

## *Reflections on the Parliament of World's Religions held in Melbourne, November 2009*

**ON THE BRIDGE: SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE INTER-RELIGIOUS JOURNEY AFTER THE PARLIAMENT OF THE WORLD'S RELIGIONS**



*On the bridge*

At the end of the formal proceedings, participants at the Melbourne Parliament of the World's Religions were invited to stand together on the bridge outside the Conference centre on the Yarra. This allowed a picture to be taken, with the mixture of religious, cultural and racial backgrounds a striking symbol of the diversity of the spiritualities and unity of humanity present. It also offered a rich metaphor for inter-religious engagement as a whole. For events such as the Parliament do not only act as bridges between otherwise separate, miscomprehending and sometimes

bitterly divided religious groups. The reality is that the best of inter-religious encounter is also directed and sustained by a great river of life and spirit which flows beneath all that bears light and wisdom. Furthermore, in many ways the task of inter-religious endeavour is to build bridges, so that religious peoples can find means to connect, enabling constructive traffic in directions which bring both greater understanding and also much-needed healing to the wider world. So how well did the Melbourne Parliament succeed in this respect and what are the next steps and challenges?

### » INSIDE this issue

#### » LEADER'S LETTER

Jill Robertson  
Page 4

#### » HOW ARE WE TO LIVE?

Jenny Burns  
Page 5

#### » MAKE A WORLD OF DIFFERENCE

Valerie Shevels  
Page 6

#### » GLIMPSES FROM THE PARLIAMENT OF WORLD'S RELIGIONS

Doug Hewitt  
Page 7

#### » BOOK REVIEW: 'A Century of Influence'

Clabon Allen  
Page 9

#### » BITS & PIECES

Mary Gilchrist  
Page 10

#### » WHY BE A CHRISTIAN?

June Mills  
Page 11

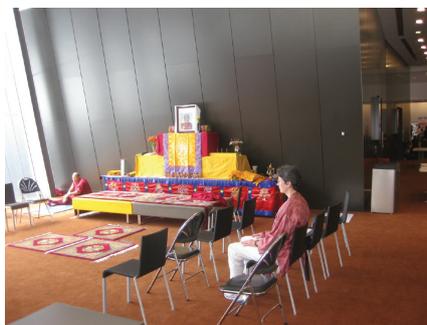
#### » NEW WELLSPRING COUNCIL SECRETARY - ALAN BAWDEN

Page 12

Towards the end of the Parliament, there was a concern voiced in some quarters about what would be its legacy. Partly this was prompted by the desire among some, including government sponsors, that the Parliament should not be a mere 'talking-shop'. I find myself unable to offer much of an assessment but I do have a sense that such a concern is a little misplaced. After all, the Parliament of the World's religions is exactly that: namely a (safe) place for people to meet and talk (or 'parley', to use the nearest English equivalent to the French word 'parler' from which Parliament derives). The effects of such a meeting and talking-place are not, and can not, be simply calibrated. The organising body, the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions, has offered up a new means to continue the conversation, through the creation of PeaceNext, a worldwide inter-religious social network (check it out and register at PeaceNext.org). Other immediate responses may also be traceable, whether in the lives of individuals or groups who attended or through networks and initiatives which have now emerged. Yet, like Christian mission, the inter-religious journey is never one event, or even a series of events (important though these may be). It is much more truly a process. In which respect, it will be the growth of understanding and relationships which will count as we travel onwards, not least the developments of relationships through such events as we held in Sydney and other places last year, rather than the Melbourne extravaganza alone. Let me however offer the following four questions as relevant to our further bridge-building, each of which draws upon particular encounters of my own during the Melbourne Parliament.

### 1. with what designs can we best build the bridge?

As in ecumenical life, in inter-religious encounter it is often when we come across points of conflict that we touch fraught edges which may



*Meditation space with the Tibetan monks at the PWR*

become growing places if we can learn to appreciate and work through them sensitively. Within inter-religious life this is particularly present when we come to talk about the possibilities and difficulties of prayer and/or worship alongside or together with one another. One of the most lively exchanges at the Parliament thus took place in one workshop between two representatives of Interfaith Ministry (including Australia's own Stephanie Dowrick) and others representing mainstream religious traditions. For it is the case that for Interfaith ministers, and for some others (including some 'progressive' Christians) there is frustration at the unwillingness of others to move into a new future of religion in which, it is held, all the wisdom of the world's religions can, and should, be shared and owned together. Is this really possible to do with integrity however? We are now in a situation where Australian societal recognition of different religious pathways is growing, and,



*Three of the Sydney youth participants at the conference (Vi from Mitra Buddhist Youth, James from the Uniting Church & Cat from the Anglican Church) with Penny Jones*

in some areas rightly so – no event, like the memorial service for the Victorian bushfires for instance, can legitimately be limited to Christian religious leadership today. Yet serious scholars of theology and liturgy know that it is in the very particularity of our symbols, language and rituals that we are most deeply formed in our spiritual identity and grow in religious truth. As we handle the challenges of pluralism therefore, what shape do we give to the bridge of relationship in this and other contentious areas (how we honour different religious law and customs being another pressing concern)? There are no simple answers. Yet I found profoundly moving the number of opportunities at the Parliament to hear from those who have been engaged in monastic inter-religious dialogue (such as the Sancta Sophia Meditation Community in Victoria, and the Christian-Buddhist dialogue of monks which has been taking place across the world and in association with Thomas Merton's former monastery in the USA). Such encounter 'in the cave of the heart' offers another way to build a bridge of profound mystery.

