine. But also, and more enduringly, it was rejected because the spilling of human blood was seen as immoral under any circumstances (*horror sanguinis*).

Even before the accession and conversion of Constantine, Christians had become soldiers and some had died rather than take the oath and kill enemies. But military service was already being rationalised as civic duty towards legitimate authority; the Christian soldier properly belonged to a 'bloodless army', so he should try to avoid actual bloodshed. The outlines of the pacifist dilemma began to emerge: while individual morality forbade killing, political morality might demand it in the service of the state. Pacifism soon became a minority protest movement, and for many centuries it practically disappeared.

Around the time of the Reformation, however, a number of the sectarian movements that emerged were pacifist, and suffered social isolation for their stance, though some, like the Anabaptists who took control of Münster or those associated with the peasants' revolt led by Thomas Müntzer, resorted to violence. The true pacifists faced the classical dilemma: could the service of the state be justified for Christians when it sanctioned the use of force, not just for internal order (policing) but for foreign conquest (military)? Pacifists were able to seek exemptions from military service while remaining good citizens, but in the course of time they generally conformed to the prevailing *raison d'état*.

Influential Quakers, however, made the case for pacifism on political grounds: war was unjust not only because it shed innocent blood but because it was the instrument of unjust oppression and colonial aggrandisement. Nevertheless, a number of influential pacifists relapsed in the face of imminent danger, notably during the American Civil War and the First World War. Tolstoy found his way to pacifism after having served in the Tsar's army, but he was dismissed as an idealistic dreamer. Gandhi, inspired in part by Tolstoy, embraced non-violence but still approved of Britain's participation in World War I. Dietrich Bonhoeffer agonised over the decision to support the plot to assassinate Hitler and justified it by taking guilt upon himself in imitation of Christ. Reinhold Niebuhr resolved the dilemma by making a clear distinction between personal and political morality: pacifism is a counsel of perfection which owes as much to humanistic optimism as to the gospel; the only answer to the challenge of fascism is to resist with military force. First came the defeat of Nazism, then the rebuilding of Europe. Martin Luther King opted for a 'realistic pacifism'.

Whatever about the deontological justification of pacifism based on absolute principles, after World War II a consequentialist ethic gained acceptance: the horrors of nuclear warfare overruled all other considerations. The anti-war internationalism foreshadowed by Immanuel Kant remains relevant: rather than simply condemn war, we must seek non-violent ways of avoiding international conflict. If the classical 'just war' doctrine is discredited, it makes sense to develop strategies for a 'just peace'.

Rev Charles Strong and Women's International League for Peace & Freedom

Ruth Russell

This chapter covers Rev Strong, his wife Jessie and daughter Helen's amazing long-term relationship, spanning over forty years, diligently promoting peace.

Federation in 1901 brought a great feeling of agency and self-reliance with the belief that Australians could mould their own destiny. Women had formerly been relegated to *wives, daughters and home maker* roles. They now saw themselves taking an equal place beside men to build a great new future.

Australian Church members included many suffragettes, such as Vida Goldstein and Cecilia John, who worked tirelessly to secure the vote for women in Victoria in 1902 (second in the world after NZ in 1893). Jessie Strong became President of the new *National Council of Women* in 1902.

This new spirit of independence, hope and inclusion was especially fostered by Rev Strong (who was also spiritual advisor to Alfred Deakin, who negotiated the terms for Australia's independence from Britain (proclaimed in 1901) and became the second Australian Prime Minister).

Other women followers of Rev Strong - Eleanor Moore, Mabel Drummond and Jane Kerr, after listening to Rev Strong's sermon that *women had an important role to play*, followed his advice and established their own women's peace group - **The Sisterhood of International Peace** with "justice, friendship and arbitration" as their motto and connected with like-minded women in other countries. Their firm belief was that all disputes are capable of resolution via arbitration NOT war as stated in the 1915 **International Congress of Women's "Principles for Permanent Peace."**

In 1919 they changed their name to Women's International League for Peace & Freedom (WILPF) thus linking themselves formally to this international women's peace organisation, and establishing branches across Australia.

WILPF women in Victoria were honoured for their huge petition to support world disarmament in the 1930s by a packed assembly in the Melbourne Town Hall with many dignitaries and Members of Parliament supporting their call for world disarmament. Their petition is still on display in a special room built onto the *League of Nations* building in Geneva.

Early in 1915 another amazing collaboration was formed with Rev Strong and the WILPF women, especially Mabel Drummond. Together they collated information and regularly published their peace journal "*Peacewards*". This publication withstood the censor's test during World War One and continued to be a sought after publication right up to Rev Strong's death in 1942.

WILPF women today continue to work for a peaceful world and honour our fruitful relationship with Rev Strong and his family.

