



# The Outsiders, 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. This is episode number eight, The Outsiders, Part 2. I'm Kevin Wiebe.

**Jesse Penner:** And I'm Jesse Penner and we are your hosts. We are continuing a conversation that we started in the last episode about how we think of those outside of our Anabaptist faith tradition and how we interact with them on this peace position.

In the first part of this discussion, we took a look at some of the distinctions between the way that we approach the peace position and the way that those in other faith traditions do it.

In this episode, we're trying to understand now what is our posture and how do we engage in conversation and how do we hold firmly to our faith convictions without becoming condemning or condescending of those who think differently than us. I think we've got a lot of great conversations coming up from a lot of great guests.

**KW:** We'll be hearing from Dr. Greg Boyd, from Dr. Carol Penner, from Pastor Cameron McKenzie, from Dr. Terry Hiebert and we'll once again be hearing from Stephanie, Travis, Jennifer and Deborah from the Many Rooms Church Community, a network of house churches in Winnipeg's North End.

**JP:** First up, we're going to hear from Dr. Greg Boyd, so Dr. Boyd is pastor at Woodlands Hills Church in St. Paul, MN and he's author of many books, including *The Crucifixion of the Warrior God*. We sat down with Dr. Boyd and asked him this question: how do we go about holding firmly to our faith convictions without becoming condemning of our sisters and brothers in Christ who see things differently, this is what Dr. Boyd had to say.

**How do we go about holding firmly to our faith convictions without becoming condemning of our sisters and brothers in Christ who see things differently?**

**Greg Boyd:** Well, one thing it's always important to remember is that we're all in process on this. In the early 90s, I got invited - and in the early 90s I was much more of your standard American evangelical than I am today, I hadn't yet grown into this Anabaptist tradition; that happened in the late 90s in the early 2000s - but I got invited to the speak at the Pentagon. It was a great honour.

I had four days and I spoke to all these generals and I just give little Christian talks and it's quite a Christian presence in the Pentagon. Here's the thing. You know God always meets people where they're at. God moved in a powerful way. When I was at the Pentagon some really cool Kingdom stuff happened there.

Now today I wouldn't accept that invitation. God bless some folks in the Pentagon, whatever but given my understanding of what I'm called to represent, it would compromise my call now to go and participate in the Pentagon in any capacity. But I didn't have that understanding 25 years ago; that was after I got a Ph.D. in theology and all the rest.

So it took me this long to have my eyes opened to this. How can I go and judge others whose eyes aren't yet open? So there's got to be some humility here. We're all human beings. We're all in process and we're not supposed to be judging one another.

Now if someone comes and asks my opinion, I'll say, well here's the kind of questions I would ask if I were you. I had a mother come up to me after a service, probably six months ago or so, and her son was thinking about joining the military because they have

all these benefits. I didn't say, "thus says the Lord, that's a heinous crime." I said, well, "are you a follower of Jesus?"

And he said, "yeah, I'm a follower of Jesus."

I said, "well, here's the kind of things you need to think about and pray about. What do you make of Jesus' teaching in Matthew 5:43-45? and just think about these things." I gave him some other passages to think about; all kind of stuff that that we've been talking about.

But I'm not going to go up to somebody who is Christian and in the military and or in any other area where you might have to use violence and judge them or tell them "you're doing wrong." That's not my place.

We all have to follow the will of God as we understand it and we all need to be - as we're following God as best we understand it - open to correction and improvement, and the Holy Spirit leading us in new directions. We all need to be open to that, but having said that, it's not our job to try to lord over one another.

The other thing is that if Jesus tells us that whatever fault you think you see in someone else's eye, consider that to be a mere speck compared to the log in your own eye.

And so we're to have this posture of absolute humility. Yeah, maybe I believe that I've got an insight that that Christian over there serving in the military doesn't have. This is how I see it: we're called to absolute nonviolence. But I can't go judging him because I've got other faults. I have to assume that I've got a log and their inability to see the nonviolence in the call to follow Jesus, that's a mere dust particle compared to my logs.