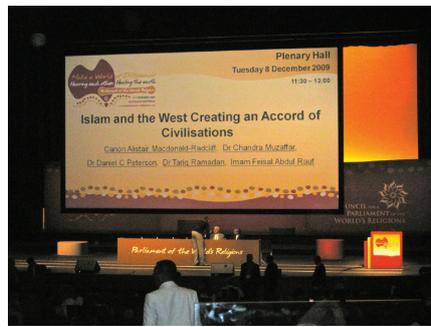
### 2. how can we engage with the less 'obvious suspects'?

I have always found churches profoundly depressing where members spend time bemoaning their, perceived, lack of numbers or age, or racial, or other demographic composition. To some extent it is better to work on the basis that God calls those whom s/he needs and gives us the fellow disciples we need (though not necessarily those whom we would like!). Similarly, concern within inter-religious circles about the limitations of those involved can also become self-defeating and lacking in affirmation of those who are already travelling together. Yet there is undoubtedly a real challenge to those involved in inter-religious encounter to engage with those other than the 'usual suspects' who are drawn to occasions such as the Parliament of the World's Religions.

At the events this year in both Sydney and Melbourne, it was a delight to meet with others, such as Jains and Sikhs, who are part of long-lasting mainstream religious traditions but who are not always prominent in our society's awareness. Generally I also feel that the Parliament did well in its Indigenous involvement, although it was disappointing that the Australian Indigenous contributions were largely kept apart from other Indigenous workshops and presentations. Yet, leaving aside the numbers of young people engaged (something which we have worked hard on in Sydney), it remains true to say that the bridge does not yet connect with some vital sections of our global community. Above all this is the case with a huge proportion of the world's Christians and Muslims who form over 50% of the religious population of the globe. Rightly in many ways the Parliament celebrates the hundreds of different religions present within it, yet this same indiscriminate approach also mitigates against the presence of many others (not least Orthodox Christians) who question whether, for example, a newly-constructed European pagan tradition with a handful of adherents should really be given as much airtime as others with wide memberships and long-established sophisticated patterns of truth-seeking and spiritual life. The absences on the inter-religious bridge thus deserve attention. This makes the work of intra-religious and ecumenical dialogue (within our religious traditions as well as between them) ever more crucial.

### **3. can we share the darkness of our own lives and traditions?**

A healthy dialogue in any relationship is also one in which we are able to admit our limitations and blindspots as well as those things which give us and others strength and for which we may truly praise God. Even if this is uncomfortable, it allows space for us to be real with one another and to grow in mutual wisdom. Honesty and humility are vital. In this regard,



*Parliament of the World's Religions.  
Hearing each other, healing the world.*

it was very good that key flashpoints in the world were not avoided and also that the Parliament made space for an excellent session in which a lively panel of lesbian and gay speakers shared some of their wisdom, pain and humour – to a packed room which would have had people hanging from the chandeliers if there had been any! Former Justice Michael Kirby also spoke cogently in another session, with Dorothy McRae-McMahon, on the use and abuse of sacred text in relation to sexuality. Above all however, I treasured a wonderful morning session in which four women (one Jewish, two Muslim and one Buddhist) talked powerfully about 'Addressing the Shadow in our own traditions'. It was deeply moving to hear their reflections on the distortions, corruption and oppression with which all our religious traditions can collude or can give birth to. There was also a profound sense in which together we can give solidarity and strength to one another. In doing so, we also encourage one another to share the positive sense of 'darkness' in each of the great religious traditions: where, as the mystics have it, we discover things in the 'light of the night' which we would never discover in the obscuring or burning bright light of day.

### **4. where do we find a common purpose?**

That inter-religious engagement has very constructive outcomes was also borne out at the Parliament where the themes of shared service, care for and challenge to the world were prominent.

Not surprisingly, in view of the almost co-terminous Copenhagen Climate Change conference, environment issues were well to the fore, with Australians such as Miriam Pepper playing leading roles. Of all the contributions in Melbourne it was one on the first evening however which made the most personal impact upon me. The Parliament provided a cornucopia of input and discussion, including the opportunity to hear firsthand from inspiring spiritual guides such as Fr. Laurence Freeman (of the John Main Christian Meditation movement), Sr. Joan Chittister, Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, Hugh Evans, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann and the Dalai Lama among others. Yet, of all the extraordinary range of people from across the world whom I met or to whom I listened, Dr. Sakena Yacobi will probably be the person whom I will remember most. Speaking at the opening plenary evening, after a plethora of political and civic and organising worthies had had their appropriate moments, she took centre stage in her simple black robe and hijab, bringing us down to earth about the realities of life, not least for women and children, in war, poverty and ideology-torn Afghanistan. The founder of the Afghan Institute of Learning, Dr. Yacobi with other women has broken new ground in empowering girls, women and the disenfranchised across her land. How much more can she, and we, do if we join our hearts and hopes and hands together?

