



## *Become contemporary to honour the tradition*

Rabbi David Gutnick of the East Melbourne Hebrew Congregation was quoted in the Melbourne Age (Friday 27 January) as saying "To become contemporary may be the best way to honour the tradition". This expresses well a basic aspect of progressive Christianity. Respect for the integrity and richness of the Christian tradition encourages us to understand it and explore its implications for today using the best available knowledge.

This newsletter announces a program of meetings for the first half of 2012 that address some of the top issues confronting people who explore contemporary Christianity. Top speakers in their field will push back the boundaries of our knowledge, challenge us about practical implications and inspire us in our quest for a relevant faith for today.

In addition, the format of meetings through the year will be more varied to respond to members' feedback – some panels with multiple speakers on a topic, shorter periods of presentations with more breaks, and more use of audiovisuals when appropriate for the speaker and topic.

## **JESUS IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY: JESUS IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY**

The first meeting for 2012 will be on Sunday 26 February, at 3.00 pm, at Glen Iris Uniting Church. It will feature a panel of three speakers exploring the significance of Jesus.

**John Smith**, "Discovering Jesus in the first century - the contribution of scholars"

**Lorraine Parkinson**, "The teaching the church forgot"

**Chris Page**, "Jesus in the 21st century"

See the details of topics, speakers and venue on the last pages of this Newsletter.

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## **MICHAEL MORWOOD WILL SPEAK ON MARCH 7**

Following the success of a weekday early evening meeting last year, we are delighted that during a brief visit to Melbourne, Michael Morwood will speak at a PCNV meeting on Wednesday 7 March from 5.30 pm to approximately 7.00 pm.

**VENUE:** Ewing Memorial Uniting Church, Malvern East. Melway Map 59 H12

Association A0048832S ABN 93 004 530 948

## **TOPIC: "Praying a New Story - How a new Christian worldview can be expressed for both adults and children"**

Copies of Michael Morwood's books will be available for purchase at the meeting including: *Praying a New Story* and *Children Praying a New Story. A Resource for Parents, Grandparents and Teachers*.

"We are caught between the old and the new, especially in terms of the worldview in which we articulate our religious beliefs. The good news is that those stories we have at our disposal to tell, the less dominant ones, blend wonderfully with today's worldview. They hold truths and insights that stand the test of time. ... (they have) the capacity to engage us better with fundamental truths, and to make faith far more reasonable and meaningful in an age when everything is questioned. When this happens we find ourselves praying a "new story" about who we are in this immense universe, who we are in relationship with the mystery we call "God" and who we are in relationship with everyone and everything on this planet."

*Children Praying a New Story* pages 11 - 12

Email: [info@pcnvictoria.org.au](mailto:info@pcnvictoria.org.au)

## PCNV PROGRAM

### FEBRUARY TO JUNE 2012

*Following are the dates, topics, speakers and venues for the first six PCNV public meetings for this year.*

*Members and people on the email contact list will receive updated information closer to the scheduled meetings.*

**SUNDAY FEBRUARY 26:** 3.00pm to 5.00pm  
**“Jesus in the 1 st C - Jesus in the 21 st C”**

**Panel:**

**Rev John Smith, “Discovering Jesus in the first century - the contribution of scholars”**

**Rev Dr Lorraine Parkinson, “The teaching the church forgot”**

**Rev Dr Christopher Page, “Jesus in the 21 st century”**

Venue: Glen Iris Uniting Church.

**WEDNESDAY MARCH 7,** 5.30 pm to 7.00 pm: **“Praying a New Story - How a new Christian worldview can be expressed for both adults and children”**

**Michael Morwood.**

Venue: Ewing Memorial Uniting Church, Coppin Street, Malvern East.

**SUNDAY MARCH 25:** 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm  
**Easter Liturgy.**

**PCNV Team**

Venue: Kingswood College. Box Hill South

**SUNDAY APRIL 22:** 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm  
**“Religion Under Attack in Australia”**

**Rev Dr Nigel Leaves.**

Venue: Glen Iris Uniting Church.

