

John Anderson. (Deputy Prime Minister 1999-2005) Since leaving politics, John has become one of Australia's leading social commentators. He launched his podcast *Conversations* out of his concern over the standard of our public debate. Having attracted close to 15 million views, [John's Conversations](#) pursues the principle that you cannot get good public policy out of a bad public debate.



1. Qn You describe yourself as a farmer. Is that a form of self-deprecation or a badge of honour?

I'm a 6th generation farmer, I love the land, and the things you have to do as a farmer, and the huge range of tasks you have to understand. My son runs the place now, I'm a farm labourer. I guess a bit of both!

2. Qn You did step away from politics relatively young, while you were Leader of the Nationals and Deputy PM. What motivated you to do that?

One of the major factors was that I didn't feel you should stay around forever, I hadn't become addicted to the position. Although as I look back perhaps it's a problem that people can leave too early, and so experience is lost.

But there was also a benign enlarged prostate, which was denying me sleep. I was exhausted, there was endless travel. My children were delighted when I told them that I was leavening politics.

3. Qn You have remained very interested in policy making and the big questions facing our society. One way this finds expression is in your podcast *Conversations*, which has now had close to 15m views. Congratulations. Your tagline says "you can't have good policy without a good debate". How do you see *Conversations* contributing?

It's an attempt to keep the flame alive. Our culture has got to a place where we confuse thinking and feeling. And we feel so strongly, when someone disagrees with us we attack them rather than listen to them. We're morphing into a fractured society where we huddle together with those who agree with us but don't listen to others.

Debate has been weakened. The last major economic debate in Australia was really around the GST in June 1999.

There are so many issues now that need to be addressed but we don't seem to be able to debate them. We are a culture that is losing its way.

Another example is the appalling level of mistrust in the USA for both candidates and both sides of politics.

4. Qn Why is it hard to have a good debate? Are we now playing the man more than the ball? The recent attack on our PM comes to mind.

We've forgotten God and we play god in our own little world; our tendency is to try to be god in our lives. We've ignored the God who tells us to love him and love our neighbour. In a post-Christian age in the west, it becomes a grab for power. In the West we are allowing the weeds to take over the garden of Democracy that the Christian world view gave us.

5. Qn What have you learnt through the interviews you have conducted?

The old divisions of left and right are too simplistic. I don't only speak to right wingers; I've interviewed many on the left.

The real division is between those who think w.r.t. to evidence and objective reality, vs those who operate on "how I feel" and if you don't agree with me, you're making war on me.

I've learned so much from so many guests -Jordan Peterson, Niall Ferguson, John Howard, Kim Beazley,

6. Qn I was struck by one of your recent *Conversations* with Niall Ferguson, the author of *Doom*, the politics of catastrophe. Do you think there is a human tendency to catastrophise and if so, why?

Yes I do, it's tied up with who we actually are. It's linked to "the Fall" in the Bible. I've heard Jordan Peterson, say to an auditorium of young men, "you know you are not the person you should be".

One of the great failings of the Enlightenment is a failure to deal with guilt – the idea that with education etc we could create nirvana. But we know deep down that we are guilty, and it shows in catastrophism. We know we deserve "less than a perfect outcome".

E.g. – Climate change - the science is settled but the models are set at predicting the absolute worst case scenario. And now we've given so many of our young people 'climate change anxiety'.

7. Qn Would you say your Christian faith and hope has been an antidote to giving in to doom and despair?

My faith is in Jesus Christ, standing at the right hand of God. As I've got older I am more convinced that's where hope lies. I can't understand why the maker of the universe would pay such a price that I can go free, and have real hope.

I do wonder about my grandchildren and the world they will grow up in but I have an antidote to the pain in our world, it will all be fixed in the end.

Catastrophism and fear cripple our society at the moment.

8. Qn At the individual level, no one is immune to hardship and difficulties. You experienced tragedy very early on in life.

When I was a boy, in a game of backyard cricket, my sister was killed by a ball that I had hit. I went to a place (emotionally mentally) that most people don't go to, especially as a boy. It changed my whole life. My childhood was over.

I had questions:

1. Why suffering? I learnt in a broken world, the whole creation groans.
2. Does anybody care? I learnt that God cares in the crucifixion of his Son.
3. Will the pain end, will the wound be bound up? I learnt that there is hope in the message of Jesus.

I share these not easily but there have been opportunities to help people who have suffered in similar ways. Particularly one young man who had been driving a car when his friend was killed in an accident.

9. Qn There is often talk of being a visionary leader. In the midst of all the challenges we face and the temptation to catastrophise, what would be your desire and hope for our nation?

We actually need to look to ourselves and respect one another.

Until our minds are crystalised by real danger, we won't do anything.

We ought to be doing it now. People are beginning to become worried about where the geopolitical world is going.

I hope for some sanity in our leaders and electorate.

GK Chesterton – "If people stop believing in God, it's not that you will believe in nothing, it's that you'll believe in anything."

Discussion Questions

How do you "feel" about his statement?

"The real division today is between those who think with respect to evidence and objective reality, versus those who operate on "how I feel - and if you don't agree with me, you're making war on me."

What do you make of the tendency to catastrophise?

Are there grounds for hope in all the doom and gloom?

Three sides of the triangle about suffering...

1. Why suffering?

“Romans 8:22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.”

2. Does anybody care?

John 3:16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

3. Will the pain end, will the wound be bound up?

Revelation 21:3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God.:4 ‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”