

*We look with uncertainty beyond the old choices for clear-cut answers
To a softer, more permeable aliveness
Which is every moment at the brink of death;
For something new is being born in us if we but let it.
We stand at a new doorway, awaiting that which comes:
Daring to be human creatures.
Vulnerable to the beauty of existence.
Learning to love.*

— Anne Hillman

In Christ Community Church service bulletin 12 April 2009: www.christ-community.net

“Change is inevitable; progress is not”

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria is part of a world-wide change taking place in how the Christian tradition is understood and practiced.

In our meetings we provide opportunities for a very diverse membership to respond to different aspects of the contemporary world and scholarship that have implications for faith and living.

[On 3 May, a gathering at Ascot Vale met impressive Aboriginal leader Reg Blow to hear about indigenous life and culture.](#)

This newsletter brings you details in the last three pages of two meetings that reflect what members have requested.

[On 14 June, three Regional Meetings offer opportunities to meet other people interested in progressive Christian ideas and practices when there is time for conversation and discussion](#) not always possible in our larger meetings with keynote speakers. The widely spread venues make it possible to form some regional networks and reduce travel times for at least metropolitan Members. So far the number of members in any country area has not made it feasible to sponsor regional Victorian meetings but we hope that time is not far away.

[On 4 July, the meeting with outstanding international scholar and author Amy-Jill Levine will be a highlight for 2009.](#) Don't miss the registration process!

[Children Praying a New Story. A Resource for Parents, Grandparents and Teachers](#) by Michael Morwood. Kelmor Publishing. South Bend In. 2009. 187 pages.

Michael Morwood's previous books have received wide acclaim for helping adult Christians to re-imagine and re-evaluate their faith in light of the contemporary "story" about our universe. That story and Morwood's writings challenge Christians to expand their notion of God beyond a localized, personal deity and to embrace belief in an all-pervasive Mystery beyond our human concepts. They challenge Christians to review any understanding of Jesus as the unique "way" to a localized God and to know him as the revealer of this Mystery in our everyday living and loving.

Morwood's books have been especially insightful and helpful to adults struggling with prayer and ritual while radically reconstructing their Christian faith.

This book is for adult Christians engaged in this shift, now asking the vital questions:

How do we educate children into this new faith perspective?

How do we pray with them if prayer is not about addressing an external, listening Deity?

Order from the website: www.morwood.org
Orders will be sent from Perth. Copies are now available for A\$25 including postage

GOD-IN-THE-PRESENT-MOMENT

Prayer in the 21st Century

by HEDLEY BEARE. Published by John Garratt Publishing, Mulgrave. 2008.

Reviewed by Margaret Ray

The blurb on the cover says “Grounded in a life-time’s experience and study of spirituality and prayer, Hedley Beare has produced a fresh account of what prayer is in the 21st century and how to give it a central place in one’s everyday life”.

The book is written in a conversational tone, with an apparent awareness that “one size does not fit all”.

The vast range of sources is evidence of this –from the 14th century anonymous writer of “The Cloud of Unknowing” to Eckhart Tolle’s “The Power of Now”, encompassing Buddhism, Islamic mysticism, Celtic Christianity, modern theologians from around the world, all with views on the practice of the presence of God.

But with all this scholastic integrity, Hedley Beare has written a book designed to be helpful rather than impressive and has mostly managed to achieve clarity and simplicity at least where the concepts allow.

I greatly enjoyed using the references to go to the Internet for further samples of the writers I had not read before (to the samples of chapters with only some of the pages omitted!)

As I read I was aware that the emphasis on prayer as disciplined interior work was being balanced by a conviction, shared with all the great practitioners, that prayer is primarily a joyful experience.

He spends some time on the recovery of the idea of God in the here and now and this chapter deals with the most difficult material for me. Those who are familiar with Eckhardt Tolle will have a head start.

The present moment has dimensions and potentialities that we do not often explore or know about but we are more likely to look for them if we have learnt to be aware. Our appointment with life is in the present moment and it seems to follow that this will also be the place of our appointment with God.

For those of us grappling with new understandings of the nature of God, new ways of prayer are seriously challenging, and it is probably as well to focus on the eventual outcome as worth the struggle! Beare gives some practical suggestions as to how to work our way into the new mindset and language, both to help ourselves and to get rid of outmoded metaphors which ‘the uninitiated have the right to find offensive’.