*Jonathan Inkpen*



*Participants adding their own contributions to the messages of goodwill and petition to the Copenhagen climate summit.*

## Leader's Letter

Dear Wellspring friends,

I pray that this new year we are in will bring you much satisfaction in all areas of your life. How has your year begun? For me I have had a great chance, as I try to do most Januarys, to catch up on some reading time. I have read several books and want to muse about them with you.

In the way of fiction I have enjoyed 'Echo in the Bone' by Diana Gabaldon. This is the 7th book in her series about time travellers who go back from the 1960s to the 1760s. With 7 books already you can tell that there is heaps of detail about the lives of the main characters. And there has to be an 8th as so many of the characters are dangling from cliff edges at the end of the book! One of the interesting things about time travellers is that they may know the eventual outcome of a war, or major event, but do not know if they will survive to see it. A bit like our Christian lives really! Let's hang on to the knowledge of God working things out for good.

Another fiction book was 'The Story of Danny Dunn' by Bryce Courtney. This is the story of a Balmain boy who was born in the 1920s and was part of the Australian army in WWII. The story of the impact of this in his life after the war is really the basis of the book. War is said to bring out the best in people, but it sure can have its painful, long-term ramifications too. What do we think about war – its necessity or otherwise?

I also read 'Wolf Hall' by Hilary Mantel which is the story of part of the life of Thomas Cromwell who was one of Henry VIII's advisors. This book is all about political power and how it was played out in the royal family as well as in the religious manipulations to enable Henry to divorce Catherine



*Jill Robertson*

of Aragon so he could marry Anne Boleyn. How do we see people using God to further their own causes today?

Then I read a couple of other books – one is certainly fiction but interesting as it is from a Christian angle. It is a book called 'St George and the Dragon' by Edward Hays. It is the story of George who was Sent (the St of this book) on a quest to find the Holy Grail – what else? However, the story unfolds by George meeting a friendly dragon who suggests that he prepare for his quest by waiting for him on a weekly basis in his hermitage. The hermitage was his own garage, where he spent all his Saturdays. For George this was frustrating as he wanted to get on with his quest, even though it meant leaving his family. However, this time of solitude on Saturdays became a very special time of the week for George. The dragon - Igor - tells George parables which are the strong and impressive part of the book. As a result of his insight from the parables, George changes his day-to-day life

and finds it much more satisfying and in the end, just when he thought he was really leaving – he finds the Holy Grail in his own garage – once he changes his life enough, it is there. Pause for thought in that one too.

Then I did face one non-fiction book that one of our daughters gave us. This is a book called 'The Great Emergence' by Phyllis Tickle. The thrust of this book is that there have been big upheavals in the Christian church every 500 years and that we are going through what she calls The Great Emergence at the moment. She looks at the birth of Christ, then around the end of the 500s, the work of Gregory I as a reformer of the church after the fall of Rome, and especially the organisation of monasteries and abbeys as places of order and education. Then in the 1000s the Great Schism that was the division of the Orthodox Church from the Roman church. In the 15th to 16th centuries there was the Reformation; and now she sees the time of an Emerging church. This church is one where there is a mix of what she names as four different styles of being church that have developed in recent years that are now becoming blurred and mixed. These styles are churches who focus on being Conservative, Liturgical, oriented to Social Justice and churches focussing on Charismatic Renewal. She writes well and even I kept reading to the end as I wanted to see where she was going and particularly thinking about where communities like ours fit into such a theory. Yes, we are there. We are there because we take seriously all the different denominations that our members come from. We respect other religions and look for connections and we see our focus of theology as being in incarnational. It is good to feel a connection with others on this

disorienting journey into what we call the emerging church. You ought to read this book as I can't possibly do it justice.

Then finally in my list - my copy of *Coracle* magazine came from the Iona Community. I read that from cover to cover at one sitting - after all it was January! The emerging church\* is well and truly displayed there, with powerful articles on Palestinian Accompaniers, Asylum Seekers in

UK, and two obituaries to people who have worked all their lives as Members of the Iona Community. Truly stimulating and humbling articles.

Yes, we have an amazing group to be associated with on Iona and I pray we will continue to be inspired by them into relevant Australian action.

Now I must get back to my murder mystery and find out who-dun-it! God be with you.

