



# The Conscientious Objectors, Part 2

## Opening

What if our theology could get up from our armchairs and move into our world? That would be something worth paying attention to. This is The Armchair Anabaptist podcast.

<intro song> Lay your guns down, down on the floor. There ain't no good in those guns anymore. Take my hand and let me kiss your feet. Let our friendship be sweet. <end>

“Because Mennonites have usually found that the way to faithfulness is to separate from others and eventually if only I am here, then at least I'll agree with myself.”

“And I don't think that we can say we love someone and then shoot them. It doesn't make sense.”

“I always tell folks that, ‘Look at - if you're in a debate and winning the debate becomes more important than reflecting love towards the person you're debating, then do the Kingdom of God a great service and shut up.’”

“How do we encourage people to see nonviolence as something more than a position about war?”

“Because we're not just sitting around doing podcasts and theology, we're actually trying to live our lives as Christians.”

<song> This is a reckoning between you and me. The righting of all wrongs as we eat and as we drink. <end>

## Introduction

**Kevin Wiebe:** You're listening to The Armchair Anabaptist, and this is episode number six, The Conscientious Objectors, Part Two. I'm Kevin Wiebe.

**Jesse Penner:** And I'm Jesse Penner and we're your hosts. We are continuing this look at conscientious objection and if we thought that last week was a little bit sticky, this week it gets even more complicated. We started off by looking at the theology of conscientious objection. How have Mennonites and Anabaptists understood the relationship between what Jesus taught about peace and the choice not to go to war, and how those things sort of line up. This week we kind of dive into some of the practical fallout of that sort of a

decision. It's something that we can talk about in theological terms, but it's something that has deep and profound impact on our day-to-day lives, our relationships with our neighbours and of course when our country chooses to go to war as it has in the past, it has huge implications for how our community operates during that time and how we interact with the people around us. So we're going to be looking at a couple of questions. We've got the same panel of guests coming back to dig into this once again.

**KW:** And this isn't just a theory for some people, and in the past this has impacted relationships and this has marked communities for generations where it has changed the course of a community. Where their relationships change direction, where the shape of their community changed as a result of some of these decisions. As we're going to look at through the course of today's episode.

We're going to be talking to Dr. Thomas Yoder Neufeld, to Pastor Cyndy Warkentin, to Dr. Layton Friesen and as well, we had a chance to talk to Dr. Ronald J. Sider before his passing last year.

Dr. Ronald Sider was the founder and President Emeritus of Evangelicals for Social Action, and he was the Distinguished Professor of Theology, Holistic Ministry and Public Policy at Palmer Theological Seminary. He also was the author of numerous books, including the *Early Church on Killing*, *If Jesus is Lord*, and *Nonviolent Action*.

One of the questions we asked Dr. Sider was, how do we grapple with the fact that conscientious objectors benefited from violence, even though they refused to take part in it. This is what he had to say.

**How do we grapple with the fact that conscientious objectors benefited from violence when they refused to take part in it and pay that cost?**

**Dr. Ronald J. Sider:** I think that the answer to that has to be that pacifists, Mennonites, are willing to engage in just as risky, costly activity as *just war* people or we have no integrity. I gave the peace lecture at the Mennonite World Conference in 1984 and I spelled that out pointedly and called on the Mennonite church to develop a new emphasis on nonviolent direct action in the spirit of Dr. Martin Luther King and Gandhi, and so on.

And the Mennonite and Brethren in Christ churches at the top leadership level in Canada and the US studied that carefully and after two years said yes, that is consistent with our anabaptist peace message.

And as a result of that, Christian peacemaker teams developed. It's been modest, but it has developed and some hundreds of people have been engaged. We just need much, much larger efforts of that sort to give real integrity to the claim that we have an alternative and that we are willing to risk our lives and even risk death just as much as a soldier is.

**KW:** Dr. Sider had mentioned that he had challenged the church to make our efforts at nonviolent action and nonviolent conflict resolution to be larger and to take this on as a church as a whole, but that it had over the years, remained relatively modest. I asked him why he thought this didn't gain more traction.

**Dr. RS:** Yeah, that's hard. It's not clear. I think one of the things that one needs to say is that our leadership has never really encouraged us to try it at a large level. Even with the Mennonite response to my proposal in 1984, the top leadership spent two years studying it but then they basically... my dream was to have that at the centre of every congregation and at the centre of the church, so that when we were marching into the face of violence, wherever, we would have all night prayer meetings in lots of our congregations.

