



THE PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN NETWORK OF VICTORIA INC.

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

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2020

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“The future is another country”

In her book *On Beauty* (2005), Zadie Smith wrote, “The future’s another country ... And I still ain’t got a passport”. Many writers have described the future as a foreign country. It is a feeling that many of us have as we think about life on the other side of the Corona virus. Restrictions on even local travel, experiences in solation, maintaining important contacts by phone and FaceTime rather than directly face to face, home schooling, working from home using the internet, conducting meetings, including church services, by Zoom and online, buying a wide range of supplies online for delivery or to be collected – the list could go on. They have made us more aware of what we took for granted. And everywhere there is discussion of whether we want to go back to life as it was or make some changes to make our lives different.

This issue of the Newsletter offers a few modest thought starters about some issues; a wide ranging look at community and world issues by Professor Joseph Camilleri, a touching Pooh story about friends and community, a look back at some of the changes in ‘religious’ groups that gave impetus to the hope that Progressive Christianity would bring new diversity and vitality to churches that increasingly seemed moribund.

In Australia the pandemic showed up some consequences of running down public services and leaving essential caring services to be operated on a for-profit basis. And there were some largely unforeseen personal and community consequences of so many jobs being casualised. With no employment provision covering sickness, infected people were motivated to take personal action that could adversely affect others at work.

As PCNV switched the focus of meetings to Zoom and to more topics that deal with personal experience and activities that enrich living, implied questions about the future of religion and spirituality become urgent. An article on hopes in 2006 when PCNV was formed provide another stimulus to look ahead. Zadie Smith lamented that ‘she ain’t got a passport’ to the future. Maybe we will not need a passport to arrive there; we will find we are there. The French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry said, “The trouble with our times is that the future is not what it used to be.” The challenge is that we will get a future that we both help to make and that we allow our political, business, community and church leaders to decide.

Disenchantment and Re-enchantment

The PCNV meeting held on 23 August as this Newsletter was finalised was about directions toward the future of Christian faith under the title that tells the story of our immediate past and the possibility of a different, more life-enriching future: “Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-enchantment”.

In coming weeks the presentation by Rev Dr Chris Page will be placed on the PCNV website:

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

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LIFE AFTER COVID-19: AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMAGINE THE FUTURE

Address by Professor Joseph Camilleri OAM July 26, 2020, on Zoom

Notes by Lorna Henry

We live in a Global society and our social and economic arrangements are not fit for purpose. This is the defining ethical issue for our times. COVID-19 is not the first epidemic, nor will it be the last. We've had Sars, Ebola, Asian Flu, none of them totally stamped out. And there will be more to come!

1. The world was unready for each of the above and then wanted to forget each, with no plans for a future epidemic. The US and UK had appalling performances with no preparation and no attention to expert advice. Australia and NZ did much better, NZ especially.

WHO was disregarded and criticized by many. The US made WHO a scapegoat for its own incompetence.

In Europe: Italy's PM made an early request for assistance from all countries of Europe and not one bothered to reply.

2. There is a shift in the international centre of gravity, from the West to the East. Note the example of Eastern action and efficiency: The virus began in China. There was initial cover up at the provincial level. The central Government waited, then came down hard. It purged the provincial government and began the most draconian lockdown. Swift construction of hospitals, and they got on top of it. A massive operation; China's population is 65 times that of Australia. Countries which have done well in controlling the outbreak are China, Malaysia, South Korea, Vietnam – better than Europe and North America. Why? Responsibility taken and collective authority used.

3. COVID-19 is also an economic problem. The pain and suffering is felt most among the poor and disadvantaged.

4. It affects the environment. What humans have done to the environment may have contributed to the outbreak. The loss of biodiversity and habitat (deforestation and use of wildlife for commercial purposes) increases human-wildlife transfer.

The challenge is to acknowledge the obligations we all have towards one another, to the common good, to humanity and the earth, creatures and habitat. That is at the heart of the crisis.

We must reclaim the common sphere (See Question 3 for an explanation), subject our institutions to careful scrutiny, and converse with fellow citizens about our social and economic organisations,

What can a citizen do? A: Everyone has an obligation to put issues on the table.

QUESTIONS:

1. Dick Carter. Global population projections for the next 40 years predict another 2 billion people. How do we deal with that challenge? Especially difficult for Africa and lesser developed countries.

