



Exploring contemporary Christianity

Since the previous newsletter, PCNV members have had opportunities to participate in two ventures that have explored the boundaries of progressive Christian thought and practice. The celebration, "Healing the Earth" was our first venture into a liturgical event that did not assume an interventionist God and that drew on singing, music, dance, poetry, colour, visuals, and statements to provide an experience of focussed community.

More recently, bringing outstanding scholar, John Dominic Crossan, to Melbourne provided stimulating lectures to capacity audiences of more than 350 people about interpreting biblical documents in light of the political and economic realities of the first century.

This newsletter also announces the availability of the first DVDs in the "Exploring Open Christianity Series" – a PCNV project to make available for Australian and New Zealand groups resources for study groups and personal reflection.

The strong support of members is making possible more diverse and adventurous activities.

HEALING THE EARTH A Liturgy for 2010

Joy Merritt was among the appreciative participants in the liturgy on 25 July and provided the following report.

This was PCNV's first liturgical event, planned to reflect and affirm progressive ways of thinking about God while focussing on the theme of caring for the earth.

The ample but quite ordinary space of the Pines Learning Centre in East Doncaster was utterly transformed by the team's preparation of that space, by the liturgy itself, and by the people who attended. I think we all felt grateful for the careful planning and skilled contributions which made possible a meaningful and moving experience, and hope that there will be more such events in the future.

The use of film, superb music and dance, readings, prayers and silence, the lighting of candles, and the opportunity to share the bread and wine of communion all enhanced what was not an 'onlooker' or

passive experience, but a very involving one. The hope is that we are inspired to act.

Those who put so much time and energy into preparation of this liturgy have generously assured us that others are free to use the material if they wish. It is available on the website.

Joy Merritt.

In light of the response, the Committee has decided to schedule another liturgy, linked with Easter, on 10 April 2011.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2010

All members will receive a notice of the Annual General Meeting of the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria Inc. to be held on **Sunday 14 November at 5.00 pm** immediately following the address by Lorraine Parkinson.

Following the Committee's report on the affairs of the Network for the past year, there will be an election of the Committee for the coming year.

JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN IN MELBOURNE

John Bodycomb was at the Melbourne lectures and provided this report

See elsewhere in this newsletter for ordering details for recordings of all the lectures

Over three hundred, with a significant number from interstate, checked in for at least some if not all of Dom Crossan's ten-lecture series in Melbourne. Three per day on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday followed the same format: one hour lecture and half-hour questions. Each lecture included a video that made essentially the same points; the material was both seen and heard, a valuable aid to assimilating and retaining. Notable features were Dom's

- encyclopaedic knowledge of the history, archeology and sociology of the Graeco-Roman period – and of scripture;
- fluency (born of familiarity) with his material, using scarcely a note;
- attentiveness to questions and carefully measured responses.
- sustained good humour, especially with audio glitches the first day!

Among key themes were

- The importance of understanding Jewish Covenantal Justice not as retributive but as distributive.
- The importance of understanding Eschatology not as an end to the world but as the end of war, aggression, inequality (“the great divine clean-up”)
- The centrality in the gospel of non-violent resistance to evil – validated in Pilate's removal only of Jesus, not of all the followers
- The interpretation of Christian gospels as parables – in which “we are supposed to get the point without asking if it ever happened”
- The typifying of Paul in relation to such themes as slavery and patriarchy in letters allegedly his – from radical Paul (Philemon) through conservative Paul (Ephesians and Colossians) to reactionary Paul (Titus)
- The missionary strategy of Paul: going to synagogues not to convert Jews but to ‘pick off’ the god fearers, who were often half the congregation

Much of the material was not unfamiliar to those acquainted with “Living the Questions”, *God and Empire* and *In Search of Paul*, but was infused with freshness by Dom's enthusiasm and energy. *John Bodycomb*

THREE VIEWS ABOUT RELIGION

‘In Britain here are two views about religious truth: one is that we don't need ever to question it, because it is known already, and in full (to my denomination, you will understand). The other view is that all religion is simply irrational, and that there is no need ever to give the subject any serious thought. These two views are politically entirely acceptable, because neither of them threatens to change anything. Everyone can remain in their present position, and nobody needs to do any thinking at all.