And unfortunately, top leadership of the Mennonite Church didn't really jump in and continue to embrace it. They said it's a good thing, but they didn't then continue to carry it out. They left the kind of radical social justice circle folks - and thank God for them, I'm glad they cared about it and they showed that it works, but it didn't stay at the centre of the church.

**JP:** We asked Cyndy Warkentin, EMC pastor of Saturday Night Church, the same question - how do we grapple with the fact that conscientious objectors benefited from violence when they refused to take part in it and pay that cost?

**Cyndy Warkentin:** Yeah, that's certainly complicated. How did they benefit? I mean their lives were spared, they didn't experience death or the horror or the trauma of war. But I guess as I think of the conscientious objectors, I also think that it probably wasn't an easy decision for most of them.

I also suspect that there were some who might have preferred to go to war but they were told by their pastors and their deacons that they would lose salvation or lose their church membership, which sometimes back then was the same thing, if they did go to war. And so they obeyed their ministers and did what they were told.

I actually think it was very complicated for a lot of them to make that decision and even though the church elders may have thought through their convictions on that issue, I sometimes wonder how those young men, if they actually had thought through to the same extent that their church elders had. But they obeyed.

And I mean, it is certainly something that they were raised with, as I have been raised with that idea, but I think it probably was more complicated and not quite as black and white as we'd like to think it was. But at the same time, I think they did benefit in some ways, but perhaps all of us who didn't go to war benefited, not just the COs.

And I think that the alternate service that they did was also important work that wouldn't have been done during that time if it hadn't been for the COs, but it was certainly safer

and much less scary for them to do things like plant trees and fight forest fires and work in hospitals or institutions for the mentally ill. That was a whole lot easier than going to the front lines and being shot.

Although I have to say I'm leery of the rhetoric of 'sacrificing their lives for freedom' that we ought so often hear, especially south of the border, but we hear that in Canada around Remembrance Day too, of people who've 'sacrificed their lives for freedom' because I always think that that war is actually a grab for power and for wealth and control, and it's the men and the women who are doing the fighting who actually pay with their lives or maybe years of trauma. And it's the men of power and wealth who stay behind the scenes and pull the strings and further their wealth and power from it.

Or if they're on the losing side, then they seek revenge once they've gained enough wealth and power again, and so that cycle goes on and on. It's not a once and for all thing generally. There's always trouble that continues to brew and I think we see that in our own times as well.

I recognize that someone like Hitler needed to be stopped. And I don't know how that could have been done without military intervention. I would like to think that there if had there been some creative solutions and some better ways of talking and of stopping him, I don't know. I would like to have seen a peaceful situation and solution rather than having to go to war.

I think the whole thing with conscientious objectors is complicated, and there's lots of nuances and it's more difficult than it seemed.

So did they benefit? Yeah, in some ways they did, for sure, and in other ways I don't think that it was as easy and cut and dried as it appeared.

**JP:** As we discussed with Pastor Cyndy, we also covered the fact that this was not a unanimous thing for Mennonite communities. There were people within these communities that did go to war and that was often something that created huge tension. Pastor Cyndy had a story from her own family that illustrated this.

**CW:** My husband has an uncle who fought in World War Two and was killed and died with a Bible in his pocket. That gave hope to some of his family members that he was a believer and that he hadn't abandoned his faith just because he had gone to war.

But I know my mother-in-law, she could barely talk about him, because in her mind he had gone to war and he had been killed in war, and so he went to a Christless eternity. There are lots of complicated things around all of that.

**JP:** Dr. Layton Friesen is the Academic Dean at Steinbach Bible College and the author of *Secular Nonviolence* and *the Theo Drama of Peace*. We presented the same question to

him. How do we grapple with the fact that conscientious objectors benefited from violence even though they refused to take part in it? Here are Layton's thoughts.

**Dr. Layton Friesen:** Yeah, that's been a very difficult, existential struggle for a lot of nonviolent or conscientious objectors. At a very superficial level, I would say that's a problem for a lot of people, I mean not nearly everybody goes off to fight in a war, there's lots and lots of people who stay home for whatever reason. Only a small fraction of the people actually go off and fight a war. And so what about all those people, they have the same issue really, they're benefiting from the sacrifices of others and how do they live with themselves. So in the superficial sense, I mean, maybe we can join them, but that's not really answering the question, I don't think.