Answer: Look at where the populations have stabilized. It's where there is a reasonable standard of living, smaller families. Eg. China, Japan (now declining), Russia (declining). If the world were serious about population, it would be serious about development.

2. Dick Carter. The movement of influence from West to East. Is this a return swing of the pendulum to a time 400 years ago when China and India together accounted for 50% of the world economy?

Answer: It could go back to that. A challenge for the US is to creatively accept this shift and not buck against it. Australia could do so much as an independent middle power, along with others. We need to develop 'trust-building' measures among countries. But Australia is not doing that. It is following the US.

For example: The US criticizes WHO; Australia follows; US suggests an international enquiry; Australia puts the request. Then, we did not get an enquiry, we got an evaluation. The EU got it going, not Australia. The evaluation will include all countries, including Australia and the US.

3. Clarification of the term 'Reclaim the Commons': all the world's resources are there for the benefit of all humanity, creatures and the earth, not for national or private gain. The opposite of 'commons' is 'enclosure' of resources for economic or political gain.

4. Margaret Mayman: What institutions are needed to achieve this?

Answer: In an ideal world, governments would engage in wide-ranging consultation. But, in the absence of that, we must all try to establish links within the community.

One example would be in education. Present educational systems are dreadful! They don't encourage deliberation and consultation! Parents must ask, 'Is my child getting an education to make a constructive contribution to society?'

The various professions have an obligation and opportunity to engage in consultation. Architecture, law, medicine, teaching – all have strong links to the common good.

Public voices must be integrated into government choices. (*GetUp, Amnesty, Greenpeace, Welfare agencies*)

Communal systems

Communal systems support immune systems at very basic levels. As the disproportionate numbers of people of colour, of working people and of incarcerated people afflicted by COVID-19 show us, an individual's capacity to heal depends not only upon the organism's innate capacity to sustain its vitality in the face of interactions with microbes. This healing capacity itself depends upon social and environmental resources, like adequate food and shelter, as well as ongoing health care throughout one's life.

Ed Cohen in "A Cure for COVID-19 Will Take More Than Personal Immunity". *Scientific American* August 7, 2020

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What we need and have wanted...is nothing less than a solution to the problem of community, of social morality, of ordered society.

This is the great abyss at the heart of modern life that opened up with the decline of the mediaeval cosmology...

Daily Meditations with Matthew Fox *August 2, 2020*

Team@DailyMeditationsWithMatthewFox.org

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It's by looking out for each other that we're going to get through this. And actually, looking out for others can be the greatest reward of all.

- UNHCR 4 June 2020

For an entrancing thought-provoking look at life under COVID-19 try the following YouTube:

Michael McIntyre Visits Fortune Teller Before Lockdown!

https://youtu.be/LEr_84HJbgk

Pooh and Piglet were There

It occurred to Pooh and Piglet that they hadn't heard from Eeyore for several days, so they put on their hats and coats and trotted across the Hundred Acre Wood to Eeyore's stick house. Inside the house was Eeyore.

"Hello Eeyore," said Pooh.

"Hello Pooh. Hello Piglet," said Eeyore, in a Glum Sounding Voice.

"We just thought we'd check in on you," said Piglet, "because we hadn't heard from you, and so we wanted to know if you were okay."

Eeyore was silent for a moment. "Am I okay?" he asked, eventually. "Well, I don't know, to be honest. Are any of us really okay? That's what I ask myself. All I can tell you, Pooh and Piglet, is that right now I feel really rather Sad, and Alone, and Not Much Fun To Be Around At All. Which is why I haven't bothered you. Because you wouldn't want to waste your time hanging out with someone who is Sad, and Alone, and Not Much Fun To Be Around At All, would you now."

Pooh looked at Piglet, and Piglet looked at Pooh, and they both sat down, one on either side of Eeyore in his stick house.

Eeyore looked at them in surprise. "What are you doing?"

"We're sitting here with you," said Pooh, "because we are your friends. And true friends don't care if someone is feeling Sad, or Alone, or Not Much Fun To Be Around At All. True friends are there for you anyway. And so here we are."

"Oh," said Eeyore. "Oh." And the three of them sat there in silence, and while Pooh and Piglet said nothing at all; somehow, almost imperceptibly, Eeyore started to feel a very tiny little bit better.

