



Winter 2001

## CONTENTS

1. <i>Ministry Among Generation X</i> Rev Con Apokis.....	3
2. <i>Made in the Image of God ... But not quite finished.</i> Dr Peter Rayner.....	8
3. <i>Philippines' Solidarity Project</i> Trudi Bennett.....	9
4. <i>The ASCM Women's Project</i> Sophia Wooldridgell .....	10
5. <i>Women's Theology Group</i> Cate Clarke .....	13
6. <i>National Chairperson's Report</i> Julia Pitman .....	14
7. <i>National Secretary's Report</i> June Searle .....	15
8. <i>National Treasurer's Report</i> Rachael Osmond .....	15
9. <i>ACT Report: Winston Rondo's visit</i> Robert Tulip .....	17
10. <i>Queensland Report</i> Ray Barraclough.....	19
11. <i>Victoria Report</i> Kerensa McElroy .....	19
12. <i>Western Australia Report</i> Trudi Bennett.....	20
13. <i>Cunnamulla</i> Mark Young.....	21

### July Conference Update

This year's July Conference is being held in parallel with the National Council of Churches Conference in Melbourne. Rev Dr Peter Matherson will be our speaker and a Friend's service will held at Fitzroy Uniting Church. More details inside

*Jubilee Grapevine* is a publication of the **Australian Student Christian Movement.**

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The views expressed in this newsletter are not necessarily the views of the editor or the ASCM as a whole.

Submissions for JG are welcome. Please send on disk or paper to the national office. Please state if you do not wish your article to be published on the Web at the ASCM site.

As requested by the Council of Christians and Jews, *Jubilee Grapevine* uses the terms Hebrew and Greek scriptures instead of Old and New Testaments.

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## Ministry Among Generation X

My first close encounter with a Generation X'er was in a previous church in the late 80's. At the time I had not identified the phenomena - in fact no one had. We belonged to a church that was struggling with an aging congregation and limited resources. A typical run of the mill mainline institutional church. In hindsight we should have seen what was coming.

A friend who some might call eccentric joined us in this church. True, he was little unusual. Today this person would be identified as a Generation X'er. Within a short period of arriving this friend was sporting a Mohawk and a punk dog collar. When asked why he had done this he gave no particular reason - he just wanted to do it. It was not a "70's counter culture" thing, nor trying to make any point - he just wanted to do it.

He arrived in the church and joined the choir - a robed traditional choir that sat in the facing stalls at the front of the church during services. As you can imagine the choir members didn't like his appearance or attitude and they tried to throw him out. Our friend was not willing to accept this edict and continued to sit up with the choir. As result all the choir members moved to one side of the stalls leaving our friend sitting alone in the opposite stalls. Sunday morning services were an amazing sight. This was only the beginning.

We had borrowed this friend's car and had bought him a present - a Young Ones t-shirt - a typical deconstructionist gift for a Generation X'er. On the front was a picture of the hippie Neil going 'Wow Heavy' and on back was the punk Viv screaming 'Piss off you bastards'. Now, if you have never heard of the TV

program the Young Ones or never watched it then you have missed another deconstructionist icon of our age.

Anyway our friend arrived late for church and was not able to robe for the choir, wearing this t-shirt. My wife asked him to join her at the front of the church. As you can imagine this was not a good move. The whole congregation was

**The whole congregation was confronted with the message 'Piss off you bastards' - the oldies freaked. In fact all of us freaked.**

confronted with the message 'Piss off you bastards' - the oldies freaked. In fact all of us freaked.

In the following days he had a meeting with the elders and minister of

the church where he asked what the fuss was all about and they freaked again. They of course wanted an apology and whatever other blood they could get. The bishop was called in and he freaked too. Our friend thought that his perspective was missing in the leadership and nominated for the Church Council or Vestry. As could be expected the church had its biggest turnout at an AGM to make sure he didn't get voted on.

Now this is the Generation X punch line. Through out all of this fracas our friend honestly did not know what the fuss was about. He had no church background before becoming a Christian. He was totally confused by people's reaction. He stuck to his guns because it was meaningful for him to do so. Even those who supported him found it hard to comprehend why he pushed onwards. You see the church had been Generation X'd. Here was someone unwilling to start from the given culture and meaning structures of the church. They were not meaningful to him or as far he could tell to many others. So it

would have been foolish to give them honour as being meaningful. He wanted a say in how the church would be at the most profound level. He did not want any received wisdom or pattern of church. He was there to deconstruct or declare as dead what he found there.