I think I would go back to what was said earlier about the church and the state and their different roles in God's Providence. As I said, God has permitted the state to use the sword. God is willing to use the state and its bloody mechanism to keep a lid on violence.

And the reason God does this, I believe is because some good can come out of it. The way I understand it, the reason why God permits the state to use the sword in this way is so that the church has the time and the place it needs to preach the gospel. If the state didn't do this, the world would just descend into anarchy and chaos, and there would be no way for the church to actually be a witness in the world.

And so God is able to use the state in its actions, and that there is actually some benefit to that, and I don't think that's actually a problem, because if God chooses to use something then clearly there's going to be some benefit, there's going to be some reason for that. So if God is able to use things that are ultimately evil and that he finally wants to rid the world of for his own purpose, and if God chooses to turn evil towards his own purposes, I don't know why Christians would reject that.

I mean, that's just God in his infinite wisdom, using the sin and evilness of this world for his own purposes and if God chooses to do that, we shouldn't reject the good that comes out of that I don't think.

And so that would be one way in which I would respond to that. But I think there's also a further sense in which we need to take this question seriously, and that is if we truly believe in the power of forgiving love to heal the world, then we also need to be willing to suffer for the sake of the gospel. If it really is the case that only people enrolled in the military and going off to fight wars, if it really is the case that those are the only people who are suffering for the good of the world, well, yeah, that is a serious problem then for the church. But if the church is also suffering, out of love, through its mission work, in evangelism and through its feeding the poor, through its standing with people who are oppressed and abused around the world, through its intervention in places of conflict in peaceful means, you know if the church is also suffering and loving along with its

neighbours in ways that we can do, in ways that we are encouraged to do. If we are suffering along with the world, then I don't think that the charge has quite as much sticking power.

But yes, if we are recusing ourselves to live in isolated, wealthy communities that kind of look idyllic, and that are kind of insulated from the suffering of the world. If that has actually ever happened I would have to be convinced that was actually what was happening because there was still lots of loving and suffering and whatever going on in these communities. But if that is actually what is happening, that would be a problem. Yeah, that would be a challenge, but I don't think that that necessarily says that Jesus' commands to love our enemies is wrong. It just means that we haven't figured out a way to do it in a healthy way or in a way that really communicates Jesus's love and willingness to suffer for the world.

Have Christians always got this right? Have we always succeeded in kind of keeping all of this together? No, we haven't. It's a very, very difficult thing to do. Love your enemies in the way that Jesus did and we will struggle with it from time to time as we have in the past.

**KW:** Dr. Thomas Yoder Neufeld is Professor Emeritus of Religious and Theological Studies at Conrad Grebel University College. He is the author of the book *Killing Enmity*, and he is the chair of the Faith and Life Commission of the Mennonite World Conference.

When we talked to Dr. Thomas Yoder Neufeld, we also asked him about this question of how conscientious objectors benefited from violence even though they refused to take part in it, here's what he had to say.

**Dr. Thomas Yoder Neufeld:** I get that, and I think that's often been the feeling on the part of the larger culture, vis-à-vis Quakers in England, who suffered huge marginalization because of their stance, and Mennonites. I think benefiting, so to speak, from the fight others have carried is a very old story, and it's interestingly not one that just goes to Mennonites. Anybody who was deferred for whatever reasons from the draft, you might say benefited. Women have benefited from the fact that men have done the fighting, et cetera.

That's not to trivialize your point. It's a very important one. Interestingly, we have been more sensitive to that one than we have about the fact that we have benefited from the violence of others. Whenever we went on migration, we've usually come to places where indigenous peoples have been removed, often violently so that we can live in peace. So this is a very, very complex and deep story. None of us can point to others or go back to World War Two. We live with the fruit of that right now here in Canada as we are trying to come to terms with what it has meant to be settlers in a land that was populated by

nations who already existed here and many of whom were very forcibly, sometimes physically, but at least also culturally, removed or decimated even.

And we've benefited. Our farms are on land where the great-grandchildren are still living. And we're on that land. We're thankfully trying to find ways of becoming conscious of that and addressing that and acting in relation to that.

