Welcome to the fifth “SPRING” edition of Red Wings for 2013!

**Reflection** includes an article “**Why millennials are leaving the church**” by Rachel Held Evans; and a small item on “Cloud Watching” by “yours truly”.

**Burning Issues** features articles on asylum seekers by Julian Burnside; News from Syria and the organization called Mussalah; an ecumenical group taking on climate change; and the Uniting Church’s stand on corporations who engage in the extraction of fossil fuels.

**Discussion Corner** presents a draft document which the participants at the evening service at St James have been working on, regarding Communion. It is up for general discussion and debate.

And “ You Who Delight Me: Words of Spirit and Faith” by Bronwyn Angela White.

**Indigenous News** features an article on the The Republic of Murrawarri and an item on an indigenous newsletter called WGAR News.

**Editorial**

Ever since the announcement about the next election, it seems to me that all we hear about is the economy. How well it’s doing, or how poorly, whether the dollar is up or down, how Australia is faring against other nations, it appears that the whole society is obsessed with only those matters financial or market driven. It is important. I know, in the big picture, but in the mean-time how is our social structure faring? Do we care enough for each other, our children, our neighbours? Do we judge our politicians or political parties by the “caring” factor, and if we don’t, why not?

If we are going to follow the Jesus way, do we not have to make our leaders accountable in all matters, and ask them the hard questions about asylum seeker solutions, finding a new way to treat indigenous people, including housing, food, fresh water and jobs that will give them the dignity to feel part of our society?

Perhaps Alice Walker had it right when she wrote this poem:

> We alone can devalue gold
> by not caring
> if it falls or rises
> in the marketplace.
> Wherever there is gold
> there is a chain, you know,
> and if your chain
> is gold
> so much the worse
> for you.
> Feathers, shells
> and sea-shaped stones
> are all as rare.
> This could be our revolution:
> To love what is plentiful
> as much as
> what’s scarce.

by Alice Walker, in Horses Make a Landscape Look More Beautiful

**Merilyn Tandukar. Editor.**
Why millennials are leaving the church

By Rachel Held Evans, Special to CNN

At 32, I barely qualify as a millennial. I wrote my first essay with a pen and paper, but by the time I graduated from college, I owned a cell phone and used Google as a verb. I still remember the home phone numbers of my old high school friends, but don’t ask me to recite my husband’s without checking my contacts first. I own mix tapes that include selections from Nirvana and Pearl Jam, but I’ve never planned a trip without Travelocity.

Despite having one foot in Generation X, I tend to identify most strongly with the attitudes and the ethos of the millennial generation, and because of this, I’m often asked to speak to my fellow evangelical leaders about why millennials are leaving the church.

Armed with the latest surveys, along with personal testimonies from friends and readers, I explain how young adults perceive evangelical Christianity to be too political, too exclusive, old-fashioned, unconcerned with social justice and hostile to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people.

I point to research that shows young evangelicals often feel they have to choose between their intellectual integrity and their faith, between science and Christianity, between compassion and holiness.

I talk about how the evangelical obsession with sex can make Christian living seem like little more than sticking to a list of rules, and how millennials long for faith communities in which they are safe asking tough questions and wrestling with doubt.

Invariably, after I’ve finished my presentation and opened the floor to questions, a pastor raises his hand and says, “So what you’re saying is we need hipper worship bands. …”

And I proceed to bang my head against the podium. Time and again, the assumption among Christian leaders, and evangelical leaders in particular, is that the key to drawing twenty-somethings back to church is simply to make a few style updates – edgier music, more casual services, a coffee shop in the fellowship hall, a pastor who wears skinny jeans, an updated Web site that includes online giving.

But here’s the thing: Having been advertised to our whole lives, we millennials have highly sensitive BS meters, and we’re not easily impressed with consumerism or performances.

In fact, I would argue that church-as-performance is just one more thing driving us away from the church, and evangelicalism in particular.

Many of us, myself included, are finding ourselves increasingly drawn to high church traditions — Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, the Episcopal Church, etc. — precisely because the ancient forms of liturgy seem so unpretentious, so unconcerned with being “cool,” and we find that refreshingly authentic.

What millennials really want from the church is not a change in style but a change in substance.

We want an end to the culture wars. We want a truce between science and faith. We want to be known for what we stand for, not what we are against.

We want to ask questions that don’t have predetermined answers.

We want churches that emphasize an allegiance to the kingdom of God over an allegiance to a single political party or a single nation.

We want our LGBT friends to feel truly welcome in our faith communities.