The only way you can really love authentically is to love humbly.

**KW:** Dr. Carol Penner is a professor and the Director of Theological Studies at Conrad Grebel University College in Waterloo. We asked her the same question about how we can hold firmly to our faith convictions without becoming condemning or condescending of our sisters and brothers in Christ who see things differently. This was her response.

**Dr. Carol Penner:** How do we avoid the "us versus them" - us the good pacifists and them the people who will do violence? Too often we have violent ideas or violent thoughts or violent intentions towards the people we disagree with.

I would say that sometimes Mennonites can be more tolerant towards Muslims than they can be tolerant towards people in their own congregation or in their denomination who disagree with them. The people who are close at hand, they raise our blood pressure. They make us upset when they don't agree with us and that's why right now in our society, with so many disagreements about mask mandates and vaccines and how do we worship together after this pandemic or in the midst of a pandemic, we are very upset with each

other. And how do we keep from getting camps – “us versus them,” because we are all children of God. God loves us all and we need to be humble and open to dialogue.

I don't think that means that I will necessarily give up everything I believe in. But believing in the best intentions of the person I'm dialoguing with, that they truly believe what they do, and so I can't hate them even if they believe different things.

JP: We also sat down with Dr. Terry Hiebert, who is president of Steinbach Bible College. As we talked about this question, he drew out some of the similarities that exist, or the common ground we can find between the *just war* position and the pacifist position.

**Dr. Terry Hiebert:** I think there are some things that pacifists and just war theory people have in common. I'm pulling some of these ideas from Michael Baxter, who wrote as a Catholic on *just war* and pacifism.

Christians can agree on a lot of things. The peace first of all and foremost, it's not just something that we have in relationship to each other, but peace comes through forgiveness and our faith in Jesus Christ.

Also, he makes the point that no pacifist – and this is one of the things; the argument of what would you do in this situation or that situation, it always assumes that it's the lone pacifist being attacked by someone. That argument is bound toward failure, I believe that no one can be a pacifist alone because I think pacifism is actually fundamentally, a social thing. It's the number of people that decide that violence is wrong that matters. One person deciding violence is wrong will get overwhelmed and crushed. But if a thousand, or ten thousand, or a million people decide that we will seek peace first, then I think that there's a different way of thinking, a different way of doing.

Baxter also says that when *just war* theory is consistently practiced, there will be more discernment in whether to engage in war, for example. And if you actually follow their principles it would look remarkably like pacifism.

Take for example, the civilian immunity clause in *just war* theory. When was the last time you had a war where there were no civilian casualties? In fact, since World War I the percentage of civilian to military casualties has proportionately gone up dramatically, and so if you think of being a part of some kind of conflict like that, realize that you will be killing many more civilians than you will be killing military personnel. How does that fit with *just war* theory – it doesn't.

And so can you actually go to war, even be a *just war* theorist and go to war, and be able to fulfill those statements; you can't. One of the more difficult things is that pacifism is difficult, and it requires a lot of humility actually. I think it's only realistic if you trust God to overcome evil with good.

There's a strange story in the Old Testament – I read it this morning actually – about the man who steadied the ark of the covenant. It was being transported, and he steadied the ark of the covenant with his hand, and he gets smitten – judged – for it. And the record of the devotional said sometimes in a sense you have to lay your hands off and let God do the work and let God be God. And I wonder, do we trust God enough to take our hands off and let God be God in these kinds of situations?

I know that sounds really idealistic. But if we realize that it's not just doing nothing, it's letting God be God, but then also resist the evil by peaceful means, I think then we have a good formula for what we're doing.

The question pacifists might have for *just war* theorists is: do you ever know the facts enough to determine whether a war is a good judgment? It's very difficult to determine, so if we can't determine those things, would we not be better off to, by default, follow Jesus' pattern of turning the other cheek, for example

Just because a president has the responsibility to call a war - think of presidents and world leaders who are calling wars right now, and think of other countries who are now taking some of those soldiers to court for war crimes. Moral responsibility is not removed just because a president has declared war. The war may be an unjust one.