*Jill Robertson*

*\* If you would like to know more about emerging churches, Bruce Sanguin, of the Canadian Memorial Church, has written a book, 'The emerging church.' Check him out, or his church, on the web and download some of his sermons. Or, email Isobel & Jim Bishop [isobeljimbish@optusnet.com.au](mailto:isobeljimbish@optusnet.com.au) who have copies of his book. Bruce wanted to title his book, 'The evolving church', but the publishers chose differently.*

*Ed.*

## How are We to Live?

I liken attending the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne to indulging in a world class smorgasbord. Like all great smorgasbords it is only possible to get a taste. I longed to indulge more than was humanly possible and I promised myself I would return. The experience began each day travelling on the tram towards the event. There was a special buzz amongst the colourfully and variously dressed crowd many of whom were carrying Parliament bags, making it easy to strike up conversations. There was enthusiasm for asking about and learning of the experience of others, enjoying the moment and getting to know each other. I walked in each day in a sea of people who were committed to understanding each other's lives and faith experiences, who were committed to encouraging peaceful living throughout the world.

The ethos of the Parliament was no doubt articulated in many sessions, however the one I attended which encapsulated the wider picture for me was **Hans Kung's 'A New Ethical Manifesto for the Global Economy'**. Although Kung had begun work on this manifesto some years ago the recent global financial crisis

highlighted his declaration that laws are not enough. Morality is required to moderate greed. A moral consciousness based on ethical standards and values is required individually and corporately. Economics, politics and ethics all need to function in order for the global market to function and there is a global responsibility to build a framework in which all three are interactive and interdependent.

Kung defined ethics as a combination of moral values and moral action and discussed the common ethics found in all religions. He suggested common humanity, truth and justice as a foundation for global ethics. The principles of humanity, which changes the atmosphere in homes, workplaces and communities when everyone is treated humanely, and reciprocity where others are treated as

self, together lead to cultures of non-violence, fairness, truthfulness and tolerance, and equal rights in gender and all other areas. Humans need to learn to be human. World religions, in working together have a powerful opportunity to teach global ethics which liberate and do not repress humanity and which lead to freedom and dignity for all. World religions can be a place where ethics are put into action and lived rather than left as dusty principles on a rarely visited shelf.

The manifesto aims to define a common fundamental vision of what is legitimate, just and fair, in economic activities. It outlines five universally acceptable principles and values: the principles of humanity, non-violence and respect for life, justice and solidarity, honesty and tolerance, and mutual esteem and partnership.

The manifesto has been presented for discussion and consideration to world leaders and has been signed by leaders including Mary Robinson, Jonathon Sachs and Desmond Tutu. It is available in printed form as *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World Ethic.*



While not legally binding it has moral appeal and is a map with clear coordinates for making ethical decisions in the hard realities of life. Kung suggested any concrete decisions need to be influenced by ethical norms. He outlined four steps in using this manifesto in decision making. First, that in solving a problem no greater problem was created. Second, that new methods must not cause social or ecological damage. Third, that the common good has priority over the individual, that is personal dignity and human rights of all must be preserved. Fourth, that ecological has priority

over social, reversible has priority over irreversible.

Global responsibility and the new world ethic present business and each of us with an alternative purpose. The familiar bottom line and motivator, profit, is replaced with a triple bottom line, profit plus people plus planet. Sustainable capitalism means that profits need to be made ethically with social wellness in mind. Caring for people and the planet are legitimate priorities when we live in a globally responsible way. This is of course not a new idea. I was reminded of my New Testament Greek class. The Greek word for house *oikos* is the source

of our words ecological, ecumenical and economic. The Parliament of the World's Religions and Hans Kung's presentation were a reminder to hold these three words together. God's household is the whole planet and is composed of humans living in interdependent relations with each other and all other life forms and earth processes. As we recover this insight and consider our place in contributing to the flourishing of God's household Hans Kung's new ethical manifesto offers a path towards peace, unity and well being for all.

*Jenny Burns*

## *Make a world of difference: hearing each other, healing the earth*

My impressions of the gathering at the newly-opened Convention Centre in Melbourne next door to, and also spilling over into, the slightly older Exhibition Centre, include an overall feeling of excitement. The venue was as close to perfect for it as I could imagine: large flowing spaces encouraging movement while allowing pauses and opportunities for chatting and discussion as people moved from session to session. The Centre is perched by the Yarra with the river visible from all open space, lending a sense of unity to the large complex.

Organisers expected 10,000 participants over the week. However people moved freely and comfortably between concurrent sessions throughout. Music and art abounded, in sessions and in spaces dedicated for them.

Visually, the scene was one of colour with many people dressed in the outfits and colours common to their national cultures, while many others wore the garb common to their religious roles in their various faiths.

The Parliament logo was an Aboriginal representation of a pathway, a track, reflecting a journey. The theme of peace ran through each day, taking among others the specific focuses of peace and conflict, the environment, cultural integrity in the face of conflict, cultural identity (eg Aboriginal, American Indian) and spirituality in our world, in peoples, in faiths. Many sessions included panels representing

various faiths, writers, thinkers, leaders/performers in a wide range of fields.

Some sessions spilled out into open spaces with no room left inside for all the interested audience. Many sessions included question times and sometimes extended discussion.