We want to be challenged to live lives of holiness, not only when it comes to sex, but also when it comes to living simply, caring for the poor and oppressed, pursuing reconciliation, engaging in creation care and becoming peacemakers.

You can’t hand us a latte and then go about business as usual and expect us to stick around. We’re not leaving the church because we don’t find the cool factor there; we’re leaving the church because we don’t find Jesus there.

Like every generation before ours and every generation after, deep down, we long for Jesus.

Now these trends are obviously true not only for millennials but also for many folks from other generations. Whenever I write about this topic, I hear from forty-somethings and grandmothers, Generation Xers and retirees, who send me messages in all caps that read “ME TOO!” So I don’t want to portray the divide as wider than it is.

But I would encourage church leaders eager to win millennials back to sit down and really talk with them about what they’re looking for and what they would like to contribute to a faith community.

Their answers might surprise you.

Rachel Held Evans is the author of “Evolving in Monkey Town” and “A Year of Biblical Womanhood.” She blogs at rachelheldevans.com. The views expressed in this column belong to Rachel Held Evans.

Cloud Watching

Ever since I was a child I have loved watching clouds. I know, a lot of kids do, so there’s nothing unusual about that. As I’m growing older though, I just love watching them more and more, not as a scientific interest, but as a joyful and creative endeavour. Some of my friends might say “oh there she goes, talking about clouds again”, but I really enjoy it so much.

So much that when a friend gave me a book called “The Pig with Six Legs”, I discovered the Cloud Appreciation Society in the UK and eventually joined it. It has a website (cloudappreciationsociety.org) and you can log in and share your photos of clouds with thousands of others across the world, lenticular or crepuscular rays, cumulous or cirrus, clouds that look like dragons, sheep, ships, any other imaginary character you like.

Some members of the Society have aided scientists in identifying clouds in particular regions, and have assisted with meteorological events. Much the same as local people reading rain gauges, people engage in cloud and weather watching.

Clouds have had a bad rap in the past, and it’s time they were treated with respect! There’s always a negative connotation, particularly when talking about weather. Phrases like “ominous, threatening” and the like make them seem almost human when they are after all a simple phenomenon of nature. Terms like “head in the clouds” or “under a cloud” also cast aspersions on people who might be simply preoccupied.

It’s such an innocent occupation, you can do it whilst walking, riding, driving a car (although it’s good to stop when you get overwhelmed) or just watering the garden, hanging out the clothes… It costs nothing, and each day there is a new display of beauty and delight to greet you if you just look up in the sky.

It seems to me that we spend a lot of time in our lives in our heads, thinking, mulling over something, worrying, planning the day’s activities etc. How much time do we spend just “being” or “allowing ourselves to be” in awe of nature?

However we spend our time, and it is often frittered away over the course of the 16 or so hours we are awake, give some thought to taking 5 or 10 minutes to lust look at the clouds. It’s a period of time well worth it.

Cloud watching can be a totally beautiful experience. Indulge yourself. You will join many thousands of people across the world looking up, peacefully exploring the beauty of the world around us. It could change your life!

Merilyn Tandukar.

Sunrise, Wanniassa, ACT.
You’ve been misled on boat people: Here are the facts

Julian Burnside
National Times
July 18, 2013

At present, both major political parties favour the use of punitive measures that theoretically stem the arrival of boat people. This theory supposedly creates the facade that if Australia purports a harsh enough regime, hypothetical arrivals will cease, seeking instead their chances with the Taliban. In any case, it’s not the Australia we should strive for.

In the midst of this seeming solution, neither the government nor the opposition has considered the legitimacy or humanity of their approach. Neither has given the public an accurate and honest explanation, meaning they’ve instead been grievously misled by false statements and gross sensationalism by opposition immigration spokesman Scott Morrison, and most recently by Foreign Minister Senator Bob Carr.

The debate about asylum seekers was poisoned from the beginning by the Howard government, which spoke ominously about “border control”, and referred to boat people as “illegals” and “queue-jumpers”. By that bit of dog-whistling, then-prime minister John Howard conveyed the idea that boat people were a risk to our community: that they had committed an offence by coming here and that they had behaved with some degree of moral obliquity. Asylum seekers do not commit any offence by coming here. Under the Universal Declaration of Human Rights every person has the right to seek asylum in any territory they can reach. It is a dismal reflection of the state of politics that Mr Morrison frequently refers to asylum seekers arriving by boat as “illegals”. He knows it is a blatant lie, but he also knows that it works.

As for “queue-jumping”, leave aside that there is no queue where boat people come from, the etiquette of the checkout at Coles is not how it works when you are running for your life. “Border protection” is a grossly misleading term, used by both major parties. It implies that boat people are a threat to us. They are not. We do not need to be protected from asylum seekers: they need to be protected from their persecutors.

