



THEME: FAITH AND RELIGION RELATING TO THE PRESENT AGE

The theme for May Sessions: The Relationship Between Religion and Ethics

May 5th Mario Trinidad - Hans Kung and the Global Ethics movement

May 12th Michael Dowling - What is the basis for creating a better world?

May 19th Martin Samson - Jesus, the basis for a prototype of applied ethics

May 26th Deidre Palmer - Ethics and its source - freedom, love, justice, peace

For bookings:

<https://effectiveliving.ucasa.org.au/progressive-christianity-network-sa/seminary-of-the-3rd-age/>

2022 Seminary Brochure

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1nXdGkseSEG24JmhKF-wTFAQ3N-Pnp_ni/view

2021/22 Archive

Video podcasts of Sem3A presentations can be found on the ELC website at

<https://effectiveliving.ucasa.org.au/podcasts/>

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Staying in touch...

WELCOME.....to a network of people who are exploring new approaches to Christianity in their search for meaning and the development of a contemporary spirituality.

These days there are many ways to keep in touch - our website, Facebook Page, the ELC website. The Newsletter is good for longer items, book reviews, new resources, Seminary news. And for those not comfortable with websites and social media, the newsletter is a good way to keep in touch. We aim to produce 4 per year, but this is not always possible. Things like the COVID pandemic interfere - our last newsletter was published in May 2020, so almost 2 years of water under the bridge!

Despite difficulties, *Seminary of the 3rd Age* kept going through 2020 with online video presentations from our guest speakers. Not as good as “being there”, but better than nothing. 2021 saw a return to live presentations but with severe restrictions on attendance numbers and strict adherence to distancing, hand sanitising and mask wearing. Videos of each presentation continued to be uploaded to the ELC podcast page for those who could not attend. We now have an archive of past presentations for you to re-visit favourites or catch up on the ones you maybe missed.

2022, and while still dealing with COVID we’re going from strength to strength. *Seminary of the 3rd Age* in March offered a spin-off group at Modbury UC, which met on a Sunday evening to view the video of the previous Thursday’s presentation and have some lively discussion. It was an excellent opportunity for people North of the city, for whom coming to ELC on Thursday night necessitates extended travel and a late night trip home! Perhaps we can continue this in May? Contact Peter Fuller (contactpcnetsa@gmail.com) for details if you’re interested in this.

In the 2022 March series, we examined *The Relationship between Religion and Culture*. For those still unable to attend, there was the opportunity to livestream each seminar for a small fee, or to view them later via video podcast. The podcast archive is growing!

This edition of the newsletter has some really interesting personal reflections from some of our members on subjects that are very much topical at the moment - faith in relation to politics, science, identity and the horror that is taking place in Ukraine. Wishing you happy reading!

Maureen Howland

CHRIST, LIBERATION, IDENTITY, UKRAINE

One of the great images of the progressive side of Christianity is “Christ the Liberator”. This is not just a reference to the title of Sobrino’s magisterial 2001 work, nor even to the liberation turn in theology since the late 1960s; in fact it has been at the very core of Christianity since the beginning:

It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.” Galatians 5:1

“The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, Because the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the afflicted; He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to captives and freedom to prisoners.” Isaiah 61:1

“That the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.” Romans 8:21

The liberating work of the Gospel begins as individual spiritual liberation—at the deepest level, your personal agency is set free from slavery to false ideas, false ways of seeing yourself and the world, spiritual oppressions of all sorts—then spreads outwards to encompass the liberation of groups, communities, whole societies, eventually the whole of humanity and creation, from tyranny, oppression, disadvantage, discrimination, racism, sexism, etc.. Anywhere you see people striving to throw off a yoke of bondage—that’s the Gospel!

You’ll notice I put tyranny first in that last list. I have in mind the terrible images on our TV screens at the moment as Russian tanks roll into Ukraine. The Putin regime has fabricated a false liberation narrative to justify its murderous move—that Ukraine is full of neo-Nazis wreaking genocide on ethnic Russians in the east and south of the country. In reality the reverse is true—Putin and his cronies are the neo-Nazis, basically a criminal cabal (the oligarchs) which, not happy to just tyrannize its own people, now wants to extend that tyranny outwards to swallow up surrounding countries and re-create the great Russian empire of old.

We’re used to seeing the West (i.e. ourselves) as the evil empire. Putin recently called the US “the empire of lies” (while lying through his teeth: “we will not invade Ukraine”), and for a moment we believed him. Stan Grant, in his recent Wilks Oration for the Effective Living Centre (25 February—catch up on the video recording on the ELC YouTube channel), pointed out how the divisiveness of identity politics weakens the resolve of the liberal democratic West, setting us up as easy prey for the real tyrannies of the world, principally Russia and China, which we see now playing out in Ukraine. cont.