**SUNDAY MAY 27:** 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm  
**“Christianity through the lens of myth and metaphor”**

**Dr David Tacey.**

Venue: Glen Iris Uniting Church.

**SUNDAY JUNE 24:** 3.00 pm to 5.00 pm  
**“The role of the Bible for Christians and churches – facing the practical questions”**

**Dr Bill Loader.**

Venue: TBA

**JUNE: Meeting of leaders of groups**

Date, time and venue to be announced.

## WEBSITE

Up to date program information is available on the PCNV website: [www.pcnvictoria.org.au](http://www.pcnvictoria.org.au)  
Select “Coming events”.

## RECORDS OF SPEAKERS

PCNV negotiates with speakers to agree that PCNV can make available, where appropriate, a transcript and/or audio-recording as an MP3 file of an address.

Last year PCNV made available a CD of 20 significant addresses as pdf files that can be read on screen or printed. In addition there is a considerable number of audio files of addresses available by ordering from the website as CDs, DVDs or MP3 files.

Go to; [www.pcnvictoria.org.au](http://www.pcnvictoria.org.au)

and click on “Texts and podcasts from previous PCNV events”.

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## CROSSAN IN SYDNEY - SEPTEMBER

The lectures by John Dominic Crossan in Melbourne in 2011 were one of the highlights of PCNV’s program. This outstanding scholar, author and lecturer will be returning to Australia for a week in Sydney, September 3-7

Later Newsletters will provide more information on dates, times, venue and topics.

Meanwhile if you may be interested in participating, mark the dates in your diary.

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## SEA OF FAITH IN AUSTRALIA - 2012 CONFERENCE

Sea of Faith in Australia (SoFiA) is holding its annual 2012 conference at Twin Towns Resort, Coolangatta, Gold Coast, 31 August to 2 September 2012. Theme:

**Re-Imagine. Beyond Difference – Beyond Belief.**

**Faith, Meaning and Humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global Village.**

The Conference Brochure will be available shortly. Inquiries to Peter Robinson [pdrob15@gmail.com](mailto:pdrob15@gmail.com)

## Does God Think?

*Michael Morwood posted this reflection on his FaceBook profile on 13 January this year. It is reproduced with permission.*

“I recall learning in the seminary 50 years ago that God does not think – at least not in the way we experience thinking. As I then understood the reasoning, God is not subject to change or to time. Everything is immediately present to God. There is no moment following another moment – and certainly no change because a change would imply that God did not have absolute perfection before the change.

Interesting, isn't it, that this would be classed as traditional, conservative, Christian thought? It interests me greatly for several reasons. One, I agree with the conclusion (but not with the understanding of “God” driving the discussion). Two, the conclusion flies in the face of almost everything I ever heard about God from Scripture, from doctrine, from liturgy, from preaching, from Popes and bishops, and from common Christian thinking and practice. All these sources have pointed to a God who changes “his” mind, who listens and reacts, who has definite opinions on a wide range of topics, who intervenes, who withdrew the “welcome” mat from heaven, who decided to withhold forgiveness, who gets annoyed if people do not offer appropriate worship and gratitude, who came up with a “plan of salvation” after the first humans made a mess of his original plans for humanity. This God sure does a lot of thinking. And apparently he does a lot of listening to Mary in heaven as she intercedes for us and gets God to think again and change the way things are.

What if God is nothing like this? What if, as conservative, traditional teaching states, God is not a listening, thinking deity? What if we take seriously what Christian tradition has always asserted about this mystery we call “God” – that God is beyond all our human concepts? Then, maybe we have a lot of re-thinking to do.

This re-thinking needs to engage the windows or pointers we use to engage or understand God. The windows we have consistently used and respected as our most authoritative insights about God mislead us when they suggest God listens, thinks, reacts and changes. Today we have other windows that we can use, windows that will help us see beyond a God operating according to our human mode of thinking.