Border control is a legitimate concern, but is irrelevant to the discussion. About 4 million people arrive in Australia each year by orthodox means: they come for business, holidays, study etc. If 25,000 a year arrive without authority, it is absurd to suggest that we have “lost control” of our borders. Our borders are close to watertight. Even if this year’s rate of unauthorised arrivals continued (which is unlikely, given our history and geography), 25,000 unauthorised arrivals per year means that border control is effective in 99.3 per cent of cases. That is pretty good.

So what should Australia do with people who arrive here by boat seeking asylum? At present we spend from $200,000 to $450,000 per person per year to detain them on an indefinite basis. The cost depends on whether they are held in a metropolitan detention centre (cheapest) or a remote or offshore place (most expensive).

I believe it is reasonable that unauthorised arrivals should be detained initially for preliminary health and security checks. That detention should, however, be capped at one month. After that, while their refugee status is being determined, they should be released into the community on conditions that will ensure that they remain available for processing and (if necessary) removal. They should be allowed to work and live in dignity.

While their refugee status is being determined, they should be required to live in designated rural or regional areas: there are plenty of country towns that would be happy to receive them and benefit from their arrival. This approach has the advantage of being decent, humane, and vastly less expensive than the present approach. Nor does it damage people by subjecting them to the further mental trauma of not knowing when their indefinite detention will end, making their transition to becoming productive members of society, if and when they are determined to be owed protection, much easier.

Australia has signed the Refugee Convention. Indonesia has not. Asylum seekers who get to Indonesia live in perpetual fear of detection. In Indonesia, asylum seekers who are assessed as refugees may wait 20 or 30 years before they are offered a place in a third country. In the meantime they’re unable to seek employment and their children are deprived an education. Not surprisingly, some of them — those with initiative and courage — take a chance with a people smuggler and arrive in Australia.

Some reading this will think: “Well, they should wait their turn.” But what would you do? If you and your family faced persecution at the hands of the Taliban, would you wait in Kabul for a bullet; or hide in Indonesia for years on end waiting for another country to offer you protection?

Or would you run for your life, and do whatever it took to get you and your family to safety? I know I would get to safety by hook or by crook. And if I got to a convention country, I would ask for protection.

Ask our politicians what they would do if they faced the same choice?

Why further punish an already vulnerable minority for their actions — when those same actions simply reflect our shared sense of humanity and our fierce instincts for survival.

Julian Burnside is a lawyer and human rights advocate.
Is there a Path to Peace in Syria?

A recent visitor to the NSW Ecumenical Council brought a message of hope from war-torn Syria. Mother Agnes Mariam, a Melchite sister from Homs, told of the Syrian peace movement, with its members from all sides in the civil war, who are striving for an end to the conflict. The first need is the withdrawal of all foreign fighters and an end to international arming of the forces on both sides.

Mother Agnes is the President of the international support team for ‘Mussalaha’ a reconciliation movement born in Homs, which has seen much of the worst of the conflict. The Irish Peace Laureate, Ms Mairead Maguire, has been leading a delegation visiting Western leaders, urging them to withdraw their military support, and stating the aims of ‘Mussalaha.’

M. Agnes Mariam has negotiated with both the government of President Assad and the leaders of the rebel forces, to seek a ceasefire. As she travels in Syria she is given accommodation by Christians, Shi-ites and Sunnis, and she remains hopeful that there can be an end to the suffering and an acceptance of the peace movements’ objectives.

Those attending the talk at NSWEC joined in prayer for reconciliation, and the work of ‘Mussalaha.’


Mussalaha

Mussalaha (Reconciliation) in Syria is an inter-religious popular movement which proposes a “reconciliation from below” starting from families, clans, the different communities of Syrian civil society, who do not support a violent revolution or are tired of violence.

Civic, religious and tribal leaders as well as the general population – Christians and Muslims – are involved in the movement, which aims to stem the violence and the potential for an on-going civil war in Syria.

The movement, note sources of Fides, intends to say “No” to Civil War and notes that “we cannot continue with a toll that totals between 40 and 100 victims a day. The nation is bled white, it loses youth and its best forces. For this reason a new initiative that comes from the “genius of the people” from people “who want a decent life, who reject sectarian violence and sectarian denominational strife, as preconceived ideological and political opposition are urgently required.”