Interestingly, when it comes to war, in World War Two, almost half or something like half of Mennonite young men enlisted. So this question weighed on many of them. I can't sit here and have my friends go, et cetera. But many others did, and they were plagued by your question.

So what do you do?

Well, you become a conscientious objector, and until World War Two, there was no alternative service. That took a lot of lobbying and a lot of organizing, et cetera. And what happened in World War Two is that finally many young Mennonite men were allowed to perform service to the country, which they did very willingly without bearing arms.

Some became medics in the military. That was true more in Russia in World War One. My grandfather was a medic. Many young Mennonite men served on the hospital trains. Well for some that was too much, but in Canada and the US, COs went to work in mental hospitals and shelters in which people who were mentally ill or disabled were essentially warehoused. So they were on the forefront of changing the culture of how you respond to mental illness.

Some of them sacrificed themselves to be guinea pigs, you might say. There was an experiment in Minnesota. Guinea pigs in a process in which they were trying to see what happens when people starve, what happens to their body and how can you respond to that? These people would voluntarily give themselves to that. That's not unrelated to your question, because deep within us, none of us thinks it's morally right to benefit from somebody else securing our security at great cost to themselves and where we just benefit. So I think that's an ongoing issue for us as we try to sort that through.

How you hold that together with Jesus's clear injunctions about loving the enemy and not retaliating. That's the rub you might say, but I think we benefit constantly from the work others are doing without always feeling that moral burden. It's just that wartime raises that to a very, very high degree.

**KW:** I find these interviews thus far to be both insightful and a little bit convicting. There are these different pieces that are addressed in this question of asking how we grapple with the fact that conscientious objectors benefit from violence even though they refuse to participate in violence, and on the one hand, there's kind of a disarming that happens, cause this question sometimes gets asked in a way that's kind of disingenuous, where it's

almost a ploy or a fallacious way of asking it. I know this because before I joined the ranks of those in the peace position I would ask it in this way, where I would ask, “so you're going to benefit from violence, so you're not going to participate in it yourselves,” as if I myself had gone to war and was going to sacrifice my life; as if I had done something when I hadn't. There was no war. There was no draft. There was no sacrifice to be made, so I made no more sacrifice than anyone else. It was all just this theory, mind game, this hypothetical situation where now I'm somehow on the High Road in this glorious pie-in-the-sky hypothetical and then I can feel good about myself whereas other people are now taking the lower road because they're preserving themselves at the cost of someone else. It kind of exposes some of that, where you know, no, we haven't had a draft in several generations and it kind of exposes a little bit of that, as well looking at if we're going to be very hard on everybody who's benefited unfairly, then there's a lot of other demographics that we could be talking about here, which we typically don't in these kinds of conversations.

But I also appreciate how, on the flip side they take this question very seriously, because we should grapple with it, and I especially appreciated Dr. Yoder Neufeld's response about looking at, for instance, indigenous territories and lands and some of those kinds of questions that we should be grappling with of benefiting from the violence that was done in the past and our own Anabaptist history in that regard.

JP: Absolutely, as so often seems to happen with these kinds of questions, it becomes something much deeper than just the original question. As we process this question of violence and benefiting from violence, I found that very convicting as well, I think that's a word that you used, to hear Dr. Yoder Neufeld talk about recognizing that we have benefited from violence in many more ways than just staying home from war, and in fact as we go through our lives now, there are so many different ways that I can think about that we live a life that has benefited from all types of violence on many other people around the world.

Think about the way we choose to consume, the things we choose to buy and the ethics behind those kinds of choices as well. There is potential in many ways for us to feed off of violence done to other people. It's a bigger question than just war. However, this episode is focused in on that very specific piece of it and a very, very sharp edge in terms of how we think about this question, because it is such a black-and-white thing, you either go or you don't.

I appreciate the nuance that people have come to this with kind of wrestling through it and coming at it from different angles. It's been a good journey to walk alongside these wise minds as they have processed this and I trust it's been edifying for you, as you've listened, as well as it has been for Kevin and me, as we've been able to walk through this episode.



**KW:** We're going to look at a very specific example, a case study if you will, of what happened to some conscientious objectors and ways that they benefited after World War Two.

After World War Two countless men died in the war and their families often were not able to sustain their farms and properties. In some small towns that lost large numbers of people in the war, there was a large influx of properties suddenly available for purchase. And if you know anything about real estate, when there's a large number of homes for sale in a small town and a small real estate market, then the value of those properties goes down.