We listened to panels of speakers searching together for a common



*Dancers*

future way from the base of their various faith traditions. We listened to writers, academics and teachers challenging themselves too, and individuals exploring their dreams.

The commonality between the traditional faith philosophies was almost painfully obvious, and certainly needed no mention there.

The Charter of Compassion session, for example, included Karen Armstrong and Jean Chittister among others on its panel. Jean's view was that the retired of the world are a major reservoir of experience and energy. She challenged, 'Let's get into it' on the session's premise that all major faiths have compassion as their base. We were challenged to join Desmond Tutu and the Dalai Lama to sign up to a worldwide charter of compassion - and just see where that would take us!

The Aboriginal woman, Vicki Clark, invited us to sink our hands into the earth from her traditional land, north-west of Melbourne, and understand its importance to her people and their role in our 21st century world. We discussed this and the place of land for all people, and then she marked our faces with goanna oil in her tradition, so reminiscent of the Baptismal tradition, which she also shares in her Catholic faith - so moving!

The American academic and rabbi, Michael Lerner, led us into his 'New Movement for Spiritual Progressives' which, from an ecumenical base, is attempting to challenge businesses, organisations and institutions across the world to 'a new bottom line' - as well as productivity, profit and efficiency he includes peace, the environment and justice for all. Brilliant!

Hans Kung launched a new Manifesto for the Global Economy, with the requirements of justice and fairness as prime factors in all dealings - radical indeed!

These were but a very few of the offerings available to us.

The challenge of the original gathering in Chicago well over a century ago seemed to be, still, alive and well. There is much to do for peace in our world, but there are many of us to do it, and certainly the will is there. Our 21st century technology allows us to work together in ways never before possible. If we can bring 10,000-odd people together from all corners of the world in one week to discuss the issue, together we must be able to make changes hitherto unimagined.

*Valerie Shevels*

## *Glimpses from the Parliament of World's Religions*

My reflections on attendance for part of the Parliament give mere glimpses of the rich experience of being in company with over 5,000 followers of religious practices from many religions and none! For me, the opportunity to listen to voices which I rarely get the chance to hear, and to be in an environment where minority views can be freely expressed, was a highlight. For example, women were very prominent among the presenters, in a way that is not normal in our formal religious gatherings, where male voices are always dominant. Also, the presence of indigenous people from many First Nations, plus representatives and advocates from the developing world, were all given a platform to be heard. Colour, dance and music were also a feature with many performances in the public space at the Convention

Centre. What a rare opportunity to have the cultures and religions of the world swirling around my feet! The dream of Mahatma Gandhi came to life in Melbourne!

In another Rabbi Michael Lerner, who was once described by the FBI as 'one of the most dangerous criminals in the US,' captures the attention of his audience of about 200 by teaching us the song: 'Let everyone have a vine and fig tree, learn to love and not be afraid/Into ploughshares beat your swords, and learn war no more.' His session, How Spiritual Progressives can help to move the focus from Personal Fulfilment toward Global Transformation, called for civil action, even to the extent of disobeying bad laws, as he has done. His was a powerful message!

Several of the Parliament's sessions led by women included the following:

Taking our place in the Inter-religious movement: Women in Peacemaking and Interfaith Dialogue. Local contributors included Sister Trish Madigan and Shehara Wiswanathan. They joined with a group of international colleagues, to tell stories of marginalised women who now have been given a voice. They are now providing their own solutions to the many inequalities they face.

Creators of Peace is a Swiss-based coalition for change, which encourages the development of Circles of Peace in local communities. These are groups of women who meet in solidarity to inspire one another to action. One of the contributors at the seminar described a Reconciliation Walk in Lebanon through the war-torn streets of Beirut, in which she had



*In dialogue with the demonstrator*

participated, designed to show the various factions that there is hope for peace and reconciliation.

An early morning session on Celtic Mysticism introduced songs with harp accompaniment, led by two Melbourne women who have explored the contribution of the Celtic saint Brigid. They drew on the writings of Brigid, some of which they have put to music, and led participants in prayer, song and reflection to music.

Walking the Labyrinth, following the path to a background of spiritual songs and poems, was an enriching experience for all who attended in the early morning. A great way to start the day!

Religion and Spirituality in Public Discourse involved Philip Freier, Archbishop of Melbourne for the past two years, describing his engagement with the people of the city in public spaces. His objective is to show that Christians don't have all the answers, as he listens to issues that concern those who have no regular contact

with the Church. He was joined in the same session by Rabbi David Saperstein, who acts as a lobbyist at Capitol Hill, Washington, describing how he relates his faith to members of the US Congress, providing a listening ear to American legislators.

The modern prophet and creation theologian Thomas Berry died in June 2009 at the age of 94, and several of his disciples presented a session to honour his efforts to build a sustainable ecological civilisation for future generations. For decades he brought to contemporary theology a vision of hope and inspiration to so many of his readers around the world, through his articulation of a new story

for our time. We celebrated together his legacy to all living creatures.