In many Syrian cities, where on one side there are clashes and victims – refer sources of Fides – “gestures of friendship and reconciliation grow, offered by civilian moderate leaders to community representatives considered hostile (this happens between Alawites and Sunnis), in the spirit to ensure security and peace through civil society.” The movement hopes to find an institutional reference in the Minister for Reconciliation, the Socialist Ali Haider, who was appointed the new Syrian Executive and from the opposition party “People’s Will Party.”

The Syrian Family Forum in its second edition is part of the Mussalaha movement of which it is undoubtedly one of the major sources. Its founding session was held on 25 January 2012 in the Sahara complex on the Syrian coast. It had an historic impact due to the religious and national figures present and because it showed that a third way was still possible outside the regime-opposition conflict: the way of civil society.

Sheikh Salman Assaf Al Bijari founded this Forum, together with the journalist Ahd Sharifat. Mr. Khalil Nuh is the chairman of its executive committee. The Forum aims to bring together influential personalities of the various components of Syrian society (that is to say, tribes and social and religious families) to unite around the founding principles of the Syrian Family “reconciliation, brotherhood, loyalty and belonging” and, in the present circumstances, support the work of reconciliation, dialogue and reform launched by strong factions of the Syrian people and accepted by the home opposition and government.

The closing press statement from Sahara stipulated that participants had to create working committees on the ground to work quickly in the provinces of Daraa, Deir EzZor, Idlib, Hama and Homs and begin national Mussalaha to assemble delegations formed from these committees to visit other provinces, win popular support and so ensure the success of national Mussalaha in order to safeguard the multifaceted mission of a pluralist Syria.

Since then, every month an important joint Syrian Family and Mussalaha Forum takes place, to help restore confidence and address the fractures caused by attacks of a sectarian or ethnic character.

http://australiansforreconciliationinsyria.wordpress.com/mussalaha/
Religious leaders unite on climate
July 15, 2013

THREE rabbis are among 16 diverse Australian religious leaders who have signed an open letter calling for bipartisan support of a carbon price.

The letter, which has been organised by the Australian Religious Response to Climate Change (ARRCC), also calls for the winding back of coal exports and for more investment in clean, renewable energy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

“We urge all Australians to give this moral issue the attention it demands,” it reads. “Our world is a blessing, a gift, and a responsibility. We must act now if we are to protect this sacred trust.”

Among the signatories are Emanuel Synagogue senior Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins, Rabbinic Council of Progressive Rabbis chairperson Rabbi Shoshana Kaminsky and The Great Synagogue senior Rabbi Jeremy Lawrence.

Speaking alongside other religious leaders at a press conference held at the Pitt St Uniting Church in Sydney last Thursday, Rabbi Kamins said Australians needed to take responsibility for the impact we’re having on the planet.

“That means not only stopping coal exports, but also coal mining over a period of time, and retraining people in those fields for other jobs in renewable resources,” he said.

“This has to be a thought-out societal approach, but to pretend that the problems are too hard or can’t be dealt with now will mean that they can’t ever be dealt with.”

He said religious leaders had a responsibility in their teachings and sermons to raise awareness of the issue.

“I think there’s an incorrect notion throughout the world that religion and science are antithetical to each other,” he said.

“Whereas I think all our religions are very much knowledge-based and celebrating the ability of the intellect to grow towards God, from which it comes. “And so I think we can be in the forefront in a common discourse with spiritual basis, telling people that actually, we should start listening to the teachings of science that are quite clear as to what we’re doing.”

The spokesperson for Catholic Archbishop Philip Wilson, Jacqui Redmond, said that in the first six months since the carbon tax was implemented, 4300 megawatts of power had been saved.

“That was significant and I think we need to celebrate that we are capable of placing a limit on our carbon pollution,” she said.

Also present at the press conference were representatives from the Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faiths, the Uniting Church, Columban Missionaries and Franciscan Friars.

All of the leaders present explained how custodianship of the earth was enshrined in their teachings.

GARETH NARUNSKY

http://www.jewishnews.net.au/religious-leaders-unite-on-climate/31589

Rabbi Jeffrey Kamins signs the letter
Burning Issues

Church to divest from corporations engaged in the extraction of fossil fuels

16 Apr 2013 by Stephen W

The Uniting Church today put its money where its mouth is on climate change.

A day after calling on the New South Wales Government to act to protect farming land, water resources and conservation areas from mining, the church’s Synod of New South Wales and the ACT has determined as a matter of policy that it should divest from corporations engaged in the extraction of fossil fuels.

The Synod, meeting at Knox Grammar School, Sydney, also required all Synod bodies whose investments are not managed by its Treasury and Investment Services to implement the policy.

The General Secretary of the Synod will write to other Uniting Church synods and its national Assembly advocating that they also join a divestment campaign.