Consider, for example, the 60 trillion cells in each of our bodies. Cells do not stop and think about what to do. Imagine the mixed-mess we would be in if that were the case! I shake my head in wonder and amazement when I think about cells in an embryo. Some cells work to produce a pair of eyes, others set off to form ears, others to make a functioning heart ... and on it goes. No thinking, as we humans experience thinking, involved.

Take this a step further and consider all the energy in the universe. Energy does not think. It just “does”. It creates, it unfolds, it manifests in countless ways – and it does not think about it.

I suspect we get caught up with the wonder of the human brain. We tend to think that our conscious awareness is the greatest, most wonderful phenomenon in the universe. Yes, it is wonderful, but as an operating system – needing to take in information, process it and then make decisions – it is slow and cumbersome in comparison with the way cells work or the way energy operates all through the universe.

And we put this human mode of thinking onto whatever “God” is?

We recognize that no window we use to expose ourselves to the mystery of God can grasp what God is. We recognize that people at different points in the faith journey will use different windows to help them relate with this mystery. We must respect the use of many, varying windows. However, we must also be prepared to examine now, as perhaps never before, whether the understanding of God to which some respected windows have led us is sufficient to ground Christian faith in the future.”

## **Incarnation: Some evolutionary thoughts**

By Diarmuid O'Murchu

The physicist, Elizabet Sahtouris, reinforces this notion that we are undergoing a major evolutionary transition, one that requires us to outgrow our adolescent belligerence and mature into responsible young adults, who will learn to treat creation and each other in more adult and liberating ways. And this, too, I suggest, is the major challenge facing Christians at this time. We are called to outgrow religious co-dependency and embrace an inter-dependent incarnational spirituality.

Over the past 2,000 years the Jesus story has been bedevilled with patriarchal co-dependency. The Gospel narratives have been simplified and domesticated for children and for adults of childlike disposition. Subservience has been the desired outcome and in many cases has been effectively achieved. But it leaves us with an adult population, many of whom have abandoned the Christian faith or find its patronising propaganda intolerable and oppressive. The old plot is becoming increasingly dysfunctional.

I wish to suggest that incarnational Christianity is a faith first and foremost for adults, for people mature and visionary enough to embrace the daring praxis of a subversive adult Jesus, seeking to honour an adult God. Rightly, therefore, Jesus needs to be contextualised afresh within the big story of creation, reinforcing the big vision of God's creative Spirit. Nothing short of this will satisfy the spiritual hunger of our age, nor indeed will anything less be of much use to humanity on the threshold of a new evolutionary leap.

**Extract from Diarmuid O'Murchu, Christian Life (Essay 1).**

<http://www.diarmuid13.com>

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### **Danger for a church**

Charity is a sign of failure. Not a sign of failure on the part of the person needing the charity. (You can't blame a person for not picking himself up by his bootstraps, when he can't even afford to buy boots.) Charity is a sign of failure on the part of society to achieve justice. ...

The danger for a church is not to hear justice preached from the pulpit or even to hear politics preached from the pulpit. The danger for a church is not to hear anything that matters preached from the pulpit. The danger for a church is not to care about those outside the walls of the church. The danger for a church is to only care about those inside the walls of the church. The danger for a church is not to care about providing a meal to the poor on Saturday morning. The danger for a church is to only care about providing a potluck to its members on Wednesday night. The danger for a church is not to care about social justice. The danger for a church is to only care about being a social club.

