



Feeding the spirit ... expanding the mind

The three meetings of the Progressive Christian Network described in this edition of the Newsletter explore some of the diverse cutting edges of contemporary Christianity.

On 27 June Father Peter Kennedy described some aspects of one of the most dramatic clashes in Australia between a traditional authoritative Church and a community of faith with commitment to a contemporary response to Christianity and people.

On 25 July we are invited to an experience of progressive Christian celebration - both as a life enhancing experience and as a basis for reflection on liturgy in the contemporary world.

Between August 31 and September 3 one of the world's leading scholars on first century archaeology and the New Testament will lead a series of workshops on the origins and formative stages of the development of Christianity. PCNV is bringing John Dominic Crossan to Melbourne for a once only opportunity to discover how recent scholarship is transforming our understandings of Jesus, Paul, Christianity and the Bible.

FATHER PETER KENNEDY

The largest audience yet for an Australian presenter for the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria heard a moving and informative address by Peter Kennedy.

190 – 200 people were an appreciative audience to hear Father Kennedy speak about his experiences with St Mary's, the "Exile", his views on the future of Christianity and his conviction that individual mysticism will be a large part of that future.

At one point in the session, Father Kennedy read "The Hut" (next column) and invited the audience to reflect on it:

Sit quietly for a few minutes with the following questions:

- *As you listened to the Tale of the Hut what resonated with you?*
- *How did you feel?*

** Was there anything in the tale that stirs your heart?*

THE HUT

It was a time for the travelers to move out from the safety of the hut. The hut they were in was familiar and well-lit, but they knew that it could no longer serve them. It was time to venture out into dark and unfamiliar terrain, to seek out a new place of life. As they moved away from the hut, the light its windows cast on the world outside grew dim, until there was very little to guide them. They had to move along tentatively. The directions they decided on were often mistaken and they had to rely on each other for any progress they made.

Not all shared the same feelings about what they were undertaking. Where one grew frustrated, another continued to trust. Where one took heart from the adventure, another started to turn back to the light of the hut. It was a strange and unprecedented situation for them all. The only ones who knew where they were going were the ones who turned back, for they were turning to light and familiarity. But anyone embracing the future was at a loss. The only knowledge they possessed was the wisdom that accumulated as they explored their way forward.

Children Praying A New Story, A Resource for Parents, Grandparents & Teachers by Michael Morwood. Kelmore Publishing; 2009; 188 pages; \$20

Available from the PCNV Bookshop.

Book Review by Dick Carter.

This useful and readable book follows on the themes Michael Morwood developed in his earlier works “Is Jesus God” (2001) and “Praying a New Story” (2003) and applies them to the “what?” and “how?” challenges of educating children in a Christianity suitable for today. The “new story” is that Jesus reveals, in his preaching that God’s Kingdom is with us, that the sacred presence is with and in all people and directly accessible to all; further, this story is set in a contemporary worldview compatible with current scientific understanding of the world and the whole universe.

Morwood firmly declares that he has not produced a text book. Nor does he intend the book “to change the way people think about their faith .. [but it is rather] .. a resource for people who are already engaged in that activity and are looking for ground on which to stand that integrates faith and the contemporary worldview”. That said however, the book could also be regarded in some ways as a remedial tract on Christianity or a primer on practical progressive Christianity which might be of use for adults.

Despite the title the book is about more than prayer, although much is said about that too. Its opening chapter deals with the way young children think and relate to the world and how an understanding of this can help adults talk to children about God, answer their questions (“what is God like?”; “who is Jesus?”; “what happens to people when they die?”; etc) and show them how to pray in ways that will be consistent with the things they will come to understand as they grow into adults.

Following chapters deal with “what story about God will we tell?” and “the universe story: where we came from”. Morwood makes the telling point that early faith education should not lock children into literal thinking on faith issues that are taught as if they are factual – he says “it backfires later in life when, as adults, people rightly discard the literal thinking”. He firmly rejects the notion of a “fall” of humankind from grace in the Garden of Eden and the concept of Jesus as a “saviour” who through his sacrificial death won access to God’s life and love. Instead “Jesus is ‘saviour’ because he set people free from religious ideas and images that locked them into thinking God was not with them. He opened minds and hearts to the always everywhere present God”. In the universe story Morwood talks about modern scientific explanations of “creation” and the origins of the Earth and shows how this knowledge has the capacity to change radically our understanding of God, of ourselves as a life-form, of how everything and everyone is connected in ways we never suspected and our understanding of prayer.

A substantial part of the book (57 pages) is devoted to “Jesus: Revealer of God’s Presence with Us” and this section is a gospel by gospel treatment of well known stories about Jesus. This is presented in a way designed to illustrate the presence and power of God at work in Jesus and in our world and to show Jesus as someone who believed in this presence and acted on that belief. The stories selected are ones that also can be readily used to lead children into prayer.

The chapter specifically on prayer (prayer is also dealt with prolifically throughout the book) discusses the purpose of prayer, why we pray, what prayer is, what prayer can express and what should be avoided in prayer. In particular, Morwood emphasises that saying prayers to an elsewhere God who controls everything and listens like a human person must be avoided.