**The lessons of generation x for the church**

The response of many of you will be to say that this guy was insensitive, did not know much about how change goes and did accept authority. To put words in his mouth, he wrote the church off as a premodern institution that is unable to open itself to the world and engage in a profound manner.

Control is anathema to the Generation X'er. Authority is not to be imposed but negotiated. It is no longer acceptable to set down expectations for church members to follow. A church needs to allow room for individuals to

deconstruct what is to be meaningful for them. In this sense Generation X is good news to a church that is developing a siege mentality. It brings a question mark over any arbitrary commitment to tradition or authority that is not able to generate meaning for people today.

At the time I was critical of the minister who seemed to waver as to the best way to resolve this explosion that had happened to his congregation. Having been a minister now for some seven years he has my total sympathy. The challenge was to see and make room for my friend as the creative edge or even centre of the church. The minister needed to get up and say he supported our friend's actions as the future of Christian ministry in that area; to prophetically declare that his deconstructionist views were a valid way of ministry.

Now I am not sure whether I would have been up to such an approach. Yet he was not unsympathetic to our friend. He cursed the timing of these events and he resigned himself to supporting the offended oldies who were the financial base of the church. The younger members gradually filtered away to other ventures and recently that church was deemed financially nonviable and amalgamated with two others. Maybe if it he had supported the views of our friend the thing would have died anyway - but more ugly. At least then the deconstructionists would have been happy.

**Control is anathema to the Generation X'er. Authority is not to be imposed but negotiated. It is no longer acceptable to set down expectations for church members to follow.**

**The Roots of Generation X**

David Bowie may not be a household name any more or even a name on every teenagers lips but he is one of the foundation stones of the Generation X culture. How so? Bowie, like any other musician

would write the music with lyrics and then record them. During his 'Diamond Dogs' period he changed this direct approach and begun experimenting in the deconstructionist literary techniques of William Burroughs. He still would sit down and write music and lyrics however before he recorded them he would do some deconstruction with a pair of scissors. Simply he took the lyric sheet and with the scissors cut up each stanza and line onto the floor. He would then reconstruct the lyrics by randomly picking up a line or stanza and sequentially pasting them onto what would be the new lyric sheet. He would then take his cut and paste result, proceed to the studio and record the new work for an unsuspecting public. Bowie did not confess to this practice until the end of the 70's. If you're wondering why someone would do something like this to a song, then

maybe its time you took a break and put on a Keith Green album on the record player to prepare yourself for what follows.

### **What is Generation X?**

What is Generation X and what has David Bowie got to teach the church other than cross-dressing (that's probably where he learnt it) and that drug rehabilitation really works? The tag 'Generation X' refers to people born in the 1960's. In other words, 20 to 35 year olds have been identified by marketing people, with their own characteristics as was noted in the baby boomers of the 60's. Generation X is a series of broad generalisations seeking to describe the adults coming of age in the 90's.

To begin with Generation X people are reticent to tax the mental faculties outside of their chosen profession. They do not read books or newspapers, though they may regularly read 'Cleo' or 'Sports Illustrated'. The number of people with tertiary education who have made Schwarzenegger, Stallone and now van Damme, millionaires is truly horrifying. They are not politically motivated, nor even that personally ambitious. Interestingly, neither are they into buying lots of records. The rock'n'roll passion is in serious retro trouble - jogging in the same spot. Their energies are spent in positioning themselves in order to secure the best meaning they can get out of life's experiences. Generation X can be characterised as those concerned with acquiring the right meaning attire - good body, money, thrills and autonomy. In other words it is about being cool. What has changed since the 60's is not what is cool but how we know something is cool. This is where Generation X meets deconstructionism. The origin of the concept began as a movement in architectural circles but really found its currency in literary circles. It became a sign post of the post modern age we are

increasingly finding ourselves in whereby previous accepted wisdom was not only rejected but displaced by whatever you found to be wise.

### **What is deconstruction?**

The term has now gained currency for all sorts of situations where meaning and purpose are supposedly a part of life. It started as a theory about how one is to understand the meaning or point of literature. The main assertion being that comprehending the author's intention **is not** the most meaningful way in which to understand a story or a novel. Rather the best way to get something out of a text is to deconstruct it in manner that allows **you** to give it meaning for **you**. From 'Diamond Dogs' onwards, David Bowie presented to us songs that left the burden of meaning to you the listener, or to put it another way, he removed from himself the burden of having to give meaning to his work. He believes the role of the listener is what gives meaning to his music.