At previous meetings the Synod had called for creation care to be integrated into all aspects of the church’s worship, witness and service, saying the threat of climate change was not being adequately addressed by state and federal governments or the international community.

It said that rapid expansion of fossil fuel mining (particularly coal and coal seam gas) in Australia was directly threatening agricultural land, human health and biodiversity.

Its Ethical Investment Principles call for divestment from companies whose activities “involve substantial change to the environment, which is not or proposed to be made good at the conclusion of the activity”. One member of Synod, Zac Hatfield Dodds, said the church was well past the point of wondering whether it was ethical to invest in climate change.

Synod requested the Ethical Investments Monitoring Committee to identify the companies affected by the new policy, issues that arise from divesting from those companies and how the policy could be carried out. Alternative investments in renewable energy are to be pursued.

The proposal was brought to Synod by Justin Whelan, Mission Development Manager at Paddington Uniting Church, and Dr Miriam Pepper, a founding member of the church’s ecology network, Uniting Earthweb.

They wanted the church’s “commitment to ecological sustainability” to be expressed not only in words or pronouncements but also by embodying those words in its life and actions. The proposal sought to align the church’s professed commitment to ecological sustainability with its actions in the world.

Synod heard that Australia had one of the highest per-capita carbon footprints in the world and that 74 per cent of domestic emissions could be traced back to burning fossil fuels.

Australia contributed further to climate change by exporting coal to other countries and was in the midst of massive increase in fossil fuel extraction.

If the proposed Galilee Basin mines were fully developed, the annual carbon dioxide emissions caused by burning their coal alone would exceed those of the United Kingdom or Canada.

Likewise, the rate of expansion of coal seam gas extraction, mainly in south-eastern Queensland and northern New South Wales, was astonishing. The implications of such unfettered expansion, not only for the global climate, but also locally for farmland, forests, human health and aquatic life, were severe.

Synod was told that the destructive impacts of climate change were already being experienced, with only 0.8 degrees Celsius increase in global temperature. The future outlook was bleak, with global emissions rising faster than the “worst case scenario” projected by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change.

Research by the Carbon Tracker Initiative has found that 80 per cent of known fossil fuel reserves must stay in the ground or sea if exceeding a 2 degree rise in global temperatures is to be avoided.

Mr Whelan said, “This means the basic purpose of fossil fuel companies is now a threat to humanity.” The proposal was part of the global “Go Fossil Free” campaign of divestment from fossil fuel companies.

ST JAMES EVENING SERVICE GROUP: VIEWS ON COMMUNION

In June and July 2013 the evening service group had several discussions about communion. This paper summarises the main points to come out of those discussions. Our aim is that this paper guides the celebration of communion at the evening service. We hope too that it fosters a wider discussion about communion at St James.

Members of the group identified 4 aspects of communion that were especially important to them. We also considered the significance of symbolism in the liturgy for our experience of communion.

1. Community: the communion we celebrate as Christians has its origins in the Passover meal which, according to Paul in Corinthians and the writers of the 3 synoptic Gospels, Jesus shared with his disciples in Jerusalem shortly before his arrest and execution. The Gospels tell us that during his ministry Jesus shared meals with friends, both men and women. We can imagine Jesus gathering with his friends at the end of the day, saying a blessing and then breaking the bread, a normal Jewish practice. Jesus also shared meals with outcasts, ‘tax collectors and sinners’. The Gospel accounts of the ‘feeding of the 4,000’ strongly suggest Jesus ate with Gentiles. We know that shared meals were integral to community life in the early church.

Accordingly we see communion as a ‘meal’ which we share with others in our community. We value the Uniting Church’s tradition of an ‘open table’, for our community is not a closed one. Indeed communion is an occasion where we show hospitality and compassion to any person, including visitors, who wish to participate. Through communion we celebrate our life as a Christian community, enjoy each others company and affirm our responsibility for and commitment to each other.

Our communion is a ‘meal’. Even though the elements consumed are largely token, it should be eaten as a shared meal, in company rather then in isolation. Every effort should therefore be made – in how participants position themselves, the physical arrangement of the room and the mode of distribution of the elements - to simulate the sense of intimacy of a shared meal. In the evening service this can readily be done around the table. Interaction amongst participants, not just with the leader, can be encouraged by serving each other and through a relayed spoken blessing.

2. Remembrance: Paul and Luke both report Jesus as asking his disciples to serve and consume the bread and wine ‘in remembrance of me’. We understand the remembering of Jesus - his message, his life and person, his death and his continuing presence amongst his disciples - as central to communion. Given that we were not witnesses to the life of Jesus, ‘remembrance’ for us means recalling what we have been told or have learnt. It also means constantly re-imagining Jesus. We do this to better understand Jesus and his significance for us. We remember out of gratitude for his life and to remind ourselves why we are a community.