When there's an increase in supply then there's a decrease in price because there are not as many people available to buy them. And so these farms, they sold for a fraction of what they were worth. Now, who was left after the war to purchase such properties? Well, at this point in time, in some communities, it was conscientious objectors, Mennonite conscientious objectors.

This led to tensions in the community. These farms were lost by those who had fought and died in the war. People who had given their lives to fight for their country to secure the freedoms of their nation. Then people who had refused to fight bought these properties for a fraction of what they were worth.

The question we asked was how we should view such events. Of course, for those who had refused to go to war, they did so because they believed this was what God had called them to do. And now of course they were able to afford more farmland, they were able to buy properties at a reduced rate, so for them I'm certain that they felt like it was God's blessing for their faithfulness. On the flip side, there were those who viewed it as opportunistic religious cowardice.

This was a question that we asked our guests. How are we to view these kinds of events? How do we look at these sorts of situations in history? In this particular case study in history? God's blessing or something more nefarious? Here is Dr. Sider.

**RS:** Well, I had not been aware of that particular set of things, but it seems to me that what a proper Christian, Jesus-centred approach would have been for those conscientious objectors and their congregations to say, 'we will walk with you. We will work with you. We will, in fact, not take economic advantage of this situation. We'll help you get your property back and get on your feet.' That would have been, it seems to me the proper response and that would have changed the dynamic in an enormously powerful way.

**JP:** We also asked Pastor Cyndy Warkentin about this. This was her response.

**CW:** Actually, I was not aware that that had happened until I received these questions, so I found that disturbing to hear that that did happen. I think Mennonites have always been ambitious and have called it a godly work ethic.

I wonder, for those families or those young men that got a hold of this cheap land, if they ever considered how that looked to their neighbours. Did they wonder about what kind of a witness or testimony they were? Did it occur to them that they were taking advantage of something, or were they simply thinking, 'oh, you know, being a good Mennonite I can get this land for cheap and I'm going to make something of it?' I wonder about that.

I also wonder just simply how self-aware they were, and did they care how their practices affected others, outsiders, right? I mean, the Mennonites often have been quite closed communities, or in general, especially back during the world wars. They thought they had a corner on truth, I think to some extent and so did they even consider some of that.

Sometimes even now I look at the tremendous wealth of Mennonites and I wonder if it's God's blessing or if it crosses the line into greed and entitlement. And sometimes I see hallmarks of the latter and that concerns me. I wonder what kind of an impression, for a family who had lost a son or two or three in the war and couldn't sustain their farm, and then a Mennonite who had worked as a conscientious objector came waltzing in and snapped up their land because they couldn't afford to keep it. How painful that must have been for those people.

And I look at the human, the feelings, the emotions behind that and that makes me very sad. I don't think I don't see that necessarily as God's blessing. I see that as being somewhat opportunistic.

**JP:** As we talked about this case study with Dr. Layton Friesen, he wrestled with the church's calling in a time like this, how should we be responding to these sorts of situations?

**LF:** Well, I'm not familiar with the particular issue that you addressed here but my gut reaction would be to ask what would a church that has learned to consider others better than themselves, what would they do in a situation like that?

I mean, what does it actually mean to love your enemies? What does it actually mean to treat people who disagree with us as better than ourselves, as worthy of more care than ourselves, as deserving more love and attention than ourselves? I think that's where we have to think of loving our enemies, not just in terms of kind of fulfilling a command, but of getting down into the very heart of Jesus's posture towards his enemies.

Is there a way to help people who have suffered because of war, and people can be a victim of war in all kinds of ways. But as Christians, I don't think we have any interest in ensuring that people who don't agree with us suffer for their actions as much as possible.

That's not really a concern for us, to make sure that people who disagree with us have a bad life.

I think it's actually the opposite. There is something about us as Christians that wants people to prosper, that wants people to do well, even people who we disagree with. My hope would be that Christians who refuse to fight in war because of their beliefs about Jesus would have the same love for their neighbours for the people who they refuse to kill on the battlefield. That they would have a concern for their neighbours so that if their neighbours are in a tough spot and are unable to sustain their farms any longer that they would find ways of helping them.