Basically what Baxter and others are saying is that if *just war* theorists take even their own principles seriously, they would be a lot closer to pacifism than they all are.

JP: Something I really valued about what Dr. Boyd said is something that I've heard echoed in a few different places over my life. I think of a pastoral mentor that I've had who used to talk in this way, where he would sort of say “what I believe today is not the same thing as what I believed 10 years ago, and it's not probably the same thing I'm going to believe in 10 years,” especially when it comes to some of these difficult and nuanced theological discussions.

We need to leave grace and room for the fact that not only are we each on journeys of learning and discovery and growth, but the people around us are too, and so those who think differently than us about something like pacifism are on their own journey and they may be on a trajectory towards something new and exciting and we shouldn't discredit them just because they're not at the place that we are within that journey.

**KW:** I remember being a young adult and I was talking to a friend about theological matters and I was expressing frustration with some other people and what I perceived to be a lack of depth in their spirituality, and I was whining and complaining about a kind of shallow spirituality. My friend confronted me about this in a gentle and loving way; I will always be thankful that he did and he used this kind of image similar to what Dr. Boyd was talking about. He said to picture water and a boat and you jump into the water.

Where do you start? Do you start out diving deep or do you start in the shallow surfaces of the water. I said, “well, obviously you start out in the surface. You start out in the first few inches of the water and then you go deeper from there.” He said, “yeah, exactly.” Just because someone hasn't swum deeper yet doesn't mean they're never going to.

We're all on a journey and we all need to go deeper in our relationship with the Lord, but it takes time and we're not all at the same place. Just because you may be at a different place than someone else doesn't mean the Lord won't take them deeper eventually. As long as we're always on a journey deeper then that's really the important thing – that we're always on that journey with the Lord taking it step by step, or if we're using the swimming analogy, just ever deeper with the Lord.

I really appreciated that and that was probably the most loving confrontation I have ever had from someone that just really corrected some thinking in me where I was, you know, frustrated with people – like Carol talked about, where these people that raise our blood pressure that are right beside us and I had less than loving intentions towards those that were right around me, which is really ironic because I thought I was the deeper one and yet I was the one with the less than noble intentions who needed to be confronted.

JP: I think you hit on something there and it's an important thing that I want to clarify. When we look at somebody and go, “oh they're on a different point of the journey than I am,” it's just as possible that we're the ones that have growth to do in order to move forward. In this, I obviously hold some strong convictions about Anabaptists having a unique and significant and important perspective on peace, but that doesn't mean that I'm going to enter into conversations with this expectation that, “oh yes, I'm ahead of you on this and I can maybe help pull you along a little bit.” There are things that we can learn from each other as we go through this.

We connected with Many Rooms Church Community, a network of house churches in Winnipeg's North End. I sat down with Stephanie, Travis, Jennifer and Deborah from that church and we talked about these same issues. We're going to start here with a response from Stephanie wrestling through this question.

**Stephanie:** Well, ironically, if you are trying to defend a nonviolent position with condemnation that makes it less compelling, which makes me wonder if that's why we're not more compelling because we haven't actually done a good enough job of modelling what it really looks like to love your enemies.

I think that when you see someone loving their enemies, it's inspiring and so that's I think what we should focus on; rather than trying to condemn others for not holding our convictions, actually live what we believe in such a way that it's exciting.

**JP:** There was a bit of a discussion that followed this with contributions from Stephanie, who you just heard and Deborah and Jennifer. We start out with Jennifer here.

**Jennifer:** What's the song we were singing last night in your yard for worship? It was My One Defence; right like Jesus is our one defence. And so, if we are living Christ-like, then that really speaks for itself, right?

