



What difference does a progressive perspective make?

In September Eric Elnes described trends in USA for both post-evangelical and post-liberal Christians to move beyond their traditional assumptions, particularly their doctrinal assumptions, to find some common ground. He described the outcomes as "Convergence Christianity". Many of his points resonated for the people from the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria who participated in the one day seminar. The 12 points he identified are included in this Newsletter. They can be a reference point for considering the difference that a progressive Christian perspective can make.

Our October meeting with Professor John Langmore from Melbourne University addressed the topic "The contribution of radical Christians to a more socially just Australia". The 80 people who attended were challenged by the presentation that proposed practical steps towards reimagining human progress for a flourishing world. Some quotations are included in following pages.

Details of our final meeting for 2012 on 25 November are on the final page. That is also the date for our Annual General Meeting with a report that will look over the full year.

Convergence Christianity

Eric Elnes described some trends in USA Christianity that could have implications for the changing Australian scene.

"... the term Convergence Christianity is a phenomenon primarily among post-evangelical and post-liberal Christians who have left their native traditions behind – or remain within them but have let go of what they consider to be the "baggage" of their traditions – and are now discovering each other out in the wilderness. They're finding that each group has gifts to share that the other has been yearning for ...

What follows are twelve characteristics of what I'm finding at the grassroots which I identify with Convergence Christianity. ... For each characteristic, I have identified something these communities generally are letting go of, and the new reality they generally are embracing. By saying "generally," I mean that not all communities are exactly alike. Some share more of this common ground than others. I believe the

time is coming when these twelve attributes will be part of what is considered the new "guiding source of attraction" by adherents of many communions."

The 12 characteristics are set out on the following page to make it easy to copy them for discussion.

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria Inc will be held on 25 November at 4.30 pm at Glen Iris Uniting Church, Glen Iris Rd., Glen Iris. A notice of the AGM has been mailed to all current members.

The President's Report will provide an overview of the activities and finances of the organisation in the past year.

There will be elections of officers and committee members to manage PCNV for the coming year.

CHARACTERISTICS OF CONVERGENCE CHRISTIANITY

Eric Elnes

“Twelve characteristics of what I’m finding at the grassroots which I identify with Convergence Christianity. ... For each characteristic, I have identified something these communities generally are letting go of, and the new reality they generally are embracing.”

- (1) They are letting go of the notion that their particular faith is the only legitimate one on the planet. They are embracing an understanding that God is greater than our imagination can comprehend (or fence in), and thus they are open to the possibility that God may speak within and across all faith traditions.
- (2) They are letting go of literal and inerrant interpretations of their sacred texts while celebrating the unique treasures that their texts contain. They are embracing a more ancient, prayerful, non-literal approach to these same texts, and finding new insights and resources as they do so.
- (3) They are letting go of the notion that people of faith are called to dominate nature. They are embracing a more organic and reverent understanding of human relationship with the earth.
- (4) They are letting go of empty worship conventions and an overemphasis on doctrines as tools of division and exclusion. They are embracing more diverse, creative, engaging approaches, often making strong use of the arts.
- (5) They are letting go of a narrow definition of sexual orientation and gender identity. They are embracing with increasing confidence an understanding that affirms the dignity and worth of all people.
- (6) They are letting go of an understanding that people of faith should only interest themselves in the “spiritual” well-being of people. They are embracing a more holistic understanding that physical and spiritual well-being are related.
- (7) They are letting go of the desire to impose their particular vision of faith on wider society. They are embracing the notion that their purpose is to make themselves more faithful adherents of their vision of faith.
- (8) They are letting go of the old rivalries between “liberal, moderate, and conservative” branches of their faith. They are embracing a faith that transcends these very definitions.
- (9) They are letting go of notions of the afterlife that are dominated by judgment of “unbelievers.” They are embracing an understanding that, as God’s creations, God is eternally faithful to us, and that all people are loved far more than we can comprehend.
- (10) They are letting go of the notion that faith and science are incompatible. They are embracing the notion that faith and science can serve as allies in the pursuit of truth, and that God values our minds as well as our hearts.
- (11) They are letting go of the notion that one’s work and one’s spiritual path are unrelated. They are embracing an understanding that rest and recreation, prayer and reflection, are as important as work, and that our work is a “calling” and expression of our “sweet spot.”
- (12) They are letting go of old hierarchies that privilege religious leaders over laypeople. They are embracing an understanding that all people have a mission and purpose in life in response to the call of the Holy Spirit. It’s no longer about who wears the robes but who lives the life.