The Pacifism of Charles Strong

The Spiritual Dimension – Norman Habel

Radical Spirituality

In his work *Christianity Re-interpreted*, Strong argues that Christianity re-interpreted escapes from 'carnal' theologies, dogma as well as infallible books and presents itself as a 'Spiritual Life'.

More and more it is felt that true Christian Religion is not worship of the letter of a book, or acceptance of church dogma, or observance of a priestly ritual, or a historical belief about events said to have happened in a distant past, but a spirit of life, an atmosphere in which we breathe, an inner force that constrains, an ideal of character to which we aspire and strive both personally and socially, which we sum up in the great little word "Love." (Badger, 1971, p, 313).

The Kingdom of Love

For Strong Spirituality is not only 'a spirit of life' for the individual to foster, but also as ideal to which we are to aspire socially, an ideal summed up in 'the great little word Love'. In the eyes of Strong Jesus understands the Kingdom of God as the Kingdom of Love'.

You must have a deeper religion, whose moving spring is not the Law, however hallowed and holy, but love of God and love of man which puts mercy to your suffering fellow-beings, and forgiveness of enemies, and reparation of injuries, before even the Sabbath law (Badger, pp. 70-71)

The Kingdom of Love according to Strong is the Spirit at work in the hearts and minds of those who know Christ, the process of transforming society by the intense practice/law of love and a transformed society which becomes a spiritual family, the family of God.

Love and War

Strong understands wars to be a violation of the law of love in its many manifestations. War is not only a moral wrong, but also a violation of the essential spiritual bond between humans and between humans and God.

Nor can we as true Christians any longer love selfishly. We are Christians first, Britons, Boers, Germans, Frenchmen second. Our religion knows but one law—Love, respect, serve, bless your fellow-men.

War violates the Spirit of Christ. And War violates the law of Love.

Charles Strong's Pacifism

The Political Dimension

Marion Maddox

Strong's Political Framework: British Idealism

Strong and many of those who worked with him were deeply influenced by the theological and philosophical traditions of British idealism. They used a variety of terms to describe the political position that followed from their form of idealism, including liberalism, radicalism, and socialism.

- Elite radicalism—working with power
- Friendship, not class conflict.

The Australian Church's Political Network and Political Strategy

A network of people with the capacity, and the will, to shape public policy.

Examples: Samuel Mauger; Alfred Deakin; Jacob, Isabella & Vida Goldstein; Alice Henry; Henry Bournes Higgins; George Higinbotham.

The church's political strategy involved working through institutional channels or, if these did not exist, creating new ones: reformist, not revolutionary.

Politics of Peace

Melbourne Peace and Humanity Society, founded 1900:

- Unusually ecumenical, including Catholics
- Campaigned against South African War, Russo-Japanese War

Sisterhood of International Peace, founded 1915

- Differences of strategy: institutional vs direct action

Discussion:

- What are the biggest threats to peace today?
- What needs to change, for these threats to be reduced?
- Which is more effective: direct action (demonstrations, civil disobedience, etc.) or institutional methods (lobbying, setting up organisations, etc.)?



Charles Strong—December 189

I cannot reconcile war and democracy, war and the Christianity of Christ.

I do not see how a truly democratic people who have outgrown the despotic, feudal and aristocratic eras can rightly seek to compel another democratic people to do as they bid, especially when the stronger power has repudiated all wish to interfere with the internal government of the weaker, and years ago had said, 'Govern yourselves'. Nor can I see how—even if there were political injustice and wrong, the Christian can ever feel justified in righting—it by murder, the legal murder of thousands, and all the horrors with which we are—alas!—too familiar.

Must we not love our country, brethren, with a purer, nobler, less selfish, love? You cannot love too much all that is great and good in it. You cannot do too much to serve it—to preserve its institutions, to carry out the great principles of civil and religious freedom on which it rests, to make its people, contented happy and prosperous. But we can no longer as true democrats love it selfishly. The cause of the people is Britain's and Australia's cause, and the people are one, whether British, German, French or Boer.

Nor can we as true Christians any longer love selfishly. We are Christians first. Britons, Boers, Germans, Frenchmen second. Our religion knows but one law—Love, respect, serve, bless you fellow-men!

Act out your democratic principles—act out your Christian principles, and I do not say that you may

never have to arrest the knaves and dastards as Carlyle says, or that you may never have to resist the attack of barbarians on your homes and hearths, but I do say the occasions will be comparatively few on which you will feel called to draw the sword. War will fall as much into disrepute as duelling, and such dreadful scenes as those which today fill our hearts with sadness will be absolutely impossible. I call on you as the Christian Democracy to discourage war. If you truly love your country and wish it to be not dreaded but loved; if you truly love your fellowmen, discourage it, speak against it, agitate against it, though many may laugh and sneer, and so help prepare the advent of the Prince of Peace and the Kingdom of the Son of Man for which we daily pray.