**Stephanie:** Yeah, it was brought up last night that if Jesus is our defence then we shouldn't be defending ourselves, so it maybe it comes even to this that if we haven't learned how to not be defensive, then we have a ways to go in actually showing that we trust that God can defend us without our need to be violent, aggressive, defensive.

**Deborah:** Which could be difficult in certain situations.

**JP:** This is Deborah speaking.

**Deborah:** Maybe we're just human, we get mad, you say the wrong thing, you know it happens, but it's coming back to the point where you say "I'm sorry" or "listen, I didn't say that right."

**Jennifer:** Yeah, these are questions that we have sometimes that surface in our church when it comes close to November 11th and we wonder how do we work for peace? How do we observe? How do we remember? And also maybe more recently when it comes to Canada Day and there are different messages coming around us in society about what the meaning of our nation is and what the work of peacemakers is in our nation considering some of the difficult history that we have as a country.

So I think those are current conversations. I don't know if our church has addressed them in any sort of deliberate way other than just informal conversations that we've had.

**JP:** I asked Jen how they've worked with Remembrance Day services in their church.

**Jennifer:** Well, we don't have very curated Sunday morning services or special services for holidays or events like November 11, so it would happen more informally. We did a movie night one time talking about conscientious objectors and sort of the history the Anabaptists have had around warfare and conscription, and there hasn't been total unanimity on how we should set aside November 11th.

**JP:** Stephanie expanded on Jenn's thoughts.

**Stephanie:** But more recently we've been experimenting with learning stories of conscientious objectors or those who have been more actively involved in fights for justice that didn't involve violence so that we learn these stories and understand that it's not completely untried to seek nonviolent ways to deal with conflict, and I think that's being helpful for our younger people.

In our schools, it's an interesting time of year because they get a double message that is - especially in our neighbourhood where it's very international so you're very likely to have both sides of the conflict in the room and so there's one message that is war is terrible, let it never happen again, and then there's the "you better honour the veterans because they gave up so much for you, for your freedom" and so in terms of the informal conversations as a church, I feel like Remembrance Day has given us lots of opportunities to talk with our kids about this really dualistic thinking that our world has about it.

I think most people don't recognize they actually are holding to incongruent messages at once and they they don't fit together.

JP: Travis took us back to how this plays out in our day-to-day relationships.

**Travis:** I think a response I might have- I know we're talking about November 11th, but I think true pacifists or peacekeepers, that happens when you first wake up in the morning every day and so I find that the way that I conduct myself or the way that I interact with people who are probably violent, I need to live out my beliefs every moment.

It is a challenge sometimes when it's not natural or it doesn't seem like the appropriate response to be nonviolent or whatever, and so because I am different, I am a minority - you were talking earlier about Anabaptists being the minority in the world holding this peace stance or this nonviolent view, following Jesus' example.

Sometimes I wonder, "okay, do other people; have they just not learned yet or is that something that's their area of growth where they need to understand Jesus' teaching more accurately" and then realizing that "okay, I'm sure they have a handle on something that I need to grow in as well.

So I think for me to not condemn them because realizing, "okay, maybe in this area I believe that this is more accurate, this is what Jesus taught." I can hold that and I can be strong and keep that firmly in my mind and I can still recognize that "oh, maybe just because I have a corner of Jesus' teaching here, I might be missing it somewhere else."

I think that helps me to be humble, too, to say that you know there are other areas that I need to learn as well.

JP: Cameron McKenzie is the lead pastor of Fort Garry EMC. As we processed this question together, I talked about an analogy my dad used to use as we grew up about the church as a diamond and a diamond becomes beautiful because of the many facets, and when we think about the Anabaptist movement or the EMC or our own local church, we can recognize that we hold an important place in that diamond. We can kind of own that space, but at the same time, we can also recognize that we are a part of something that is larger and more beautiful than it would be if it were just our little piece. That we actually



fit into something bigger in terms of the universal or worldwide church. Cameron expanded on that with his own analogy.