AN ECONOMY OF LIFE: RE-IMAGINING HUMAN PROGRESS FOR A FLOURISHING WORLD

“The pursuit of ever-increasing wealth has driven the development of the systems and structures which now define the way our world works. These systems and structures are financial, geared to the making of profit, and they are global. They assume that eventually everyone will get a share of the wealth: as long as the systems of production and consumption are not limited, eventually the money will ‘trickle down’ and those who are now poor will one day be rich too.

In this context, human wellbeing is measured in terms of continually increasing material prosperity, ‘progress’ is economic growth and when economic growth slows or stops, human progress is said to be halted. Ecological wellbeing is not a factor other than that the earth’s resources, extracted, excised, processed and refined, are essential for economic growth.

Over the last decade of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century, we have had to come to terms with the knowledge that this current global economic agenda, what is often referred to as neoliberal/neo-classical or (radical) free-market economics is failing to achieve prosperity for all, is causing violence and destruction to people and the planet and is entirely unsustainable in its current form.” ...

“We must find a new way to live together in peace with each other and the planet. It is time to ask ourselves what we can do differently. We must consider the values and the principles we need to guide us to more equitable, peaceful and sustainable ways of living. We must try to imagine this alternative life – what might it look like? How will we know if we are making the ‘right’ kind of ‘progress’?” ...

“Progress in the system is measured in terms of profit, size and above all economic growth and the achievement of continual economic growth is the goal of human activity. Human wellbeing, therefore, is at best regarded a secondary and derivative goal measured only in financial terms: if economic growth slows, halts or reverses, human wellbeing is threatened because the capacity of individuals to consume is threatened.

It is also important to recognise that in this economic model consideration of ecological wellbeing is entirely absent. Unrestrained consumerism, a necessary plank in this form of economy, is encouraged without consideration for the damage being inflicted upon the biosphere. The single-minded pursuit of corporations to deliver profit to their shareholders has resulted in the destruction of rivers and forests around the world and the devastation of Indigenous communities and cultures.” ...

“It is a matter of survival that we must declare limits to ‘growth’. Growth as it is measured by ever-increasing wealth and profits is actually not human progress in a sense that reflects the creative flourishing of human beings, but simply ‘greed’. It is time to reconsider growth if we are to ensure the planet’s survival for future generations. We must reconsider growth also as we recognise and accommodate the inherently cyclical nature of economies. Above all we must re-imagine and redefine our success, our progress, as societies and nations according to how well we support what is necessary for the flourishing of all people, including:

- financial security for a reasonable standard of living
- decent and meaningful work
- education
- healthcare
- secure housing
- appropriate social services
- “opportunities for cultural, technological... social and spiritual development”,

- the right to “participate in decision-making in the community” and
- vibrant, safe and inclusive communities.”

Extracts from *‘An Economy of Life: Re-imagining Human Progress for a Flourishing World.* Statement by the Assembly of the uniting Church in Australia, 2009. Used in an address to PCNV by Professor John Langmore. Email for a copy of the Report: enquiries@nat.uca.org.au

THE GOD THING by Fred Plumer. progressivechristianity.org

The challenge is that we are talking about a supreme Mystery that is virtually too big for most of us to even fathom. Every day, between our space travel, our amazing telescopes (including the Hubble) and the growing understanding of our universe, scientists find new and truly awesome information about our universe and have more questions. What we do know is that there are thousands of solar systems in our Galaxy and the number could be up to a billion solar systems. An average galaxy contains between 100 billion and 1 trillion numbers of stars. Our own Milky Way galaxy seems to contain about 200 billion stars; and that is only an average number of stars according to scientists today. Now picture this...there are virtually billions of Galaxies in our universe.

Scientists tell us now that if you make a circle with your thumb and finger, about the size of a half dollar, and look through it into the sky you are looking at over a billion solar systems, any one of which could support life. Hold on to that thought and then let's try and move to some description of God. The challenge of course is many of us want some sense of a personal God. But when we talk about a personal God, even for those who truly feel that they have had an experience of something they may want to call God, we are not describing God; we are describing our experience of a Great Mystery.

The point is that none of us can do anything more than describe our own experiences of this Great Mystery that sometimes feels so real to us. To move from our experience to description of what God is or what God wants is just something that we must admit is beyond us. As Dr. Gordon D. Kaufman, concludes in his book, *In Face Of Mystery*: “...In religious myth and symbols, and in theological doctrines and reflection, we are dealing with matters of profound, ultimately unfathomable mystery; the ultimate meaning of human life, the final truth about the world and our place within it, is simply not available to us humans.”