Central to the picture we have of Jesus is his deep and continuous relationship with the spirit of God. As a ‘spirit person’ he was also a mediator of the sacred to those around him. By remembering Jesus through the liturgical celebration of communion, our hope is that we may also experience the sacred.
3. **Personal Reflection**: balancing the community aspect of communion is a personal aspect. The communion service provides an opportunity for personal reflection, in a context which focuses our attention upon our lives as Christians. Communion can be a time to examine our lives, to acknowledge to ourselves where we have fallen short and to recommit to the Way of Jesus. Given the importance to us of personal reflection, the communion service should be designed to allow a sufficient time of quiet. Meditative music may be helpful.

4. **Wider Connection**: the communion meal has been a central and defining feature of Christian worship, and indeed Christianity, since the early decades after Jesus’ death. It is practiced by virtually all Christian traditions. Liturgies and interpretations differ but they are based on the New Testament account of Jesus sharing the bread and wine. In the regular re-enactment of the communion meal, we feel a strong connection not only with fellow participants but also with Christians of past centuries and with our Christian sisters and brothers across the world today.

**Symbolism**

The New Testament accounts of the Last Supper and of meals Jesus shared during his Ministry are rich in symbolism. The quality of our experience of communion depends to a large extent on our understanding of the symbolism and how it is conveyed in the liturgy. Some of the group’s thoughts on this symbolism are given below.

In the New Testament accounts of the Last Supper, Jesus asks his disciples to think of the bread and wine as his body and blood. When pouring the wine he promises a new covenant. Some of us are uncomfortable with the blood symbolism seeing in it suggestions of ancient ritual of blood sacrifice. Certainly Jesus’ death as a sacrifice required by God to atone for the sins of humanity has been a dominant theme in most Christian traditions. The group believes this an unappealing doctrine with little basis in the mentioned texts. More plausible and helpful interpretations are available.

Bread and wine are daily staples now as they were in Jesus’ time. They are of the earth and of human manufacture. They are emblems for food and drink generally which sustain life. As we daily consume these staples to nourish our bodily life, so as Christians we daily seek to follow Jesus’ Way to nourish our spiritual life. Our consumption of these elements as a ritual meal can be seen as signifying our individual and communal intention to partake of spiritual nourishment, that is, of our re-commitment to walk each day in the Way of Jesus. The Way of Jesus can also be understood as a path of transformation in becoming more like him.

The original participants in the Last Supper were Jewish to whom the Passover was a time of thanksgiving for the Israelites’ passage from slavery to freedom. The Mosaic Covenant, to which Jesus’ reference of covenant relates, was established after the deliverance from Egypt. These ideas of journey and freedom infuse the meal’s symbolism. They point to Jesus’ teaching about the Way and the Kingdom.

As a group we agree on much but not in all respects as to how best to incorporate the symbolism of bread and wine and of the Last Supper into the communion we celebrate. We intend to come back to this issue later in the year.

**July 2013**


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

In the Prologue, the author introduces the Lord’s Prayer as “The strangest prayer”:
‘The Lord’s Prayer is Christianity’s greatest prayer. It is also Christianity’s strangest prayer. It is prayed by all Christians, but it never mentions Christ. It is prayed in all churches, but it never mentions church. It is prayed on Sundays, but it never mentions Sunday. It is called the “Lord’s Prayer,” but it never mentions “Lord”. ... ‘It is prayed by Christians who focus on the next life in heaven or in hell, but it never mentions the next life, heaven, or hell. It is prayed by Christians who emphasise what it never mentions and also prayed by Christians who ignore what it does.’ (Page1)

The meaning of each section of the prayer is explored in the context of biblical writings and Roman dominated life in Jesus’ day. The prayer as a whole is a vivid commitment to doing ‘your will on earth as in heaven’.
‘When you read “kingdom of God”, therefore, mentally rephrase it as the “ruling style of God”. It imagines how the world would be if the biblical God actually sat on an imperial throne down here below.’ (Page 78)