Because Pooh and Piglet were There.

No more; no less.

Note from the editor: When you look around a corner you can be surprised. I asked the good friend who first sent me this adventure of Pooh and Piglet if she remembered which Pooh book this came from. I had enjoyed the Pooh story and wanted to include it in this Newsletter. My intention was to provide PCNV Newsletter readers a correct acknowledgement. After some astute internet investigation I was told this was one of many Fake Pooh stories probably not written by A A Milne but coming from a blogger, Kathryn Wallace:

<https://englishwanted.com/category/proofreading/> .

As a follow-up I was referred by my astute friend to a piece on "The theology of Winnie the Pooh" <https://pastorserve.net/the-theology-winnie-the-pooh/> That was definitely the end of my search. One of the axioms of Progressive Christianity is that living with questions can be more significant than finding answers. Perhaps sometimes we should skip the questions and enjoy the sunshine.

Signs of hope

*The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria was formed in June 2006. Some around the table discussing the need for opportunities in Australia to consider new developments in Progressive Christianity had just read the May-June edition of **The Fourth R**, the magazine of Westar Institute. It featured an article by Hal Taussig, “Grassroots Progressive Christianity, A Quiet Revolution”. The article summarized the findings of a national (USA) investigation of thousands of progressive churches and groups described in his just published book, **A New Spiritual Home: Progressive Christianity Emerges at the Grass Roots**. Polebridge Press 2006.*

The investigation of diverse groups across the United States presented a hopeful picture of the future based on changes Hal Taussig saw taking place across the nation: “New voices celebrating a lively, open-minded, and open-hearted Christianity are emerging at the grass roots across America.”

The article and the book have been key references for me during 15 years on the Committee of the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria. They still speak of hope now and for the future. As always, hopeful possibilities confront us with choices. Following is the conclusion of that 2006 article. - Editor

The Five Characteristics of Progressive Christianity

1. A spiritual vitality and expressiveness. The wide-range of churches and groups in this movement—in contrast to the traditional liberal Christians—are not just heady social activists and intellectuals. They like expressing themselves spiritually in meditation, prayer, artistic forms, and lively worship. It is astonishing how similar these spiritual and worship expressions are, even though they come from widely different denominations and parts of the United States. *A New Spiritual Home* details five aspects of this new spiritual vitality: participatory worship, expressive and arts-infused worship and programming, a reclaiming of discarded ancient Christian rituals (for example, baptismal immersion and anointing with oil), a wide variety of non-Christian rituals and meditation techniques, and development of small groups for spiritual growth and nurture.

2. An insistence on Christianity with intellectual integrity. This new kind of Christian expression is devoted to and nourished by a wide-ranging intellectual curiosity and critique. It interrogates Christian assumptions and traditions in order to reframe, reject, or renew them. God language, the relationship between science and religion, and postmodern consciousness are the major arenas of this intellectual rigor.

3. A transgression of traditional gender boundaries. These groups are explicitly and thoroughly committed to feminism and affirmation of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people. The feminism is regularly a part of new kinds of family and child-rearing dynamics. The extent of gay-friendliness is illustrated by at least seven national Christian movements devoted to support of GLBTs and rooted in thousands of local churches.

4. The belief that Christianity can be vital without claiming to be the best or the only true religion. In contrast to mainstream Christianity’s lukewarm “tolerance” of other religions, progressive Christianity pro-actively asserts that it is not the best or the only. Progressive Christians take pains to claim simultaneously their own Christian faith and their support of the complete validity of other religions.

5. Strong ecological and social justice commitments. The longstanding Christian interest in aiding those who suffer or are poor is continued in progressive Christianity. Similarly, this new movement is committed to old style liberal social justice programming and peace advocacy. In addition, however, there is a passion for environmentalism, including explicit attention to changing life style and consumer patterns in order to lessen the human footprint on the Earth.

Hal Taussig, “Grassroots Progressive Christianity, A Quiet Revolution”. **The Fourth R**. May-June 2006. The Westar Institute. www.westarinstitute.org

Five magnificent short films about living today

Progressive Christianity Network Britain has just released a vivid and challenging set of five short films, each presenting one or two people who tell their story - very personal experiences of living in UK today. They are described (in something of an understatement) as “Short films with big challenges for religious faith”.

