



Finding spiritual meaning at Easter

During the coming weeks religion will be in the news. Election of a Pope is taking place in Rome. Abuse of children by religious and staff in religious institutions is the subject of both state and national inquiries. And Easter observances will confront us with starkly conflicting assumptions about the significance of Jesus, the nature of God, and the deepest needs of people – to say nothing of commercial exploitation of 'Easter eggs'.

PCNV offers some modest contributions to an understanding of issues raised by Easter. Page 2 of this newsletter gives details of an [Easter Service on 17 March](#) that offers a different understanding of Good Friday. The review of a book by John Dominic Crossan on pages 3 and 4 of the newsletter offers a [perspective on Jesus](#) that involves a challenge to how we live. The PCNV meeting on 24 March will be addressed by Dr Val Webb on the [positive role of questioning and doubt](#) in enriching faith and life (see page 5). Then ten days after Easter, on Wednesday 10 April, Professor David Tacey will speak on '[Resurrection Stories for Non-literal Thinkers](#)' (see page 2).

Progressive Christianity is about exploring our Christian heritage to find ways to live guided by scholarship and respecting intellectual integrity.

FAITH IN ACTION

[In spite of a hot afternoon for the first meeting of PCNV for 2013, an audience of 80 - 90 was inspired and fascinated by three examples of a progressive faith in action.](#)

Dr Janet Bodycomb is a Melbourne GP who donates her time and expertise to refugees and asylum seekers at the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre. Dr Bodycomb attributed her desire to help these needy people to her background in the church and the role models provided by her parents. She explained the enormous and varied needs the ASRC tries to meet. She told moving stories of the kinds of health crises faced by people who have experienced war, torture, famine and malnutrition. She gave the audience a clear picture of how they too can help.

Dr Ian Anderson has contributed his expertise in financial management to his voluntary work on the Board of Oxfam for over thirty years. Dr Anderson painted a broad picture of the kind of work in which Oxfam has been involved, since it was first called Community Aid Abroad. He explained how his faith has always been the driver for his voluntary work, and also for his

venture into the area of sustainability in corporate activity.

Mr John Rogerson is CEO of Australian Drug Foundation, whose professional and voluntary work includes the important work of advising on alcohol management. Mr Rogers gave a clear, down-to-earth explanation of the huge crisis faced by Australian society in coming to grips with alcohol related violence, poverty and ill health. His life-long faith is being expressed by his person-to-person involvement with young people and with sporting clubs he helps with management of alcohol on their premises.

- Lorraine Parkinson

COMMON DREAMS 3 **Canberra** **19 - 22 September 2013**

We expect there will be a large group of PCNV members travelling to Canberra to meet with progressives from across Australia and New Zealand and to receive the stimulus of top Australian and international speakers. See the program and register on-line at www.commondreams.org.au

Easter is a time in the Christian year when progressive Christian perspectives differ sharply from many traditional Christian understandings.

A Memorial Service for Jesus of Nazareth

**Sunday March 17, 5:00pm –
6:30pm**

Manningham Uniting Church
152 Anderson's Creek Road, East
Doncaster
Parking on site.

*This will be a time to remember
Jesus with love, and to name his
legacy to the world.*

*It will be a time to remember and
mourn the injustice and savagery
of his death.*

*It will be a time to remember that
his death was mourned by God;
not required by God.*

*It will be a time to remember that
Jesus died for his 'kingdom' vision
of the best possible world.*

The service will include musical
reflection with video images, song,
silence and prayer.

It will be followed by a sharing (not
a Eucharist) of bread and wine, and
then by a light shared meal.

**Come and experience a
different way of
understanding Good
Friday.**

**NB: It will be held on March 17,
NOT ON GOOD FRIDAY.**

**PCNV invites you
to think about Easter
in historical and literary
perspective**

“RESURRECTION STORIES FOR NON-LITERAL THINKERS”

**Address by
Professor David Tacey
of LaTrobe University**

**on
WEDNESDAY 10 APRIL
5.30 pm to 6.45 pm**

**at
Ewing Memorial Uniting Church
Cr Coppin Street & Bourke Road,
Malvern East
Melway map 59 G12**

INCLUSIVE CATHOLICS MASS



Celebrant: Fr Greg Reynolds

Every first and third Sunday at 5.00 pm

Glen Iris Road Uniting Church
200 Glen Iris Rd, Glen Iris.

To welcome all Catholics and Christians
but especially

the disenfranchised and the excluded.

For detail contact Greg Reynolds 0400 534 557

Website: www.inclusive-catholics.com

THE MEANING OF THE LORD'S PRAYER

The Greatest Prayer. Rediscovering the Revolutionary Meaning of the Lord's Prayer. John Dominic Crossan. HarperOne. 2010. Review by David Merritt

After reading this book and finding it stimulating, I used it with a study group and found it packed with material that provided insights and challenges. Crossan combines cutting edge scholarship about both early Christian writings and social conditions in the first century eastern Mediterranean world with vivid communication. The result is a book that guides a reader to see the life and teachings of Jesus in fresh and challenging ways.

In the Prologue, the author introduces the Lord's Prayer as "The strangest prayer":
'The Lord's Prayer is Christianity's greatest prayer. It is also Christianity's strangest prayer. It is prayed by all Christians, but it never mentions Christ. It is prayed in all churches, but it never mentions church. It is prayed on Sundays, but it never mentions Sunday. It is called the "Lord's Prayer," but it never mentions "Lord". ...