There are two chapters on church ritual – one on feast days and the other on the sacraments – which could be helpful to clergy and others responsible for the instruction of children in this aspect of formal religious life. Hardly surprisingly, in view of Michael Morwood’s background, these sections are strongly influenced by the Roman Catholic tradition. His views on the concerns of the institutionalised church about right thinking, exclusivity in mediating access to God, hierarchy and exercise of power are vehemently expressed.

The concluding section is a reflection for Christian educators on being Christian. In this Morwood points out the resistance many will encounter if they try to implement the suggestions in the book in an institutional environment and outlays his opinions on how to be an authentic Christian.

BOOKS

There has been a big increase in the interest of people attending PCNV events in buying books that express a progressive Christian perspective. PCNV has begun to purchase supplies of selected titles to make them readily available to members and others. An example of this is the book by Michael Morwood reviewed on the previous page. An order form for books currently available from PCNV is part of this newsletter. Just print that page.

PCNV continues to feature selected titles in the online bookshop Amazon.com. See our website: www.pcnvictoria.org.au and click on "online bookstore".

EXPLORING OPEN CHRISTIANITY

PCNV has begun an ambitious project to develop a series of 6 DVDs featuring interviews with outstanding leaders of progressive Christian thought and practice. Each DVD provides three 10 – 15 minute segments of the interview so that the DVDs can easily be used in discussion groups or for individual viewing. Each DVD will be accompanied by a discussion guide.

A professional producer and camera crew with Rev Dr Chris Page as the interviewer ensure both high quality production and focus on Australian perspectives.

The first three interviews have been completed and are in editing stages:

Dr Val Webb

Sir Lloyd Geering

Father Peter Kennedy

John Dominic Crossan will be the fourth person to be interviewed during his visit to Melbourne at the end of August.

Marketing for the individual DVDs (\$35) and the set of 6 DVDs (\$195) will commence later this year.

With a budget between \$2500 and \$3000 for each DVD, this project is a major move into a new aspect of communication and resource development for PCNV.

JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN

PCNV's biggest budget venture this year is bringing one of the world's top New Testament scholars to Melbourne for a week in late August-early September.

A brochure listing the lecture times and topics with a registration form that can be printed accompanies this Newsletter.

On Tuesday 31 August and Wednesday and Thursday 1 & 2 September there will be three lectures each day starting at 10.30 am and concluding at 4.30 pm.

The themes are:

Tuesday: The World of Jesus and Paul

Wednesday: Jesus and the Kingdom of God

Thursday: Paul and the Lordship of Christ.

Dominic Crossan begins each lecture with a visual presentation featuring stunning material from his archaeological work.

There is a public lecture on Friday night at 7.30 pm: "Divine violence in the Christian Bible".

Tickets are available for one day of lectures, three days of lectures, the evening lecture or a package of all lectures. You can book online from the PCNV website: www.pcnvictoria.org.au or by printing the registration form on the brochure that can be downloaded from the website and mailing with credit card payment or cheque to the PCNV postal address.

INCLUSION AND EXCLUSION

"I admire and follow Jesus. I just don't think Jesus was a Christian. Nor did Jesus show any interest in establishing a religion. Jesus was more interested in inclusion than religion. When people create a savior Jesus in the image of their need for an in group and an out group, then we often end up with exclusive religion."

Ian Lawton, "We're all in this together". Sermon on 4 July 2010. C3 Exchange.

www.c3exchange.org

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria



invites you to

HEALING THE EARTH

A Liturgy for 2010

WHEN: Sunday 25 July 2010
3.00pm to 5.00pm

WHERE: The Pines Learning Centre,
520 Blackburn Road, East Doncaster
(Over Reynolds Road, second driveway into the Pines Shopping Centre.
Enter front door of last building on the left) **Melway 34 D5**

You are invited to an interactive liturgical experience designed to explore Progressive approaches to care of the Earth. It will include film, dance, music, solo instrumentalists, silence, challenge, meditation and communal action, plus a Progressive Communion Ritual. The liturgy will be followed by a homemade afternoon tea and opportunity to discuss the liturgical experience.

Leaders: Andrew Boyle, Lorraine Parkinson, Gail Pritchard, Robert Sanderson, Jan Sebastian and Carolyn Sutherland.

Entry fee is \$7 (\$5 for members)

"Open minds, open hearts, open hands"

PCNV BOOKS ORDER FORM 2010

TO: Progressive Christian Network of Victoria Inc.
76 Coppin St, Malvern East , Victoria 3145

Please send the following order to the address below:

..... copies of **“Children Praying A New Story, A Resource for Parents, Grandparents & Teachers”** by Michael Morwood @ \$20.00 \$

..... copies of **“Putting Away Childish Things: A Tale of Modern Faith”** a novel by Marcus Borg @ \$37.00 \$

..... copies of **“The Case for God”** by Karen Armstrong @\$30.00 \$

..... copies of **“The Future of Faith”** by Harvey Cox @ \$37.00 \$

TOTAL \$

Plus postage and packaging \$3 per item \$

TOTAL \$

Please complete payment details and delivery instructions

PAYMENT FOR PCNV RESOURCES

I enclose cheque for \$..... (payable to PCNV)

OR Bill My Credit Card for \$

Card Type: Visa MasterCard

Card Number: _ _ _ _ _ / _ _ _ _ _ Expiry _ _ / _ _

Card Holder’s Name:

Signature: Date:

ADDRESS FOR DESPATCH OF RESOURCES

NAME:

ADDRESS

..... Postcode

Tick if receipt required