The Uniting Church's contribution to interfaith relations was reported by a team of UCA national leaders. In a presentation entitled Neighbourhoods of Difference, the message conveyed was the following: 'As Christians we believe that diversity is a part of God's creation. We are called to live together in peace, loving our neighbour as God loves us and all people.' The leaders reported on the efforts of the UCA Dialogue with People of Other Faiths.

The Parliament was not without its controversies. Christian



*Parliament flags 2009*



*Inter-Faith peacemakers from Israel/Palestine*

fundamentalists stood vigil each day at the entrance, with their banners proclaiming 'Jesus: the Only Way to God.' They were open to dialogue and participants at the Parliament engaged in discussion with them, but didn't dissuade them from their protest!

From the summaries above there is an indication of the scope of topics covered in the hundreds of sessions offered to participants. These are just glimpses of the wealth of ideas presented in the whirlpool of the Parliament, held in Melbourne in the first week of December 2009.

*Doug Hewitt*

# BOOK REVIEW

## *A Century of Influence: The Australian Student Christian Movement 1896-1996.*

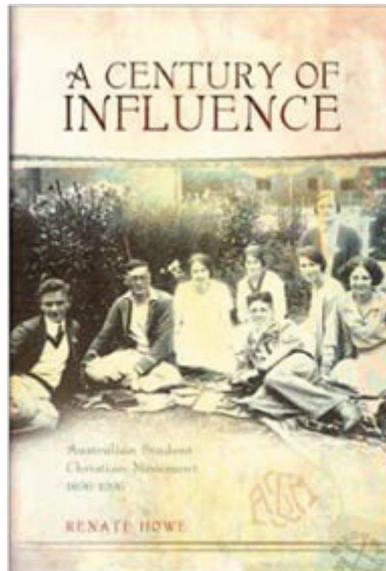
Renate Howe. UNSW Press, Sydney. 2009. (445 pp)

The title *Century of Influence* comes from the powerful impact that the ASCM has had on the church and on society in Australia. The first thing that strikes one about this book is the number of familiar names that are mentioned in it: Bob Hawke; Gough Whitlam (neither active churchgoers); Charles Birch; David Gill; and Wellspringers Jim Tulip, Peter Fensham, and others. Considering the relatively small numbers involved in the ASCM, its members had a disproportionate influence on the churches and on society.

The book mirrors huge changes in society and the churches reflected in student attitudes. In the early 1900s the watchword in ASCM was 'The evangelisation of the world in this generation' – words of John R Mott. Many students responded by signing up with the Student Volunteer Movement for missionary service overseas. After WWI there was a change of mood, and social justice took over from missionary service. One result of this was the foundation of the Evangelical Union for those more evangelically inclined.

After WWII, SCM worldwide was still strong and provided a major forum in the universities for discussions on political and theological issues. By the '60s and '70s the mood had changed again. Some students reacted against the overtly political discussions.

Numbers dropped off, national conferences were more difficult to organise. There was some reaction against the mentoring role of the Senior Friends. This paralleled a decline in the churches' support, resulting in reductions in funding and in personnel. ASCM once again had to change its role to fit the changing times.



There were enormous changes in the universities. From being small, with a large number of students coming from church-run private schools, numbers increased enormously. Among this more cosmopolitan student body there were many fewer who were willing to give time and energy to serious discussion of political, moral, social and theological issues. Yet for many younger students, the ASCM was the place where they had their

first ecumenical experience, looking together with students from other denominations at challenging issues, and being critical of the more conservative churches. I myself was never involved in the Australian SCM but I was a student and on the staff of the British SCM from 1956-66. Their struggles were very similar to what was going on in Australia.

So why should Wellspringers read this book? We are very concerned with getting young people involved in Wellspring. We want them to have the opportunity of widening their Christian vision. On the whole we have not been too successful at appealing to this constituency. Many leaders in the ecumenical movement had their first broadening experience in the ASCM, but it is now sadly rather weak with greatly reduced influence. We believe that Wellspring can offer this kind of experience to today's students. Our hope is that we can be a broadening influence on the church communities, just as SCM was. We face many of the same challenges to encourage a broad-based renewal in the churches and to be a creative force in wider society.

So this book is not only interesting historically, it provides a challenge to us in Wellspring to bring in younger people to join with us in responding to developing needs in society. Read the book, and learn from history!

*Clabon Allen*

## Bits and Pieces

• Brisbane Catholic Archdiocese has a special event 7–10 July **'Pray 2010'**. It is a program of Prayer and Spirituality in the Catholic tradition. With workshops, discussions, meditation etc. Further details [www.pray2010.org.au](http://www.pray2010.org.au)