Each STORY is titled by a person’s name and comes in five brief parts:

- ‘The story’ telling you in just a few lines about the experiences of the person
- ‘The film’ About 7 minutes in YouTube style so you can adjust the volume and stay half screen or flick to full screen
- ‘Talking Points’ with some key issues or quotes to invite discussion
- ‘Resources’ to go deeper into the issues and related services. Mainly UK resources but Australians will be able to think of Australian equivalents
- ‘Reading’ – selected books on the issues raised.

Gemma talks about her experience of growing up in a conservative church but feeling lost and finding meaning for her as a Hindu. She now likes to go to both the Hindu temple and Christian church (where her husband is the priest)

Nathaniel is a gay man who talks about his first gay experience and what followed in discussion with his mother and implications for his religion.

Holly speaks about morality, faith and rebellion as she and friends become passionately involved in advocating action on climate change.

Greg is a working class man on an inner city estate who explores how the church could relate to working class culture – “inviting the Spirit back in” because “now the church, local politicians and government need to better understand working class culture”.

Patrick and Davey’s story is headed “Faith, scars and friendship” as they talk about being Protestant and Catholic in divided Belfast – on opposite sides of the political and religious spectrums but able to maintain friendship around ice hockey. An evocative Irish song evokes scars and friendship.

The Films with accompanying Stories and Talking Points are available free at

<https://madeofstories.uk>

A gift of Progressive Christianity Network Britain to world-wide audiences who want to explore how religion may relate to the contemporary world. There were occasions when I thought the broad English and Irish accents (Greg and Patrick and Davey in particular) might be a barrier to Australian users. But the deeply moving and challenging content of what they are telling us made accents a minor impediment to moving stories that can stimulate understanding and action. Editor

The Progressive Christianity Network Britain website is: www.pcnbritain.org.uk

PCNV MEETINGS IN 2020

SUNDAY 23 FEBRUARY: “Understanding Sexuality and Gender Diversity in 2020” with Ro Allen, Victorian Commissioner for Gender and Sexuality.

MARCH & APRIL cancelled due to the pandemic and planning for a Zoom meeting format

SUNDAY 24 MAY: Dr Val Webb, “Florence Nightingale: The Making of a Radical Theologian”. Zoom

SUNDAY 26 JUNE: “ Gifts of Winter” with Coralie Ling, Julie Hall and Greg Crowe. Zoom

SUNDAY 26 JULY: Professor Joseph Camilleri OAM, Life after Covic-19. An opportunity to reimagine the future. Zoom

SUNDAY 23 AUGUST: “Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-enchantment. Directions toward the future of Christian faith” with Rev Dr Christopher Page. An opportunity to reflect on your faith journey. 4.00pm to 5.00pm. Zoom.

COMING

SUNDAY 27 SEPTEMBER: “Poems and a Reflection by Rev Glynn Cardy”. Rev Glynn Cardy is the Minister at the Community of St Lukes’ Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, Remuera, Auckland. Glynn is a leading NZ progressive Christian minister. He is well known for the provocative billboards making statements on social justice issues which he displays outside his churches. He is also a noted poet whose work contains strong threads of spirituality and commentary on the human condition. Glynn is also a member of the Common Dreams Committee.

OCTOBER and NOVEMBER (AGM) are being planned.

The website is being upgraded to provide up-to-date reports of previous programs and news of coming programs: <https://www.pcnvictoria.org.au>

More stimulation from Paul Valéry, quoted on page 1

“The trouble with our times is that the future is not what it used to be. ”

“The best way to make your dreams come true is to wake up.”

“Sometime I think; and sometime I am.”

“God made everything out of nothing. But the nothingness shows through.”

“One should be light like a bird, and not like a feather.”

“All our language is composed of brief little dreams; and the wonderful thing is that we sometimes make of them strangely accurate and marvelously reasonable thoughts. What should we be without the help of that which does not exist? Very little. And our unoccupied minds would languish if fables, mistaken notions, abstractions, beliefs, and monsters, hypotheses, and the so-called problems of metaphysics did not people with beings and objectless images our natural depths and darkness. Myths are the souls of our actions and our loves. We cannot act without moving towards a phantom. We can love only what we create.”

Paul Valéry, French poet, philosopher and essayist, 1871 to 1945.
https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/141425.Paul_Val_ry