I don't know exactly what that would look like in that particular situation. I'm kind of reminded here a little bit of the Jubilee laws in Leviticus, where if a person got into a situation where they simply couldn't afford their land anymore or because of some misfortune had to sell their land, there was a provision in the law that every so and so often, every 50 years there would be a year of Jubilee, when all of this would come back.

That's kind of addressing that same instinct that there's a certain kind of mercy involved in an arrangement like that, where if somebody, because of whatever misfortune loses their land, they actually get it back. And I wonder whether that teaches us something here too that we might want to consider.

**KW:** Dr. Thomas Yoder Neufeld shared his thoughts on this very perplexing case study.

**TYN:** I would be foolish to think that I've got a good answer to your question, partly because I think it's once again very complex. People don't choose what happens to the market out there, but people do choose whether they jump at the chance of benefiting from somebody else's misfortune. That's where, again, I think even Christians are constantly steeped in the logic of this world and Mennonites are no exemption from being steeped in the logic of real estate and property and maximizing profits et cetera.

I hear your question and boy, I would love to know what specific circumstances there are. I think it's of a piece with what I was saying earlier, namely the way we're trying to learn to think about our relationship as settlers to the indigenous peoples. Because there are parallels there, we were able to grab land because the government wanted to make farms out of what had been roaming pasture lands or hunting grounds, et cetera. So we benefit, and we're good farmers. We know about that.

The same thing happened already in Russia. Catherine the Great wanted to make sure that somehow south Russia, which was what it was then called, would be agriculturally productive.

Mennonites haven't always asked, 'OK, well, whose land was this before it was granted to us?' Sometimes you really don't want to ask, but we're beginning to be conscious that the

legacy of colonialism, for instance, I know that's not where your question lies, but I think it's of a piece actually with the question of our commitment to nonviolence, the legacy of colonialism in the settler reality in Canada is one that we're at different stages of grappling with. Different people have a longer history of grappling with it, but we're finding out that we need a lot of imagination.

We will no doubt benefit enormously from the grace and forgiveness of indigenous peoples, but that only should encourage us to be more creative and more resilient and find creative ways of addressing the justice questions. So I think probably that's not unrelated to your question. I don't personally know of circumstances like this, but I have no difficulty imagining them and that that would leave a kind of a legacy of mutual suspicion and maybe shame and guilt between Mennonites and others whose farms were lost to those who stayed.

There have been other places where Mennonites have benefited in Prussia when Jews were dispossessed, that property became available. Well, who better to get it than good competent agriculturally responsible Mennonites, right? I'm being ironic.

This is a deep, deep moral question that has a complexity to it I can't possibly, nor am I equipped to quite fully exploit that one.

**KW:** I really appreciated the way our guests wrestled with this really difficult case study and they brought up a lot of really excellent points about ways that Christians and conscientious objectors could have done more to show love to the families who experienced these losses due to the tragedy of war.

Now something I was thinking about as we're going through this particular topic is something that I hesitate to share just because of how delicate this is. This is something that is filled with a lot of sensitivity, particularly because there are people involved. People who lost loved ones, and people who lost homes and people who are living in homes now for generations, who have raised their children and grandchildren in these homes, so I don't want to seem insensitive to this in any way or seem like I have an answer or suggest this as being something that is in any way the final word, but merely just because it's easy to look back on history and to think that, yeah, that's bad, and now we have the answers or to just cast judgment, perhaps, on what happened.

Yet there's another perspective that could be considered or just another nuance to this situation that could be talked about, and that's just the simple fact that when these homes were put up for sale, without buyers the families would have lost everything and likely the homes would have been foreclosed on and that's an experience that my family went through and now as a pastor, numerous families in our church have had to go through in more recent years.

When a bank forecloses on a home, you lose everything. It's not just sold for, you know, a fraction of what it was worth. It's not just the loss of what you invested it's losing pretty much everything there, where people wish they would have had a buyer and that is a difficult reality. So even though we can talk about the fact that these conscientious objectors, yes, they did benefit from this situation, it did also provide a small, negligible benefit to these families as well. I'm sure at the time they were thankful to have a buyer rather than no buyer yet at the same time it's very little comfort, very small comfort, and it's not something that's to be paraded around as, 'yay, now we're the heroes because we bought these farms for pennies on the dollar,' but it is something to consider, especially for families like mine who had gone through that or families like people in our church who wished they had buyers for their homes but didn't and so had to face these things without that sort of small comfort in the end.