A deconstructionist is someone who rejects any inherent meaning in literature, or life. Even more, a deconstructionist believes that anyone who seeks to impose his interpretation of the meaning of the story, even if they are the author, may be an obstacle to people getting the meaning they want or need from that story. To be deconstructionist is to be one who is able to use literature or any life event to make meaning for themselves. A Generation X'er responds to any imposition of meaning by deconstructing it and disarming it into user-friendly experiences. One clear example is the recent raised profile of rights for all sorts of groups. For instance I remember the hassles we underwent to help us provide for all the various age groups for Sunday morning services. In particular whose rights should be considered when our children are taking over. Some saw it as a sign of the neglect of the children, some saw it as the children

getting to good a deal, while others did not want to be bothered.

Should the children's sense of belonging or the parents' sense of communal support, the singles who were feeling imposed by the family hegemony or the minister who wants people to hear the sermon have priority. It took us about 12 months of negotiation for people to be happy with what they had to give up for themselves.

### **What has Generation X have to do with the church?**

Those of you who at this point are turning over your Keith Green album on your record player maybe wondering whether such people really do exist in our churches? Some of you may be quickly tempted to identify the presence of this beast as those who are young and rebellious and that it is an old problem in new trendy gear. The fact is that the rise of Generation X and its deconstructionist intent is problematic for the church that is still one of the key meaning umbrellas in our society.

If by this stage you are wondering who David Bowie is, then you should go straight to the Reformation or Vatican I and not pass go or collect your \$200. If you want to confess that Bowie's music sounds all the same then in all likelihood you are probably one of those poor people who wanted to go to the Woodstock anniversary concert. Certainly if you did not know that David Bowie was one of the significant popular post modern performers then it is quite likely that you belong to a church which is wondering where all the young people have gone; a part of a church that cannot remember the last time (or any time) when something shocking was the means of Jesus ministry among you. In either case let me suggest you may not be a good vehicle for ministry among the Generation X.

If you are not familiar with one of the icons of the 70's, David Bowie, then it is unlikely that you will be familiar with the

Throwing Muses or the Pixies but you by now have bumped into Nirvana, Pearl Jam and Soundgarden. The sense of get out of my way I want to piss on your life. Interestingly, one music group of Christians has become the icons of the 80's and 90's are the Violent Femmes. They are raw, bold and challenging the church with the spirit of deconstruction. Their first two albums, "Violent Femmes" and "Hallowed Ground" are essential listening. For instance the words from "Black Girls" begins with the repeating chorus "I like - black girls" and ends with the chorus "I like - white boys". In between the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are evoked as the source of salvation. The interesting thing is that there is no apparent concern about what seems to be a competing ethos.

### **A cameo of Generation x in the Church**

Simply Generation X are the people in your church who want to do some deconstructionist reinterpretation on not only the hymns you sing but also your favourite choruses. They are the people in the church who resist all forms of pietistic expectations. They are the people in your church who want to leave the church or are giving the church its last chance. All they feel as Christians is the church's irrelevance and futility of making an impact. You may say that this is the same feeling shared by many Christians in the 70's. However the difference is that Generation X's have no willingness to invest in transforming the church. If the church ain't up to it - then it should cop it sweet and fade away.

The main point of this article and the lesson of the above experience was that Generation X's are the only way the church will continue its ministry. It does not mean that we have to swallow all the Generation X agenda but we do need to acknowledge its pivotal role. They are the people in your church who do not

want to be given a rhythm of life but to stand for something now. More than stand they want to fundamentally deconstruct and reinvent the life of the church. They will not accept the church as it has been received particularly the tyranny of flower, lawn, welcoming rosters. They need to feel part of the process of deconstructing and reinventing in order to put their name to it. They want to be carried forward in a new vision. It may have retro overtones, often looking simply like the church of the past, but it must be on about allowing people to create (not find) meaning in its life.