The divisiveness of identity politics—this needs some explication. The fact is that identity can be both positive and negative. On the positive side, identity is about isolated individuals finding the solidarity of a group to identify with, in order to liberate themselves from oppression, fear, discrimination, etc. On the negative side, identity can be a tool for the very opposite—for oppressing other people who don't fit your identity. This negative side of identity is then ripe for manipulation by the next power-hungry tyrant or demagogue who comes along and offers you a false liberation narrative.

Which brings me back to Vladimir Putin. Vlad is the arch-manipulator of other people's identity. As to his own motivation/identity—the Russian patriot mantra, the travesty of the collapse of the Soviet “empire” complaint, the devout Russian Orthodox believer act—they're all just a front—don't be deceived by it as a large proportion of the Russian population are. He's really just an old-school tyrant, not “evil” or “insane”, just a seriously bad person in the Ivan the Terrible or Josef Stalin mould. He'll stop at nothing—manipulation, lies, murder, laying waste a whole country—to get what he wants—power, control, riches, the adulation of his people, the rest of the world fearing him.

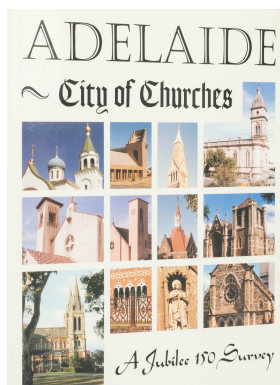
So, yes, identity can be either positive or negative—a tool for oppression as well as liberation—this is really what Stan was getting at. Don't stop, therefore, at any limited human identity—this is nothing less than an injunction of the Gospel itself, namely the call to unlimited, universally inclusive human solidarity. It's also central to the idea of liberal democracy. Don't stop at being black or white, male or female, gay or straight, Indigenous or European, Ukrainian or Russian, etc.—always strive to go just that one step further and be a human, a person, a living soul on God's earth. Only then can we all be equal, and free.

Back to the image of Christ the Liberator. There are approximately three works of liberation going on at the moment. Firstly, the people of Ukraine—finding their true identity as they stand firm against Russian tyranny—we pray for their security and eventual liberation. Secondly, the Russian people—surely it's time for them now to liberate themselves from false identity (Russian exceptionalism, Russia as empire), divest themselves of the nefarious Putin regime and embrace real democracy at last? Thirdly, we of the West—setting aside our identity politics and uniting to support the Ukrainian and Russian peoples in their linked quest for freedom. Yes, anywhere you see people striving to throw off false identity and find their true identity—that is indeed the Gospel.

Fergus McGinley — April 2022



FAITH AND POLITICS: HOW DO THEY RELATE? – A PERSONAL VIEW



It is interesting to look back on how church and state have related to each other in South Australia. The early colony (a “Paradise of Dissent”) held the clear separation of church and state. All religious institutions were to be treated equally and none should receive any “State Aid”. The “city of churches” was less about the number of church buildings and more the fact that churches of all traditions were free to establish themselves. Implicitly it meant that neither church or state would interfere with each other, perhaps encouraging the idea that “faith and religion” ought not mix. Even today, there remains a reluctance

for institutional Christianity, for example, to be supportive of one political party over another. However, this separation never deterred people of faith from being personally involved in politics and exerting moral influence. Many influential dissenters in Government helped shape the cultural milieu of South Australia. Is this still true today? Perhaps these days it is more from outside the political process that people of faith can best address political parties over issues deemed to be in the public interest. How do we decide what these issues may be?

I believe the key challenge is to decide which things are against the “will of God”. The best clue to discern this in a non-theological way is to ask, “where is there innocent suffering and why?” Where do people cry out for fairness and justice? Such questions connect us with the core agenda of Jesus to “bring good news to the poor, release to the captives, sight to the blind, freedom to the oppressed and the grace of unconditional acceptance to all”. It will often mean speaking truth to power on behalf of those who are the voiceless, for our faith reflects the fact that all are God’s beloved people. This is often called the social pioneering role of awakened Christians.



What are the issues that need to be addressed in this election year? Here is my list - what is yours? First, I am aghast at the continuing incarceration of asylum seekers and refugees, highlighted interestingly by a certain tennis player locked down in a particular hotel. This inhumane treatment justified by dubious political reasons has to be changed. Second, while First Nations peoples have clearly expressed a way to have a voice to Parliament their desire to be included in the political process has been blunted by the

failure of having bi-partisan political support. Third, all parties are too tame when it comes to tackling the consequences of climate change. Per capita, Australia is one of the biggest emitters of green-house gases in the world. Fourth, adequate housing for the poor and young.

cont.