‘My own view, however, is awkward for everybody. It is that the modern critical study of religion has put it beyond doubt that religion everywhere is just a human creation, and as such remains very important to us, even after philosophical and historical criticism have demolished all our received religious beliefs. To get ourselves into a better position, we need a lot of hard thinking and readiness to accept both personal and institutional change. This will not be easy, but the rewards will be proportionately great; and surely every human being before he or she dies would wish to make some personal effort to reach a considered view on the great questions of life? What are we, what is our world, what can we know, how should we live, what is the best we can hope for? – It's not crazy to be preoccupied with questions like these, and to pursue them determinedly ... is it? Unfortunately, in Britain too much honesty in pursuing such

questions can be seen as deeply threatening by many people and by many established interests that are still committed to traditional answers to them.’

Don Cupitt, in the Introduction to *Odyssey on the Sea of Faith. The Life & Writings of Don Cupitt*, by Nigel Leaves. Polebridge Press, 2004. Page ix.

Don Cupitt is one of the outstanding and most controversial theologians of recent times. His prolific writings over more than 50 years have charted the journeys of an original and creative thinker who has responded to big changes in the contemporary world. He is the founder of the Sea of Faith Network and has visited Australia and New Zealand on lecture tours for the Sea of Faith network.

You can read more about the Sea of Faith in Australia at the SoFiA Network Website - www.sof-in-australia.org

The book, quoted above, by Nigel Leaves from Western Australia, provides an excellent introduction to Don Cupitt’s thought. At times the discussion involves technical philosophical terms but the rewards for the persistent are substantial.

Cupitt places a high value on religion but sees it as a fully human creation:

“All major cultures have their own characteristic set of religious metaphors and rituals, and in every culture the central religious concepts and symbols provide the vocabulary in which people articulate their sense of life’s meaning and worth. Religion is only human, but no culture survive for long without it. Life’s meaningfulness and worthwhileness are not given but have to be made, and that making is religion.”

Quoted by Leaves, page 56.

My copy was \$27.95 from a PCNV bookstall. *David Merritt*

THE END OF LIFE

After hearing a Life Matters interview on ABC Radio National about the end of life, PCNV member, Murray Lloyd, wrote that it was well worth listening to so as to know where someone in that position is coming from but that key points were missing ‘No mention of advanced care directives as a major strategy – no mention of how some people are greatly affected by their religious beliefs and /or whether they believe that there is a comfortable eternity ahead of them’.

‘I have just finished reading retired Bishop Spong’s latest book, *“Eternal life - a new vision”*. His last chapter is very relevant to the needs of the end of life debate. So here is the last paragraph to possibly get you interested.

“Life is precious. I have loved my journey through it. I want the moment of my departure to be celebrated in a manner similar to the way the moment of my arrival was greeted, with joy and with great expectations. If in life we have touched the transcendent and the eternal and have shared through self-consciousness in the life love and being that flows through the universe, then I believe we can find the courage to lay this phase of that journey down when it is appropriate to do so and to enter what is to come. I want the decision to end my life to be both my legal right and my ethical responsibility. I want to live well while I am living and to die well when I am dying, and both because I believe that life is holy.”

‘This closure is preceded by an excellent discussion that challenges the over popular religious concept that God began life and should also end it.’