• In November our Community Friend Gail Pritchard and her husband Alastair were involved in the Sale (Vic) story of a **'Healing Trail.'** Many cultures, faiths and families met each other as one people on this weekend and Catholic, Anglican, Baptist and Uniting Churches joined in solidarity and hospitality to provide an unforgettable experience. A Chin refugee from Burma with her husband and six children related the pleasure of wading in the sea and the kindness and generosity of the people of Sale. They shared a little of the torture endured before obtaining a protection visa. These refugees travelled across Melbourne, invited to stay with families in Sale. They were from Turkistan, Thai/Burma camps, Sudan, Ethiopia. They had a fun-filled time with motor bikes, ball games, walks, TV, concert, sweet songs, much laughter, sharing a common humanity. There were many questions about the new environment and homes they were visiting. Again they were risk-taking and vulnerable

and much pain was shared. This was truly a healing and life-building weekend for all. (Vic Unity No. 105)

• **Iona Dates:** Any one wishing to know dates of Special Weeks and costs at the Abbey or at the Macleod Centre for 2010, plus a booking form, could contact the Wellspring office, or email: [abbey.bookings@iona.org.uk](mailto:abbey.bookings@iona.org.uk)

• **Taizé attendees:** We are eagerly awaiting reports from Adrian White and Georgie Lewis on their return from the Philippines.

• **Reminder:** Even though we have passed the suggested time for renewal of Members and Friends so they could be included in the Prayer Diary, it is not too late to renew your Membership or Friendship with the Community. Should you have any comments or suggestions about the vision etc of Wellspring please let us know.

• **Our website:** Our website is being improved and updated. Please check in regularly and if you have something to offer please contact Neil Holm. [www.wellspringcommunity.org.au](http://www.wellspringcommunity.org.au)

• **Desert Creek House:** Our Community Friends Ursula and Yves de Morsier have developed this special place at Numbugga via Bega. A place/a search for the meaning of life

– Prayer, Meditation, Community, Ecology, Psychology, Architecture. Check it out [www.desertcreekhouse.com.au](http://www.desertcreekhouse.com.au) You can go for half a day, one day, a few days – a search for a new way of life.

Mary Gilchrist

\* \* \* \*

**Editor's note:** Mary has also drawn my attention to the article by Paul Collins on 'The morality of population control' (*Eureka Street*, December 17, 2009), which serves as a useful 'companion' piece to that of Will Robertson's (*Pipeline*, Dec 2009). Paul writes:

'The great religious traditions have only the most rudimentary views on the morality of population limitation. Because the religious traditions have been largely absent from this debate, it has been mainly carried on in secular and economic terms by biologists, demographers and economists.

'The reason why religious people have avoided this issue is simple: it is a theological and moral minefield. Embedded in it are a whole range of acute ethical issues and challenges to ingrained attitudes.'

Check out the full article for yourself, or contact the Editor.



Welcome to Country

# Why Be a Christian?

'Why Be Christian?' Summary of ideas from *The Heart of Christianity* by Marcus Borg (p 220ff.)

*During holidays at Phillip Island in December 2009, June made these notes from 'Heart and Home: Being Christian in an Age of Pluralism', the final chapter of Borg's book. Having shared them with other people, she now wishes to 'whet your appetite' to borrow or buy the book for your own perusal.*

Salvation *is only through Jesus* seems to indicate that Christians only, have the monopoly on God's Salvation. However, knowing about other religions - and especially knowing people of those religions - negates this claim. It is now impossible for many of us to believe that only Christians can be in a saving relationship with God.

When we think about that claim, it is a pretty strange notion that the creator of the whole universe has chosen to be known in only one religious tradition - which fortunately for us, just happens to be 'ours'.

If one *must* be a Christian in order to be in right relationship with God, then that is a 'requirement' and we are no longer talking about 'grace'. If our relationship with God is based on 'grace', then it is not based on 'requirements', not even the 'requirement' of being a Christian.

I am convinced that God, the sacred, is known in all major traditions - not just our own. Moreover, it seems to me that seeing the similarities between Christianity and other religions add to the credibility of Christianity - rather than threaten it.

The 'only way' passages in the Bible are John 14:6 ('I am the way, and the truth, and the life, no one comes to God except through me') and Acts

4:12 ('There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved'). We can understand these passages as expressions of both TRUTH and DEVOTION.

*Truth: the way of Jesus was 'death' to the old self and 'resurrection' into a new identity and way of being, that lies at the heart of Christianity and of other religions.*

*Devotion: to say 'Jesus is the only way' is also the language of gratitude and love, and it can continue to express Christian devotion - but not as a hardened doctrine. We can continue to express our love songs to Jesus without needing to demean other religions.*

'Why be Christian?' (Here is Borg's own 'testimony')

- The importance of being part of a religious community and tradition of practice which mediate and nourish the relationship.
- We need a 'path' - community and tradition provide a practical means of reconnection and transformation in this life.
- Religious community and tradition put us in touch with the wisdom and beauty of the past.
- Although all traditions have their 'monsters' and at times been distorted in brutal directions, they have also incubated lives remarkably filled with compassion, courage and joy. The saints in the traditions are the most remarkable people who have ever lived.
- The vision of life articulated by the traditions is important, not only for us as individuals but for us as sharing the earth.

All of these are among my reasons for being 'religious' - for being part of a community of memory and practice.