My list is actually longer but these are examples which need to be addressed because of the scale of innocent suffering.

How does one speak in the public domain so as to be heard? It cannot be done by preaching which unashamedly draws on scripture and God language. Instead we need to develop a public discourse which dares to ask what is ultimately real. Paul's speech at the Aeropagus is one biblical example. Martin Luther King Jnr is another. Such discourse draws on universal images of fairness as well as daring to even name "crimes against humanity". While for us the ultimate reality of God incarnate is the warrant for our faith and social action, in the public domain we express this secularly by referring to the need to right the wrongs which prevent people from living their lives as the valued human beings that they are.

JONATHAN BARKER

A Prayer for Ukraine

God of peace and justice,
we pray for the people of Ukraine today.
We pray for peace and the laying down of weapons.
We pray for all those who fear for tomorrow,
that your Spirit of comfort would draw near to them.
We pray for those with power over war or peace,
for wisdom, discernment and compassion
to guide their decisions.
Above all, we pray for all your precious children, at risk and in fear,
that you would hold and protect them.
We pray in the name of Jesus, the Prince of Peace.
Amen.

Archbishop Justin Welby
Archbishop Stephen Cottrell



What is the relationship between faith & science for me?

For me faith is something I have acquired over more than 70 years of living in Christian communities where I've been affirmed as a person, and found answers to the questions: where do I find meaning in life, and how do I make sense of this world?

Faith is about meaning and purpose. It is about the "why" question. Science, on the other hand, is where I go for answers to the "what" question ... but I'll return to that later in my remarks.

Looking back over my life, I now realise that my faith has been a journey of exploration, by way of several significant communities:

- Gartrell Memorial Church, Rose Park, where as a 7-year-old I received a prize – Enid Blyton's "The Adventures of Brer Rabbit" – for my first year's attendance at Sunday School;
- Brighton Methodist Church, where Sunday School, the Order of Knights, Christian Endeavour, MYF and (I hesitate to confess) the Billy Graham Crusade, were major formative influences on my early understanding of the Christian faith;
- SCM at Adelaide Teachers College & Adelaide University and later, at the ANU in Canberra, where I undertook my PhD and was also a member of the National Memorial Methodist Church; and lastly, after marrying and returning to Adelaide, the Uniting Church at Malvern & Unley.

All communities in which I was welcomed, where I formed some of my closest friendships, and eventually came to realise that Christ's way of living and relating to others was the only one that really worked.

It was not until after I joined SCM in 1964 that the geology and organic chemistry majors of my B.Sc. degree started to pose serious questions for the somewhat conservative theology then underpinning my faith. It was the SCM that introduced me to modern theologians like J.A.T. Robinson and his book *Honest to God*, and to Paul Tillich's *The Shaking of the Foundations*. It was the SCM that sponsored the lunchtime address I remember hearing in the cloisters at Adelaide University on the topic "Science and God", given by the famous Australian scientist and theologian, Charles Birch.

Over the following years my bookshelves became home to numerous books by other theologians – most recently those of John Spong, Val Webb, Bart Ehrman, Richard Holloway, Gretta Vosper and the members of the Jesus Seminar – all bringing the tools of modern scholarship to the task of uncovering the origin, authorship and meaning of the Bible for citizens of the 20th & 21st Century.

cont.

Fast forward to 2014 Now long retired after a fulfilling career as a geoscientist in government, industry and academia, and having become increasingly disillusioned with the church's teachings, out of the blue I received a phone call from my old SCM mate, Esmond Dowdy, inviting me to join the committee of PCNet(SA). That community is now my spiritual home where I feel most at ease and encouraged to continue my faith journey.

Over recent years my faith has evolved to the point where I would now describe myself as a Christian agnostic. The language and concepts I now employ to give expression to my faith bear very little resemblance to those I would have used for much of my life in the church. A major reason for this may be encapsulated in the words of Albert Einstein: "Religion without science is blind."