'It is prayed by Christians who focus on the next life in heaven or in hell, but it never mentions the next life, heaven, or hell. It is prayed by Christians who emphasise what it never mentions and also prayed by Christians who ignore what it does.' (Page1)

The meaning of each section of the prayer is explored in the context of biblical writings and Roman dominated life in Jesus' day. The prayer as a whole is a vivid commitment to doing 'your will on earth as in heaven'.

'When you read "kingdom of God", therefore, mentally rephrase it as the "ruling style of God". It imagines how the world would be if the biblical God actually sat on an imperial throne down here below.' (Page 78)

Substantial parts of this small book (188 pages) focus on what Jesus meant by the 'kingdom of God'. For example there is an illuminating and confronting discussion of how the message Jesus began to announce when he heard of the death of John the Baptist was different from the message of John whom Jesus described as 'the greatest human ever born' (Matthew 11: 11, Luke 7: 28). Jesus had been part of the John movement (Mark 1: 9 -10)

'John believed that only sin held up God's transformative intervention. So he created a great sacramental and penitential renewal of the exodus. His followers were first brought out into the desert east of the Jordan and were then brought back into the Jewish homeland though that river. As they passed through it, repentance purified their souls just as water washed their bodies. Thereafter, they were received into the promised land as a regenerated people. Them, surely, said John, God would come, any day now. Surely said John, once a critical mass of purified people were ready, God would have no further excuse for delay.' (pages 86 – 87)

'But John was wrong, terribly, tragically wrong. He announced the immediate advent of an avenging God and what came was the immediate advent of an avenging local ruler. Herod Antipas, the Roman appointed governor of Galilee, arrested and executed John. *And God did nothing – no intervention and no prevention.*' (Page 88)

'Jesus watched, Jesus learned, and Jesus changed. ... He changed his understanding not only about the kingdom of God, but about the God of the kingdom.' (Page 88)

'In answer Jesus proclaimed another ... aspect of his paradigm shift You have been waiting for God, he said, while God has been waiting for you. No wonder nothing is happening. You want God's intervention, he said, while God wants your collaboration. *God's kingdom is here, but only insofar as you accept it, enter it, live it, and thereby establish it.*' (Pages 89 – 90)

I have quoted this example at some length. Far better than a mere description could do, it provides some sense of the way understanding of the text of the gospels leads to profound implications for how we think and how we live.

This book is compelling reading for an individual and a rich source of material for group study.

Usually available from the bookstall at PCNV meetings and also from internet suppliers such as Mosaic Resources, Preston, paperback \$24.61 plus postage. Tel (03) 9470 6650
<https://mosaicresources.com.au>

COSMIC CALENDAR

Progressives recognise that creation stories involve myths and metaphors – that literal thinking destroys their claims to respect. However an ongoing challenge is to hear alongside those claims the grand perspective of the story of beginnings told by contemporary science. A recent email from the progressive community in Michigan, USA, C3Exchange, included the following from Ian Lawton. It is reproduced with permission.

Carl Sagan introduced the cosmic perspective into mainstream thought. The Cosmic Calendar is the history of the universe scaled down to a single year. If the Big Bang took place on January 1, the Milky Way emerged in May. Other planets followed in June, July and August. The earth and our sun arrived mid-September. Life on earth came soon after. But humans didn't appear until December 31 at 11.59 pm. In other words, it's as if we arrived on the scene just a few seconds ago. Within those few seconds, in a blink of a cosmic eye, we became aware of our role in a massive thirteen billion year evolutionary process.

We've barely had time to process our few seconds of life, still rubbing our eyes trying to wake up to our place in the enormity of it all. Sagan said, "We are like butterflies who flutter for a day and think it is forever." Small flutters in the cosmic metamorphosis. And yet we know from the Butterfly Effect that small flutters in one place create monumental changes in another place far away. Small is not only beautiful. Small is amazing. Small is transformational.

Piglet experienced this in Winnie the Pooh, as A A Milne said so well,

Piglet noticed that even though he had a Very Small Heart, it could hold a rather large amount of Gratitude.

Our small and limited minds are capable of imagining enormous possibilities, and dreaming the biggest dreams. Our small hearts are capable of enormous gratitude and love. Our small efforts have the potential for enormous good in the world.

Ian Lawton. **C3Exchange, An Inclusive Spiritual Community. 24 February 2013**
www.c3exchange.org

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria



invites you to

“Still defending doubt”

with

Dr Val Webb

WHEN: Sunday 24 March 2013
3.00pm to 4.45pm
Followed by a book launch 4.45 to 5.00 pm

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

THE TOPIC

While doubt is encouraged in most disciplines, somehow in religion we have been expected to abandon all creative thinking and "just believe", blaming ourselves for our doubts. This is more about authorities and belief systems than about faith and certainly not the experience of that "great cloud of witnesses," courageously lurching from one doubt to the next, believing God was with them in their doubts. Doubts are not preying forces of evil but tantalizing carrots enticing us to richer experiences. They are not the enemies of dogma but the harbingers of hope. This book invites readers to doubt boldly, just as a scientist anticipates new discoveries with each doubt investigated.

VAL WEBB

Val Webb is an Australian theologian who holds graduate degrees in science and a Ph.D. in theology. She has taught in universities in the United States and Australia and has written ten books including *Like Catching Water in a Net: human attempts to describe the Divine* which won the religion category of Best Books USA Award in 2007. She now lives in Mudgee, Australia (www.valwebb.com.au) Her latest book is an updated and expanded second edition of *In Defence of Doubt: an invitation to adventure*.

BOOK LAUNCH

Why Weren't We Told?: A Handbook on 'Progressive' Christianity, by John H Smith and Rex A E Hunt will be launched in the final 15 minutes of the meeting.

PCNV meeting cost is \$7 (\$5 for members)

“Open minds, open hearts, open hands”