**Cameron McKenzie:** Yeah, another analogy that works for me is the one of these huge radio towers. We don't build so many of them as we used to, but they're dotted all over southern Manitoba here. And you've got these massive guy wires that are pulling with great force in opposite directions and the tower is the thing. Because that's the thing that's got the dishes and everything that broadcasts the signal, boosts the signal, whatever, but you actually have these tensions pulling and if any one of those tensions gives way, the tower comes down.

I think the church is a little bit like that too. We've got these different groups within the church. We're all holding the tower up, we're all a part of it, but it's actually our pulling in different directions that enables the church to stand upright and do the thing that the church does.

We don't realize that the people who think differently about this question within the church, they're thoughtful, intelligent, faithful worshippers of Jesus. They're not wild people out there who have abandoned reason. So let's spend a little bit more time talking to each other to see what we can learn from each other or maybe even better, as often was the case around the pandemic, which is a good kind of analogy in some ways, let's find as many of the pieces of common ground as we can, and let's strengthen those and not worry as much about where we're differing on the edges of what we believe.

**KW:** As we were processing and listening through the different interviews for this episode, we chose to end with Pastor Cameron's interview for this episode because of his challenge and particularly the way that he refuses to demonize those who think differently than him, and this challenge for us to build on the common ground we have with our brothers and sisters in Christ instead of just dividing and building our camps against one another. This challenge to seek the good in one another and seek the common ground that we have with one another and this challenge to really build up the Church instead of seeking to tear it down.

And I think that is such a fitting challenge to end this episode with. I can't see a better example for us than Cameron's way of thinking and really, that's something that I have come to know about Cameron in general, as someone who's known him as a student in his classes at Providence when he was a teacher and now as a pastor in the same denomination as him, as someone who just thinks like that and behaves like that, and it's something I think we would all do well to emulate a little bit better. To have that generosity of spirit towards others and not just assume that because they think differently than me they must be some kind of monster, but rather assume that maybe I have something to learn about them instead.

**JP:** It is easy to find ways to disagree. It is easy to find ways to divide and ways that we think differently or live differently than those around us, but I think it's a really important challenge, especially in the times that we live, which are divided times which are times that seek to sort of incite sort of hatred and skepticism about people who are not in our little tribe or little group. To be people who actively look and this is a peaceful position and this is a peaceful posture, to be the sorts of people who walk through life and disagreements looking for opportunities to find common ground, shared stories and to look at the other person as somebody who's bringing something valuable to the table that we can learn from.

**KW:** Our feature song today is the song House of Peace by Steve Bell.

### House of Peace, Steve Bell

You have brought us so very far  
In so short a time  
In spite of our weaknesses  
In spite of all our crying

You are worthy of everything  
Every word of praise  
Every song we will ever sing  
Fountain of all grace

Our High Priest  
Make us a house of peace

Like the sun on a mountain top  
A city on a hill  
Like a river that never stops  
Let our love reveal...

You are worthy of everything  
Every word of praise  
Every song we will ever sing  
Fountain of all grace

Our High Priest  
Make us a house of peace

In the cold of the winter's night  
In the summer's day

In the changes we often fight  
Let us learn to say

You are worthy of everything  
Every word of praise  
Every song we will ever sing  
Fountain of all grace

Our High Priest  
Make us a house of peace

### **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.ca](http://www.thearmchairanabaptist.ca) and find us on iTunes, Spotify and wherever podcasts are found.

A special thanks to our guests who have joined us today, that was Dr. Greg Boyd, Dr. Carol Penner, Pastor Cameron Mackenzie, Dr. Terry Hiebert and Travis, Stephanie, Jennifer, and Deborah from the Many Rooms Church Community in Winnipeg.

Our intro song is First Communion by Dane Jones Hill and our feature song today was the song House of Peace by Steve Bell.

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 up 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 and how Anabaptist eschatology and our understanding of the end times and eternity plays into how we look at peace and nonviolence. That's next time on The Armchair Anabaptist.

*\*Edited for clarity*