Science deals with empirical evidence. As my famous American geochemical colleague, the late John Hayes, was fond of saying when presented with a new discovery: "show me your data". Science addresses the "what question" I mentioned earlier, helping us to understand the physical world we inhabit and how it works. This knowledge was not available to the authors of the Old & New Testaments, all of whom had their own slant on what was important. We are rarely (if ever) told from the pulpit that many of the epistles attributed to Paul were in fact written by someone else. And yet in our worship services we are expected to respond to each Bible reading with the words "This is the Word of God", a single seamless entity. We continue to pray "Our Father who is in Heaven ..." and mindlessly recite the Apostles' Creed, thereby implying the existence of a 3-tiered Universe, virgin birth and bodily resurrection. Most of our prayers of intercession are directed towards an interventionist God who can cure illness and disease. We are told in the Bible that a slave community of Hebrews resided in Egypt for 400 years; that Moses and his people wandered in Sinai for 40 years; that Solomon built not just a temple twice the size of any temple so far excavated in Israel, but also a palace of similar dimensions to accommodate 300 wives and 700 concubines ... and yet not one of these major events left behind any archaeological evidence![1] Isn't it time that our faith caught up with, and acknowledged, the historical and physical reality of the world as we now know it?

I'd like to be part of a 21st century church witnessing to a faith that has cast off the shackles of doctrines formulated long ago by sages with a limited understanding of how the world works, and instead embraces new advances in scholarship and science while seeking to emulate the life and love of Christ in the here and now.

David McKirdy, presented at Adelaide West Uniting Church, April 18, 2018

[1] Wood, B., 2017. Museum of the Bible: Questionable science. *Science* 358, 1142.

DISCOVERING A SPIRITUAL PATHWAY FOR OUR TIMES

Contemplation, Prayer, Mysticism, Meditation

Friday 20th May – Saturday 21st May 2022

starting with a meal at 6pm and concluding on Saturday 21st after a celebratory meal

At The Effective Living Centre

Cost \$35 full, \$30 concession includes meals and morning and afternoon teas

Retreat Brochure https://drive.google.com/file/d/1DbtpdltZPcrr_z0QNcrm5nTiJ5XPUwla/view

Book online <https://events.humanitix.com/discovering-new-spiritual-pathways-for-our-times>



Three years ago Martin Sansom offered a retreat to PCNet on rediscovering a mystical pathway for our times and developing the spiritual senses. This year he will be holding an evening presentation at the Seminary of the third age on 'Jesus the basis for a prototype of applied ethics'. Arising from that theme Martin will once again facilitate another retreat on discovering a spiritual pathway for our times where we will engage with themes such as contemplation, prayer, mysticism and meditation. Over the last four years Martin has been writing on Systematic Christology from the point of view of mystical theology and offering insights about how Rudolf Steiner's Christology can inform contemporary spirituality.

Contemplative phenomenology, a method that he has developed through his studies, offers us ways to experience both Christ-Sophia and the effect of our spiritual religious work upon society, other people and the environment. It is a Sophianic process of learning with Mary to ponder all the awakened thoughts and prayers in our hearts as a method to engage with the gospels. Through our faith we can access the grace of salvation through Jesus. This redemptive act has three aspects to it; restoration, redemption and transformation. It is this third aspect that the retreat will focus on, making the capacities more familiar and practicable for our lives today. The process of developing virtue can be a spiritual path towards a new ethical engagement. Teilhard de Chardin goes so far to say that a person living a Christian life has a specific consciousness and task in the household of evolution. This retreat will explore many of these ideas and offer some practical grounding for a person of faith today.

Resources



The **UC FORUM** gives expression to a considered, respectful and contemporary voice for the progressive thinkers in the church. The forum addresses many critical issues including education, theology and praxis, communication and governance. It seeks to represent, with integrity, this significant and growing movement of people present in many congregations, as well as those who have become self imposed exiles from the church. We seek Open Dialogue and Inclusive Action in the Uniting Church in Australia, and with friends of the UCA.



Progressing Spirit is a leading outlet for an intelligent, inclusive, and pioneering exploration of today's theological, spiritual, and social advancements. Progressing Spirit is brought to you by [ProgressiveChristianity.org](https://progressivechristianity.org).

Best selling authors, social leaders, and cutting edge innovators – our contributors bring diverse perspectives to the growing conversation around the idea of Progressive Christianity. Inspiring, insightful, and sometimes even challenging, these unique voices come from the pulpits, academies, and front lines around the world.

[.https://progressingspirit.com/](https://progressingspirit.com/)

A song: Love finds a way

Geoff Boyce has written a song in response to the situation in Ukraine and bullying in general. You will find the song (with Rod Boucher) at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dMH3rmPgziI>

Geoff Boyce is Chaplain at Large, based at Pilgrim Uniting Church in the City of Adelaide, South Australia. He was chaplain to Flinders University from August 1997 to January 2017 during which he established Oasis on campus as a centre of unconditional support for staff and students. He now works independently offering his experience, knowledge and connections with others concerned for human flourishing. blogger



More from Geoff at <https://rootandbranches.org/the-landscaper/>



root & branches

radical musings for nurturing humanity in the "garden" of life

hosted by Geoff Boyce



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