#### **Justice For More Than Just Us**

Transcript for November 28, 2010 by Bill Freeman

C3 Exchange website: [www.c3exchange.org](http://www.c3exchange.org)

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria



invites you to

- *“Jesus in the 1st century:  
Jesus in the 21st century”*  
by

**Rev John Smith  
Rev'd Dr Lorraine Parkinson  
Rev Dr Chris Page**

**a panel of speakers  
presenting progressive perspectives informed by scholarship  
and focussed on implications for faith and life today**

**WHEN:** Sunday 26 February 2012, 3.00pm to 5.00pm

**WHERE:** Glen Iris Uniting Church, Glen Iris Rd. (Melway Map 60 A9)  
Parking in church grounds and nearby streets

#### **THE SPEAKERS AND THEIR TOPICS**

##### **John Smith: “Discovering Jesus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century – the contribution of scholars”**

In the last two and a half decades New Testament scholars, particularly those from the Jesus Seminar, historical Jesus, school of theology have provided many questioning Christians with the necessary tools for a faith search with intellectual integrity. Who are they? What is unique or valuable about their contribution? What impact has their contribution had on practical Christianity? Where are they taking us? From Doubt to Deconstruction to Discovery – searching for a faith I can affirm.

**Rev John Smith** is a recently retired Uniting Church minister who has had a varied ministry including welfare management, chaplaincy and parish ministry. He has followed the work of the Jesus Seminar as it has developed. He is a founding member of the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria and a member of the Committee.

## **Lorraine Parkinson: “The teaching the church forgot”**

What was so threatening to the early church about the teachings of Jesus of Nazareth? What was it that led church leaders to give what he said a lower status than their own views **about** him as the Messiah/Christ? This section will pinpoint the difficult and dangerous teachings which have often been ignored or conveniently forgotten by the institutional church. What has been the effect of this? Why has the church acted in this way?

**The Rev Dr Lorraine Parkinson** is a retired ordained Minister of the Uniting Church. At Melbourne University she majored in Jewish Studies (including study of biblical and modern Hebrew and first century Aramaic). Her doctoral dissertation with the Melbourne College of Divinity was researched in Melbourne, Jerusalem, Cambridge University (UK) and Episcopal Divinity School (Cambridge Massachusetts USA) and was on the gospel writers’ transformation of the self-identity of Jesus. In 2011 she published “The World According to Jesus ... his blueprint for the best possible world”. Lorraine is a member of the Committee of PCNV.

## **Chris Page: “Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”**

In contemporary western society Jesus is far more popular than Christianity, the Christian church and perhaps even “God.” Virtually all religions and even non-religious societies seem to be unanimous in their view that the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth is fundamental to moving humanity forward. However significant questions remain: What is the role of the Christ figure so dominant in Christian theology for the last two thousand years? Can one encounter the historical Jesus without a sense of the mystical or cosmic Christ? And is a great teacher, moral inspiration and prophetic sage, enough to sustain and inspire the Christian experience in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

**Rev Dr Christopher Page** has recently moved from ministry in the Baptist Church to Toorak Uniting Church. From 1985 to 1995 he lived and studied in Ontario Canada, completing a doctorate in Education in 1991 with a focus on Adult Education. Chris is the Vice-President of PCNV and has been actively involved multi-faith issues in the city of Manningham.

**Cost** is \$7 (\$5 for members)

*“Open minds, open hearts, open hands”*

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“The transformation of Christianity over the first 400 years of its existence is as profound as we can imagine. It started out with a teacher of the Law of Moses who imagined what the world might be like if God’s Laws were put into place instead of the laws of Empire. By the time of the full conversion of Constantine on his death-bed, Christianity had become the official Roman religion. What originally was a movement oppressed by Caesar because it was seen as a competitor, had become the Roman cult of the Lord Christ. It had become, in fact, an imperial religion – the state religion of the Roman Empire. ...

“These days the winds of change are blowing again. The growing international movement in mainstream churches known as ‘progressive Christianity’ is an attempt to reclaim for the foundation of Christian life the teachings of Jesus, the teacher of divine wisdom from Nazareth.”

Lorraine Parkinson, “*Jesus of Nazareth: how did he become the Christ?*” Address for the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria, 6 September 2009.