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A recent article in the Australian by Greg Sheridan^[1] pointed out that the census has shown that barely half of the population identifies as Christian and that the future will make us a minority. The article was bemoaning the loss of Christian influence in society.

It was heartening to read that somebody is worried about what will happen without our Christian underpinnings. Jesus teachings are still revolutionary more so in our modern world. At a recent meeting of Education leaders in the Diocese, Stephen Harrison, the mission leader of the Anglican Schools Commission in Brisbane pointed out that there is a need to be more relevant to the increasingly secular families that are coming to Anglican Schools. Part of this is the need to educate our increasingly secular school communities in how Christianity underpins so much of what is good in our society and how despite our past institutional failures Christianity remains the force for good in the World.

Jesus' teachings are not necessarily popular, loving one's neighbour and one's enemy, turning the other cheek, forgiving not seven times but seven times seventy, caring for those who no one else cares for, not passing by on the other side, going in search of the one and leaving the 99, celebrating the prodigal and respecting relationships are alien thoughts in today's increasingly brutal society. Our society is so often driven by fear and is increasingly only interested in self, instant gratification and vengeance rather than justice. As Greg Sheridan says in his article "It has been rightly said that when people stop believing in God they don't believe in nothing, they believe in anything." The important thing to remember though is that we have been here before but not in our living memory.

We need to "reconceive ourselves as minorities" and resist being excluded from the market place of ideas and discussions on moral and social issues. Our most unpopular messages with some will not be about marriage equality or gay rights; they will, amongst other things, be around caring for others and not judging them, about justice not vengeance, about forgiveness, about compassion, about looking after refugees and other unpopular minorities. It will be unpopular because it is about love and not being persuaded to live in fear.

Unfortunately, fear is a justification for some of our society's worst excesses and it drives us as a society to look for scapegoats. Our approach to fear may be our greatest selling point to a world who have lost hope as they have lost Christianity, because Jesus has removed our fear. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love". (1 John 4:18)

So! Can it be that difficult for us? No, it can't if we engage:

- through our schools, (around 7,000 Students). It would be unfortunate if we could not succeed in giving our students a positive view of Christianity during their time with us;
- through our examples of compassion and inclusiveness including Anglicare and parish initiatives; and

- through our involvement in social justice issues led by St Mark's Theological Centre, our Social Justice Commission, Anglicare, some of our parishes and the Australian Centre for Christianity and Culture. Greg Sheridan in his article also said, "On refugee policy I think that the bipartisan approach of strong borders has been justified and effective and reduced harm overall, but I am in a sense happy that the churches haven't quite reached this position, because their overwhelming first instinct is simply to care for the refugees".

We have an advantage, we have the "Good News" to tell, that Christ has given us the opportunity for new beginnings and new life and we have St Paul as an example and his advice to his friends and fellow Christians in Rome:

⁹ Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; ¹⁰ love one another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour ... ¹⁷ Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought for what is noble in the sight of all. ¹⁸ If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. Romans 12:9-10, 17-18

One wonders what our western world would have been like without the influence of Christ for the last 2,000 years.

Grace and Peace

David Holmesby
Chair Anglican Schools Commission

[1] Greg Sheridan (Foreign Editor), 'Taking Christianity out of Western Culture will change us utterly', The Weekend Australian, 26 August 2017