**JP:** I think as you speak, Kevin, what I'm reminded of is the fact that these stories change when there are faces to them. You can talk about a bank foreclosing on a home, or I can talk about my friend Kevin who went through this experience. In the same way, when we're thinking about what happened in this case study, what's happened over the years our perspective begins to change as we recognize that these are real people going through real events and that there is complexity and there's human emotion and there's relationship that's involved in these things.

In all of this, it feels like there is a core truth that we can grab tightly onto and it seems to me that as we talk about conscientious objectors, some things that our panellists came back to over and over again was the fact that Jesus has clearly called us to a life of radical nonviolence and that conscientious objection was a key way that Mennonites exercised that and lived that out in the real world.

At the same time, there's lots of nuance, lots of complexity, lots of difficulty around how that's actually lived out and I think that as we talk about these things, some disagreement or some tension or some uncertainty about how all of this works and how it can work best is actually healthy. I think to believe that we have it all figured out and we have a clear picture of exactly how things have happened and should happen is not a good way to go through life. I think we cling to the core and the rest of it we just have to be open to discussing and learning and processing together.

**KW:** I think the ideal would have been in the first place that the leaders of all the world nations could have gotten together and ironed out their problems before war would have ever happened. That would have prevented all of these things from happening in the first place. What do we do in the absence of perfection and how do we deal with it and how do we think about the imperfections of the past? I think it's important not to just justify everything, acknowledge that it's messy, there were mistakes, there were tangential

benefits, there were tangential failures, and that's OK. We can make mistakes. We can repent of them and hopefully do better in the future. Fall forward as I say.

**JP:** Humility is key.

**KW:** Our feature song today comes from Poor Bishop Hooper. They are a group that sings through the Psalms and this is their song Psalm 27.

One of the lines of the song says this “even with false witness or constant breath of violence I know the one who cares for me is there. Even if my father and my mother both abandon, I know the Lord who cares for me is there.”

We have been dealing with a very delicate and sensitive topic today. Something that has a lot of nuance, a lot of emotion attached to it, something that has shaped communities, something that has divided communities. But I think this song is a good reminder that the Lord is there and he cares for us. This is Psalm 27 by Poor Bishop Hooper.

### **Psalm 27, Poor Bishop Hooper**

The Lord is my light and my salvation  
Why should I ever be afraid?  
The Lord is the stronghold upon my life, and  
Of whom should I be afraid

Even with false witness or constant breath of violence  
I know the One who cares is there  
Even if my father and my mother both abandon  
I know the Lord who cares for me is there

I have heard You saying, "Seek my face, and  
Come and talk with Me  
Come and talk with Me"  
My heart responds in the way You made it  
Lord, I'm coming  
I am coming

Though the darkness surrounds, I know I am protected  
My heart will never be afraid  
To gaze upon Your beauty, God, and see You in Your temple  
I will stand hidden in You

I am certain I will live in  
The house of the Lord all of my days

I know I will delight in  
The house of the Lord all of my days

### **Closing**

The Armchair Anabaptist is a Theodidaktos podcast and Theodidaktos is a publication of the Evangelical Mennonite Conference.

You can check us out online at [www.thearmchairanabaptist.com](http://www.thearmchairanabaptist.com) and find us on iTunes, Spotify and wherever podcasts are found.

A special thanks to our guests who have joined us today, Dr. Layton Friesen, Dr. Thomas Yoder Neufeld and Pastor Cyndy Warkentin. We were also honoured to be able to interview Dr. Ronald J. Sider in April of 2022, just a few months before his passing and what you heard of him today was from that.

Our intro song is First Communion by Dane Jones Hill. Our feature song today was the song Psalm 27 by Poor Bishop Hooper.

Our executive producer is Erica Fehr, our producer and audio engineer is Kevin Wiebe, and our administrative assistant and wizard of all things web related is Ruth Block. I'm Kevin Wiebe. And I'm Jesse Penner and we have been your hosts for The Armchair Anabaptist.

We certainly hope that what you have heard today will do more than stay as merely food for thought, but that it can help inspire each of us to get out of the comfort of our armchairs and translate into living more like Jesus.

Join us next time as we continue our journey looking at the life of peace for episode seven, which is called The Outsiders, where we explore how other faith traditions wrestle with these teachings of Jesus. That's next time on The Armchair Anabaptist.

*\*Edited for clarity.*