Recently our church community in Port Melbourne has been undergoing a process that we have dubbed "Apocalypse Now at Holy Trinity". In short we have decided that the church building is no longer maintainable or viable for our little community. As result we asked the question what were we prepared to consider as our future. Could our future involve selling the land, even closing shop? The emotions of our community were summed up in a dream that was shared in one of our services to consider all this. A woman had this dream where she found herself walking in the church building and saw all these people present who were past parishioners, dressed in the clothes of their time. As she was walking about she had this sense that people were saying to her and to us as a congregation: "We did what we thought was right as God's people for our time and place and we free you to do likewise now". This vision brought great comfort and encouragement. However this mandate for deconstruction is no light matter. As a result and in no small part to this deconstructing vision, we are now in the process of selling the property upon which our church building sits. We are no longer worshipping in this building but are sharing a building with the local Uniting Church. This whole process has been scary not only

to the community around, past parishioners but also church bodies responsible for overseeing our decisions.

The church needs to decide whether it can cope with this level of deconstructionism. As a premodernist institution the church is trying to walk incognito and unaffected by a postmodern world. The church needs to return to its missionary heritage. At the moment the church is like a Christian missionary in India wearing a sari but not willing to learn to speak Hindi. The response of Generation X's will be cool disgust. The real issue is that the church does not understand or is pitifully ignorant as to why this spirit of deconstructionism is so important.

### **Living in the church with the Generation X**

At the moment a third of our congregation is deconstructionist Generation X's. They are both the creative edge and the black hole of the church. If you want to promote a new work among young people in the local schools, turn the church building into an Arts & Craft Market, start a ministry among refugees, reinvent our Sunday morning services, conduct stimulating debate after the sermon, share a church building with another denomination, etc., all of which have occurred in the life of church in the last 18 months, then you can rely on your Generation X's to provide the church with the emotional energy to reinvent itself. However when it comes to rosters, being punctual, giving more regularly than spontaneously, having dinner parties, welcoming people, volunteering for Council or for anything, etc., then your premodern Christian is who you have to rely on. This divide can be stressful for the life of our church.

As a minister I am greedy - I want it both ways. But you see I am a Generation X'er and so I would rather go down in a blaze of deconstruction, fighting for a

new style of ministry that deconstructs previous perceptions of the church than to keep a church visibly isolated from the world it is called to serve. It is this that keeps me alive in ministry. The cost has been that some have found this deconstructionist imperative to stressful and have moved on to kinder waters.

This is not only about the problems that young people have - far from it. It would be wrong to understand what I am saying as another way of describing the

generation gap within the church. In the end it is not about youth but a tidal wave that is now swamping not only our culture but the church is being dragged in kicking and screaming. Generation X may be a certain age group but deconstructionism is a mind set and can afflict or inspire anyone or any church.

*Con Apokis is an Anglican minister in Melbourne.*

### “Made in the image of God ... but not quite finished”: A blind man’s view of divine likeness.

“Made in the image of God.” Whatever else it may be, it is a good marketing tool. The power of the association of our own bodies with the likeness of God draws us like any other offer of inflated self-importance. The vistas of metaphor offered by others' bodies: the lover; the parent; or the child, provide such scope for the different faces of love. As an idea it embarrasses the enlightenment mind, but it is not an idea to be rationally appropriated. It is an image, a picture.

The problem with images is that their power lies in their specificity. If we must give God a body we don't have much choice about giving God a particular body. So whose body gets the job and what privileges does this give them? For example, historically the body of God has always been described as a male body. Feminists may argue this problem is consigned only to history. One can hope there really has arisen a generation of women for whom imagining their own bodies in the image of God is not a test of their emancipation but rather a spiritual tool; one they can use freely. So, can I imagine blindness embodying the divine nature? How about schizophrenia?

Both present difficulties that the gender questions do not. Both are problematic visions of God because they suggest

basic lack of functioning, problematic when ascribed to God. In fact I have a bolt-hole. I can take the eyes of God no more seriously than the pancreas of God. The sight of God is another matter, but for me the sight of God is an activity not a sense. It connotes attention (for care or for censure) but does not suggest retinas and photons.

It is more important to me to image God as human than to wonder whether I am a poorly manufactured facsimile of God. Imaging God as human is one thing Christianity is very good at. As far as I know, the sightedness of Jesus (unlike his masculinity) has not been used as a bar to ministry or participation in the church, and this means I carry no history of alienation from this particular image of God.

If we can't take the physical likeness very seriously, we pass to the spiritual, or rather the moral image of God. One may wonder why such a question interacts with disability at all. Surely the same questions hold for everyone.

The problem comes because although I might have no difficulty with the physical image of God, most people think I should. When we add this to some rather patronising ideas of divine fairness, and add in the notion that

suffering of itself ennobles, we are left with many versions of the statement “you are disabled but God still loves you” or “... you still carry the divine likeness”. People then must flesh out what they mean by ‘the divine likeness’.