Substantial parts of this small book (188 pages) focus on what Jesus meant by the ‘kingdom of God’. For example there is an illuminating and confronting discussion of how the message Jesus began to announce when he heard of the death of John the Baptist was different from the message of John whom Jesus described as ‘the greatest human ever born’ (Matthew 11: 11, Luke 7: 28). Jesus had been part of the John movement (Mark 1: 9 -10)
‘John believed that only sin held up God’s transformative intervention. So he created a great sacramental and penitential renewal of the exodus. His followers were first brought out into the desert east of the Jordan and were then brought back into the Jewish homeland though that river. As they passed through it, repentance purified their souls just as water washed their bodies. Thereafter, they were received into the promised land as a regenerated people. Them, surely, said John, God would come, any day now. Surely said John, once a critical mass of purified people were ready, God would have no further excuse for delay.’ (pages 86 – 87)
‘But John was wrong, terribly, tragically wrong. He announced the immediate advent of an avenging God and what came was the immediate advent of an avenging local ruler. Herod Antipas, the Roman appointed governor of Galilee, arrested and executed John. And God did nothing – no intervention and no prevention.’ (Page 88)
‘Jesus watched, Jesus learned, and Jesus changed. ... He changed his understanding not only about the kingdom of God, but about the God of the kingdom.’ (Page 88)
‘In answer Jesus proclaimed another ... aspect of his paradigm shift ... . You have been waiting for God, he said, while God has been waiting for you. No wonder nothing is happening. You want God’s intervention, he said, while God wants your collaboration. God’s kingdom is here, but only insofar as you accept it, enter it, live it, and thereby establish it.’ (Pages 89 – 90)
I have quoted this example at some length. Far better than a mere description could do, it provides some sense of the way understanding of the text of the gospels leads to profound implications for how we think and how we live.

This book is compelling reading for an individual and a rich source of material for group study. It is available from bookshops or from internet suppliers.

Source: THE PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIAN NETWORK OF VICTORIA INC. NEWSLETTER, MARCH 2013

Bronwyn Angela White.


This small book by New Zealander Bronwyn White is a fresh and valuable resource for those seeking new material to read or use in worship.

Divided into two parts, the first part is headed: Poems of Love. These 28 poems are very personal, touching both everyday and special events and people. Topics covered include “In the Garden”, “Hugs like Coffee”, “Rainbow Dance”, “Women in the Graveyard” and “Raining in Bali”.

When the book was launched in April last year, an article in the local Wairarapa News reported the poems included “from tragic affairs, to recollections of life with her daughter, to sex and observations on society”.

The second part: Words of Spirit and Faith offers a wide selection of 27 liturgical reflections suitable for a Sunday morning experience. They include: “This Sacred Space”, “Way of Justice”, “Bread for the Journey”, “Autumn Benediction” and “Litany for the Journey”.

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Of this collection Sir Lloyd Geering writes: “In this rapidly changing world where the century-old liturgies have become tired and lifeless, Bronwyn has used her poetical skill to create new expressions of thanksgiving and spiritual nurture that are inspiringly fresh”.

Bronwyn is collating a second publication of liturgies suitable for both Advent and Christmas.

Reviewed by Revd Rex A E Hunt
The Republic of Murrawarri and Indigenous Self-Determination

By Curtis Kline • Aug 1, 2013

On April 10 of 2013 the Queen of England received a letter sent to her by the Murrawarri Nation of northern New South Wales and Queensland in Australia. This letter was actually a notice for the declaration of independent sovereign statehood of the Murrawarri Nation. The Queen was given 28 days to produce one of three situations accepted in international law as well as British Common Law that recognized the governed taking over or acquiring of new land.

The three situations could have been: 1) A declaration of war and a subsequent victory; 2) The signing of a treaty or agreement; and 3) a lack of occupation of that land by other peoples.

The Murrawarri Nation requested that the Queen give proof of any of these three situations. Treaty documents between the Murrawarri and the British Crown, a deed of concession showing that the Murrawarri have indeed ceded their sovereignty, dominion and ultimate authority to the Crown of Great Britain, or documents showing a declaration of war against the Murrawarri Nation would have all qualified.

However, the fact is that none of these documents exist, the Murrawarri Nation never signed any treaty with the British Crown, and war was never declared. This, along with the decision by the High Court in the Mabo case which stated that the principal of Terra Nullius—that the land was not under occupation at the time of Captain Cook’s coming to Australia—was complete fiction and no longer defensible, meant the Queen could produce no such evidence.

In fact, the Queen did not even respond, allowing the Murrawarri Nation to de facto claim recognition of their Republic as an independent nation.

The Republic of Murrawarri is now functioning with a Peoples Council as an interim government. With its first meeting on July 13 the Peoples Council elected chairman Fred Hooper, passed a resolution to establish a Provisional Council of State. A constitution and a bill of rights have already been drafted.