There is a chapter entitled “When prayer is no longer just asking for things” which contains a section on different methods of prayer and another on prayer as energy exchange which introduces interesting new material. This chapter concludes with suggestions for making a checklist of factors from various contributors to help us enter into the experience of living in the present moment and regularly encountering God there.

Chapter 7 is entirely a “what to do section” which includes techniques for meditation and a seven step process to structure daily prayer practice.

The book concludes with a chapter which deals with some of the famous exponents of praying to God-in-the-moment - the Gaelic blessings, notable for the way they convey the presence of God in the midst of daily living; Brother Lawrence who could affirm that the time of business does not for him differ from the time of prayer; Carlo Carretto who realised the need for a place of stillness in the midst of the most committed activism and St.Patrick the fierce intercessor, supremely assured in his relationship with God.

In some part of this exposition–cum–handbook you are sure to find suggestions which you can adapt for your own devotional life so that the concept of filling every part of life with gratitude and awareness of the presence of God becomes a possibility rather than a vague aspiration.

Beare ends with the observation (hope) that perhaps in the company of such people we too may find ourselves able to paraphrase and extend the comment that “all of my prayers have generated in me and in others wholesome joy”.

Margaret Ray

**“A PEOPLE’S HISTORY OF
CHRISTIANITY – THE OTHER SIDE OF
THE STORY”, by DIANA BUTLER BASS,**

HarperOne 2009. \$39.95

Reviewed by John Emmett

Imagine the great commandment rather than the great commission as the basis for God’s mission. This means that our primary and unique calling is to “love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul and strength; and our neighbour as ourselves” rather than assuming the power of “all authority to make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything ... commanded”. The great commandment speaks to the centre and depths of relationship with God and others. The great commission sounds something like an imperial edict to invade and colonize.

Diana Butler Bass is an historian. She has impeccable credentials as a Church historian from scholarly, research and teaching perspectives. Diana has reflected deeply on the story of the church over 2000 years. She is also a person who observes closely and keenly churches today. Diana’s earlier books witness to her research and interest in the life and well-being of protestant churches. Whatever the setting, Diana is a highly competent communicator of the church’s story.

In her latest book, “*A People’s History of Christianity – the Other Side of the Story*”, HarperOne 2009, Diana deliberately chooses to explore the story of the church through the lens of the great commandment. Her ‘people’s history’ focuses on the story of the practice of people’s love of God and neighbour. This is not a history of theological dissent and divisions, although some comment is offered about such matters. It is a history that selects from every age of the church’s life. These stories illustrate how Christianity as a movement of love for God has called, inspired, enthused and empowered ordinary people to extraordinary lives and action. It is a history that highlights the power of love to transform individual lives and to change human existence.

Throughout the book, Diana includes reflection on contemporary experience of the church, and of the Christian ‘love story’ as a continuing, powerful movement of transformation. Using a construct that follows the church’s story through

a series of images - from the Way through Cathedral, Word, Quest and River, Diana’s writing offers an easy and inspiring read. The chapters offer simple and clear divisions, enabling the reader to hold a sequence of events as well as engage in the development of ideas. This is a history of the practice of Christian faith as much as the story of a colossal movement. Real people, in real places, come alive in her story telling. Attention to scholarly work is thorough. The endnotes are full and references abound.

Through this history, more than any other histories of the church I have read in the past 35 years, I became acutely aware of how fluid the church has been. In every age, many times over, the church has morphed its form and expressions even its messages. Yet, at the centre has been the constant of Jesus Christ, unique revealer of God.

I was left somewhat breathless, very excited at the numerous stories of transformation and change Diana’s book details. We tend to think of the church as a fixed entity. Indeed we often work hard to sustain our fixed images of the church into a persistent reality. Yet, the story of the church is one of constant change. Diana presents a history that sees the church always and at all times ‘emerging’, never as finally emerged. Others might say that the church is always reformed and being reformed. This history holds great hope for people of today’s churches. The great commandment view of church history invites us to sit loosely with the structures and particular of expressions of the church, whatever the era, whomever the people, whatever the specific heritage might be. Rather, we are encouraged to be ‘water people’, to embrace fluidity of tradition, to live out the vocation into which we have been baptized

Dr. Diana Butler Bass will be in the UCA Synod of Victoria and Tasmania from June 30th to July 5th. She is the keynote presenter for the ‘From Congregations to Spirited Communities’ events. Visit <http://mpru.victas.uca.org.au> for details, email john.emmett@victas.uca.org.au or call 9251 5246.