Murray Lloyd welcomes comments to murraylloyd5@gmail.com

EXPLORING OPEN CHRISTIANITY

PCNV has released the order form for its first set of *Exploring Open Christianity* DVDs and discussion guides. The series features five quality DVDs and discussion guides with each DVD featuring a unique voice in the quest to improve the understanding of Christianity for a contemporary world. **The DVDs are open format so are useable in any country.** The series features:

- **Val Webb** on *Exploring Doubt and Faith*
- **Sir Lloyd Geering** on *Exploring the Future of Religion*
- **Peter Kennedy** on *Exploring the Future of a Faith Community*
- **John Dominic Crossan** on *Exploring Jesus and Paul*
- **Greg Jenks** on *Exploring the Future of the Bible*

More details about the people who are interviewed are on the order form on the PCNV website: www.pcnvictoria.org.au

You can download a form to order individual DVDs (at AU\$40 each) or the whole set (at \$AU150). [PDF; 91KB]

COMING PROGRAMS

OCTOBER 10: 3,00 pm. Peter Norden will speak on the topic, "**Compassion**" Venue: Glen Iris. See details on the last page.

NOVEMBER 14: 3,00 pm. Rev Dr Lorraine Parkinson will speak on "**GOOD GOD - WHAT A MESS! Evil in a world created by a Good God**". Venue: Glen Iris.

INTERESTED IN A LOCAL GROUP?

Some members have expressed interest in finding or forming a local group to share experiences and discuss progressive Christian topics. Several groups have been established from local PCNV members. See the list of groups referred to in the next column

RECORDINGS OF CROSSAN LECTURES

All of John Dominic Crossan's lectures in Melbourne were recorded and the audio recordings are available for direct download or by mail using an order form.

The range of resources related to Dom Crossan's visit to Australia include audio files from Dom's addresses (just \$4 each for download or \$40 for all 10 lectures), a video presentation from Dom's Friday night lecture and Dom's soon to be released book.

Go to the website at:

<http://www.pcnvictoria.org.au>

and select the Dom Crossan resources of interest to you.

Members in the Geelong area?

If you are interested in making contact with other people in the Geelong area interested in PCNV activities, please email the PCNV secretary at: info@pcnvictoria.org.au and we will pass on your email address or phone number to two members who have initiated this inquiry. We do not provide the email address or phone number of a member to anyone unless authorised by the member.

List of groups

PCNV has compiled a list of groups we know about. The list has a description of the group, when and where it meets, and the kinds of activities it provides. The list gives a person to contact for further information. The information is provided by a participant in the group and PCNV is not able to provide any recommendations about the groups. It is a contact list for interested people to explore for a possible match with their interests. It is on the PCNV website at <http://www.pcnvictoria.org.au>

Is your membership up to date?

Thanks to all the members who have renewed their membership. If you have not yet got around to attending to that, now is a good time! If you need another copy of the membership renewal form, it is available from the secretary.

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria



invites you to

• *“Compassion”*

by

*Former Prison Chaplain and
Human Rights Advocate*

Peter Norden

WHEN: Sunday 10 October 2010
3.00pm to 5.00pm

WHERE: Glen Iris Uniting Church,
Glen Iris Rd. near the corner with High Street, Glen Iris
(Melway Map 60 A9) Parking in church grounds and nearby streets

THE TOPIC

The "tough job" of compassion is everyone's job in a post-modern world. This is an invitation to journey beyond compassion as superficial niceness and discover the crucial role of all people of faith to engage themselves in life's tough problems. How can an emerging Christian understanding lead to deeper action?

THE SPEAKER

Peter Norden AO is a Vice Chancellor's Fellow at the University of Melbourne, based in the Melbourne Law School. He is also an Adjunct Professor in the School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning at RMIT University.

Peter was the senior Victorian Catholic Prison chaplain from 1985 to 1992, and since that time has been the Policy Director of Catholic Social Services Victoria and the Director of Jesuit Social Services.

In 2007 he was made an Officer of the Order of Australia 'for services to community development through social research and programs aimed at assisting marginalised young people and offenders, to the mental health sector and to the Catholic Church.'

Cost is \$7 (members \$5)

“Open minds, open hearts, open hands”