The permanent government, when formed, will consist of a parliament of 54 representatives appointed by their respective ancestral family groups within their respective provinces. The representatives will strictly be half male and half female. There will also be four representatives from non-ancestral Murrawarri provinces, and residents who are not of Murrawarri descent will be allowed to stay on their land and automatically be granted Murrawarri citizenship.

In the declaration, the Murrawarri strongly claim their right to self-determination in both asserting the existence of this right as well as claiming how the Nation will put it to use.

In the Declaration of the Continuance of the State of Murrawarri Nation, it is stated that:

We the Murrawarri Peoples declare our people have maintained a physical, spiritual and cultural connection to our Ancient Lands, Subsurface, Natural Resources, Waters and Airspace and we did not cede our Sovereignty Dominion and Ultimate Title through any process of treaty nor through any act of war declared on the Murrawarri Nation and its peoples by the British Crown, Government or their servants. As well as:

The Murrawarri Republic will foster the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; it will be based on spiritual, cultural, freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by our peoples. It will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of culture, religion, conscience, language, and education; it will safeguard our sacred places handed down to us by our creator and our ancestors; and it will be faithful to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations.
The Murrawarri Nation’s act of self-determination has been an inspiring story. Already 27 other Aboriginal groups in Australia have requested Murrawarri’s declarations and constitution to use as templates for their own independence movements. The Republic of Murrawarri is also turning its attention to establishing a reparations and repatriation process with the Australian government and the Queen of England. This would include negotiations for the transfer of all monies collected plus interest by the government and the Crown for the illegal use of land, natural resources, and water within the Murrawarri Republic’s boundaries from the time of the first illegal land grant.

The right of self-determination of all peoples is foundational in international law, and is the first article in both the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples also states the right to self-determination of Indigenous Peoples, under Article 3:

*Indigenous peoples have the right to self-determination. By virtue of that right they freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.*

Disappointingly, since the decolonization era, it has been assumed by many that the right to self-determination is no longer meaningful. However, as exemplified in the case of the Murrawarri Nation, decolonization is far from complete, and the right of self-determination is crucial to the protection of Indigenous Peoples around the world.

**WGAR NEWS**

**WGAR is the Working Group for Aboriginal Rights (Australia)**

**WGAR News** publishes information and opinions from a wide range of sources, many of them grass roots organisations. The opinions expressed are not necessarily the opinions of WGAR.

The e-newsletters include media releases, opinion pieces, news items, audio, videos and events.

**WGAR News** monitors the media, focusing on, among other topics: The NT intervention; Aboriginal tent embassies; Aboriginal sovereignty movement; Aboriginal land rights and Aboriginal well-being.

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This year the Social Justice and Inclusiveness Group has decided to support Pegasus as a local organisation.

“Pegasus is a not-for-profit community organisation that provides equestrian activities for people with disabilities. We bring horses and people together to achieve their potential.

Pegasus is located at Pegasus Farm on the outskirts of Canberra. About 100 riders with a disability ride at Pegasus each week and about 100 volunteers assist with the operation of our programs. Our riding lessons are offered in an integrated environment with riders placed in classes according to their ability.

Apart from being fun, horse riding helps to improve co-ordination, balance, muscle development and fitness. It also boosts personal confidence, self-esteem, communication skills, leadership and trust.”


Margaret Morton, Executive Director at Pegasus, in her latest report on goals and initiatives for 2013, says:

“We have one main focus for 2013 and that is to offer MORE services to reach MORE children and adults with disabilities: MORE lessons for riders with and without a disability, MORE Horsing Around, and MORE Hippotherapy classes for people with movement disabilities.... Pegasus is also developing new and exciting initiatives to help us become more financially self-sufficient. They include: Children’s themed parties, riding clinics for those without disabilities, and rental of our fantastic facilities.”

Last year the organisation faced closure as a consequence of a fall away of financial support from the community. Pegasus has made a big effort to raise more of its own income but it still needs more support from the community if its future is to be assured. With our financial and other support we can help Pegasus achieve these goals.

**CONCERT 13th October**

On Sunday afternoon, 13th October, we are planning to hold a concert at St James. We have decided to invite our local community groups and performers to entertain us. All of the groups use our facilities here at Curtin for their rehearsals.

They will include Ukuleles Canberra, The Shiny Bum Singers and some members of the Spanish Music Group. During the interval refreshments including tea, coffee and afternoon tea will be served.

Ticket prices will be $20, or $15 (student, Centrelink or DVA pensioner/allowee) or $60 for a family ticket. Tickets will be available in the next few weeks.

Please come along and bring your friends and neighbours to support Pegasus, a wonderful organisation and community facility and help them provide more services and opportunities for children and adults in the future.