When a Christian seeker asked the Dalai Lama should she become a Buddhist, he replied to her, 'No, become more deeply Christian; live more deeply in your own tradition.' - then we can become more centred in the one to whom the tradition points and in whom we live and move and have our being.

Why be Christian? All these reasons above and more - but chiefly it is 'home' for me

The Christian tradition is familiar to me: its stories, language, music and ethos.

In adulthood I have grown to appreciate its antiquity and wisdom, the music and words, the forms of worship, its passion for compassion and justice; the sheer goodness of its most remarkable lives.

Its worship nourishes me; its hymns move me; its scripture and theology engage my imagination and thoughts; its practices shape me. For me, it meditates the good, the true, and the beautiful and through all of these, it meditates the sacred. For me it is a sacrament of the sacred.

And it is 'home'. It is familiar to me in a way that no other religion could ever become. I know that other religions could have been home for me; had I been born a Jew, a Buddhist or a Muslim, for example, I am quite sure I would still be one.

And I am quite aware that some who grew up Christians were so abused by the experiences that Christianity could never seem like home, except as a home one needs to escape. For them another way of being religious may be necessary. For me Christianity is 'home' like no other tradition - its vision, way of life, its scripture, worship, language, music, thought, vision and so forth - is home.

Home is about more than familiarity and comfort – home is also about growing up, maturation, learning and living a way of life that takes one to a wider world.

Christianity is a way of life. To be a ‘Christian’ means living ‘the path’ within this tradition. At the ‘heart’ is the way of the heart – a path that transforms us at our deepest level of being. At the heart of Christianity is the heart of God - a passion for our transformation and the transformation of the world. And we need not feel that our home is superior to every other home in order to love it.

A twentieth century hymn, ‘This is My Song’ to the tune of ‘Finlandia’ sings of the love we have for our homeland. (We need only substitute the word ‘religions’ for ‘nations’, ‘lands’ and ‘country’ to get some idea of the terms of affirmation.) Religions are ‘homes’ and Christianity is ‘home’ for me.

This is my song, Oh God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for lands afar and mine.  
This is my home, the country where my heart is;  
Here are my hopes, my dreams, my holy shrine;  
But other hearts in other lands are beating  
With hopes and dreams as true and high as mine.

My country’s skies are bluer than the ocean  
And sunlight beams on cloverleaf and pine;  
But other lands have sunlight too, and clover,  
And skies are everywhere as blue as mine.  
Oh hear my song, O God of all the nations,  
A song of peace for their land and for mine.

*June Mills*

## New Wellspring Council Secretary



Alan Bawden trained as an architect and spent many years as a project manager. Surprisingly, at the age of 50 he was then appointed as a Strategy Worker in the Uniting Church. It was during this time that he and Kathryn Richards met, and married in 2001.

They have four children between them and three grandchildren, all living in or near Melbourne.

He has been a supply minister for congregations waiting to appoint their next ordained minister. He is now retired and is house-husband and computer expert in the home (he knows how to turn it on and off!)

Alan enjoys walking and still plays tennis – gently. His interests include photography, drawing and writing.

## WELLSPRING COMMUNITY INC.

Leaders:	Jill Robertson	02 6259 0576	jillrobertson@wellspringcommunity.org.au
	Mary Gilchrist	02 9825 2197	marygilchrist@wellspringcommunity.org.au
Duty Leaders	Doug Hewitt	02 4969 6336	doug.isabel@bigpond.com
	Gillian Hunt		gillieh@bigpond.net.au
Treasurer	Margaret Allen	02 9798 4663	clabon.margaret@bigpond.com
Secretary	Alan Bawden	03 6344 1295	kathrynalana@bigpond.com
Pipeline Editor	Bonita Frank	02 4455 1724	bonitafrank@hotmail.com
State Contacts:			
NSW State:	John Burnard	02 4283 2439	jburnard@aapt.net.au
ACT:	Merilyn Tandukar	02 6296 4046	merilyn@tandukar.id.au
Victoria:	Leo Van Neuren	03 9887 3798	ivanneur@adjust.aug.au
Tasmania:	Pat McKenzie	03 6344 2357	pmc16202@bigpond.com
South Australia:	Jean Stirling	08 8376 6371	revjs@adam.com.au
Western Australia:	Betty Matthews	08 9453 9996	betty.matthews@ispx.com.au
Overseas:	Margaret Holm	02 9868 5915	n_m_holm@internode.on.net
Administrator:	Jan McEvoy	02 8259 0813	Mondays, 9 am – 5 pm

PO Box Q924, Queen Victoria Building, Sydney NSW 1230; Phone: 02 8259 0813 wellspring@ncca.org.au; www.wellspringcommunity.org.au

NOTE: Additional copies of Pipeline are always available for leaving with friends, churches, or in any appropriate place. Just contact Jan in the office and she will send you extra copies.

**NEXT ISSUE:** Theme for the June 2010 issue is “The neglected relationship between science and spirituality”.

Editor: bonitafrank@hotmail.com, mobile 0407 337 220 or phone 02 4455 1724.

**Deadline for material is 13 April 2010**