Diana will speak on Sunday 5th July, 2.00pm – 6.00pm at the Gannawarra Centre, 132 Keilor Rd, North Essendon; Cost \$25. Bookings can be made on 9251 5246.

Unichurch Books stocks the book.

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria

invites you to a choice of three

. *Regional meetings*

to meet others in a relaxed environment
to talk about
progressive Christian thinking and practice
and strengthen regional links

WHEN: Sunday 14 June 2009, 3.00pm to 5.00pm

WHERE: **St Leonards Brighton**

Cnr New Street & Wolseley Grove, Brighton
Melway 76 E3. Car parking in the streets.

Elm Street Uniting Church, Bayswater

Elm Street, Bayswater
Melway 64 E4. Plenty of parking.

Brunswick Baptist Church

503 Sydney Road, Brunswick
Melway 29 G7. Best parking in Blyth Street.

Choose the location that best suits you

PROGRAM

- ★ Meet members and others from the region interested in progressive Christianity
- ★ Enjoy a cuppa and time to talk about common interests
- ★ Discuss a challenging quote from Gretta Vosper's book, "With or Without God" that will involve experiences of the cutting edge of contemporary Christianity
- ★ Contribute ideas for the development of the Network

There is no cost for participation in these meetings these

"Open minds, open hearts, open hands"

The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria

invites you to
a workshop with

THE RENOWNED NEW TESTAMENT TEACHER & AUTHOR

Prof. AMY-JILL LEVINE

E Rhodes & Leona B Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee
Author of "The Misunderstood Jew", etc

**"UNDERSTANDING JUDAISM,
UNDERSTANDING JESUS"**

A Workshop to explore how locating Jesus in his Jewish context is vital to understanding his mission, the Gospel writers' interpretation of it and how this influences Christianity today.

WHEN: Saturday, 4 July 2009, 2.00 – 5.30 pm

**WHERE: Phoenix Park Community Centre,
Rob Roy Rd, Malvern East (Melway Map 69 D2)**

ABOUT AMY-JILL LEVINE

Amy-Jill Levine is E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Professor of New Testament Studies at Vanderbilt University Divinity School, Department of Religious Studies, and Graduate Department of Religion. Her most recent publications include *The Misunderstood Jew: The Church and the Scandal of the Jewish Jesus*; the edited collection, *The Historical Jesus in Context*; and the fourteen-volume series, *Feminist Companions to the New Testament and Early Christian Writings*. A self-described "Yankee Jewish feminist who teaches in a predominantly Protestant divinity school in the buckle of the Bible Belt," Levine combines historical-critical rigor, literary-critical sensitivity, and a frequent dash of humour with a commitment to eliminating anti-Jewish, sexist, and homophobic theologies.

**Admission: If registered by 30 June - \$20; PCNV Members \$17; Students \$10
After 30 June & door - \$25; PCNV Members \$22; Students \$10**

Use the form on the following page to register

**Enquiries to The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria
03 9571 4575: info@pcnvictoria.org.au**

REGISTRATION BOOKING FORM

Prof Amy-Jill Levine “Understanding Judaism/Understanding Jesus”

Saturday, 4 July 2009, 2.00 – 5.30 pm

Phoenix Park Community Centre,
Rob Roy Rd, Malvern East

Admission: If registered by 30 June - \$20; PCNV Members \$17; Students \$10
Later registration & door sales - \$25; PCNV Members \$22; Students \$10

Please send me tickets @ \$ each

Name:

Address:

..... Postcode.....

Telephone ... (In case of queries)

Email (optional)

Cheque for \$..... enclosed (Make a cheque payable to PCNV)

OR

Bill my credit card for \$

Card Type: Visa / MasterCard (Strike out the one which does not apply)

Card Number: Expiry Date...../.....

Card Holder's Name:

Signature:

Tick if receipt required []

**Send To: The Progressive Christian Network of Victoria
76 Coppin Street
MALVERN EAST, VIC. 3145**