So what do progressive Christians do with the “God thing?” First we admit that whatever it is, if anything, it is a mystery beyond our comprehension. We can rename “it” as the Supreme Mystery, Ultimate Meaning, Unity or...but I believe that it is time to reject the dualistic idea of two realms...the real and the mysterious, the natural and the supernatural. I believe that we can live our lives in such a way that we can intentionally create opportunities to experience that “God Thing.” I now experience the supreme mystery almost every day of my life in some place, in some thought, or with someone.

Secondarily it is time, once again, to admit that there is no one, nothing outside of myself that needs my praise, my thanks, or even my obedience. I can choose to live in harmony with the operating forces of the universe or I can ignore them. It will not affect what happens to me when I die. However, I also know that there are certain practices in my life that will help me see, hear, taste and feel the awesome miracles that are always around me and within me, every day, wherever I go.

And finally, we must learn to be comfortable in midst of the unknown. Like all humans, I often find myself clamoring for answers, clarity and security. If we want to be open to the awesome experiences of creation we must be willing to live in the face of the Ultimate Mysteries.

LAUNCH OF A PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN LOBBY GROUP

On 21 August, 2012, a new religious lobby group, *A Progressive Christian Voice (Australia) Inc* [APCV], was launched in Queensland. Its President, the Rev'd Dr Peter Catt said, 'We want to represent the voice of the Christians who are trying to view life from the future.'

'We want the Australian public to understand that conservative lobby groups might be one expression of the Christian faith, but they are by no means the only expression', Dr Catt said. 'The application of faith to life requires us to endeavour to look back from the future. To have an eye for how future generations will view our current actions.'

'In every age we are challenged to see which aspects of our living, which we assume to be foundational to society, are in fact unjust and rob people of the liberty to flourish.'

More information including membership details and membership application form at <http://www.facebook.com/AProgressiveChristianVoiceAustralia>

Contact Ray Barraclough, Secretary of APCV, 44 Coral Street, Maleny, QLD 4552 or email: dorray@westnet.com.au

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

EMERGING CHURCH

Anderson's Creek Road Uniting Church
152 Anderson's Creek Road,
East Doncaster

Every third Sunday at 5.00pm

FINAL SERVICE FOR 2012:
November 18, 2012,
5.00 pm – 6.30pm



An opportunity to enter a sacred space and engage with the spiritual dimension of life, inspired by Jesus the Teacher and the God he loved.

This will include music, images, readings, a reflection on the theme, song, ritual and silence.



The liturgy will last for 45 minutes, followed by a blessing of bread and wine and conversation over a BYO light meal.

Enquiries to John Bodycomb
and Lorraine Parkinson,
Phone 9852 2150
Email: parki@netspace.net.au

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria



invites you to

*“Why don’t Australians go to church?
Implications for progressive Christians”.*

with

Rev Dr David Merritt

WHEN: Sunday 25 November 2012
3.00pm to 4.30pm
Followed by the Annual General Meeting at 4.30pm

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

As well as the increasing number of Australians who identify themselves with other faiths or no faith, a high percentage of Australians continue to identify themselves as Christian. Yet the proportion of those who attend church services has declined greatly. Religion generally and organised religion in particular are valued highly by some but increasingly ignored by the majority of Australians. If we can identify some of the causes of this changed attitude to churches, can that point to promising explorations of a different future? Progressive Christians are frequently in an uneasy relation to a church, feeling alienated by much of traditional Christianity, particularly its doctrinal traditions, but wanting to connect with the rich Christian heritage with the teachings of Jesus at its centre, sources of spiritual renewal, and cooperative action for a more just society. As the major denominations plan for a diminishing future, what are implications for progressive Christians?

THE SPEAKER

David Merritt is a retired Uniting Church minister with long experience at the cutting edge of change in the church. He was national director of education in the Uniting Church in Australia for nearly three decades, convenor of the education committee of the World Council of Churches for 6 years, a consultant to local churches and regional bodies across Australia about priorities in times of change, and has been secretary of the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria since its inception in 2006. He has been actively involved in training of welfare workers and youth workers and was a founder of Camp Coinda, an experiential personal development camp that continues to flourish after more than 6000 young people have participated.

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

“Open minds, open hearts, open hands”