Here I must move to the specifics of blindness. I spent seven years in a school for the blind. Its motto (thankfully only ever visible in the obscurity of Latin) was “The Lord is my Light”. I was never sure whether this was meant as some kind of compensation or to suggest some special gift.

The idea of the gift of inner sight is widespread. In Mark's gospel there are two stories which I think of as totally disconnected but which are always read together (Mark 10: 35-52). The first has two of the more upwardly mobile disciples asking about seating arrangements. It is immediately followed by the story of blind Bartimeus, who won't keep his mouth shut despite repeated requests and is, consequently, cured. No preacher could resist the juxtaposition: those with the vision of the kingdom always before them who never quite get the punchline and the blind man seeing it all at one glance. Leaving aside whether he sees because or in spite of not seeing, how am I to react to such a story? As a pious nine-year old I felt quite smug about it; everyone likes to be told they have an inside running for heaven. The angry teenager felt patronised, held up before the congregation as some kind of cipher. Now I am content to stand with the rest of the congregation for this admonition.

The preacher should be free to throw this contrast into my face too, even if they, and the rest of the congregation, usually are not. There is no moral consolation prize, no gift of inner sight and no excuses either.

So if there is nothing much to learn from the interplay of disability and our thoughts on the image of God either for the physical or the moral dimensions, does the idea have anything to teach us at all? I offer one small and incomplete idea. To take seriously the idea that we are ALL in the image of God is to absolutely demand equality. This sounds easy of course; who would deny equal treatment, equal opportunity or equal access, at least as pieces of rhetoric? But how about equal challenge or equal critique. The language sounds perilously close to mutual obligation with rights bringing responsibilities and no end of reactionary nonsense. I mean something much less modest. To say we are fully and equally in the image of God is to say we are fully and equally offered choices to behave well or badly. Not the same choices; equal does not mean the same. To excuse someone's self-centredness or manipulation *carte blanche* because of their disability also denies their generosity, their giftedness. This is the image of God I believe we all share, even if the responsibility is daunting. I would deny it to no one.

*This is a version of the talk **Dr Peter Rayner** gave at the 2001 ASCM National Conference. Dr Rayner works in the Bureau of Meteorology specialising in climate change.*

## Project Reports

### The Solidarity Project



This is the second part of the story of my solidarity trip to the Philippines in Jan/Feb this year. The first week involved discovering the life and work of farmers in Northern Luzon. Perhaps the second week is the more important stage in terms of discovering how Australians contribute to the devastation of farm land and it's people.

From Isabela we journeyed south to the province of Nueva Viscaya, where Peter and I met our new team - Pauli from the Alliance for Community Development; Josie, a provincial development committee member; Casie, the SCM organiser for the area; and two new Australians from "Migrante", a Filipino Immigration Society - Elmo and Malen. Elmo was also a freelance reporter for

SBS who is staying for another 5 months to do a story on street kids.

After a briefing session with Pauli and Josie, it was off to see the governor. The governor is very supportive and is opposed to a Climax/Arimco gold-mining proposal in Didipio. Climax is an Australian exploration company based in Sydney. This joint venture (Arimco) is their first proposal to operate a mine. The governor must endorse the proposal for the mine to go ahead. Climax/Arimco launched an appeal to the national government because this provincial governor refused to endorse the mine. The governor responded by asking the Alliance for Community Development (ACD) to expand their activities. The governor is doing this as

elections are coming up and the people do not want the mine.

In 1995-6 Climax/Arimco had hired public relations people to infiltrate the local communities with propaganda. Free t-shirts, stickers and hats saying "Environmentally Friendly Mining" were given out. They were even thinking of developing a mining song!

To get to the mine site at Didipio, we rode for a couple of hours in a jeep – half the time on bitumen, the other on muddy roads. The rest of the way involved hiking through mud. A few steps into our hike, Peter sank knee deep into the mud – I could tell it was going to be a fun walk. For me, it turned out to be one of the highlights. The serene, peaceful, yet challenging walk was so much more comfortable than dodging tricycles in the noisy, polluted cities. This 2 hour hike only ended 5 hours later!

When we reached Didipio we were met by the anti-mining leader Manong Peter. He was distrustful of us at first, wondering if we were from the mining company, but gradually opened up enough to tell us his story.

The mine officers first came in 1989, and they didn't identify themselves. When they found out they had opposition, Climax/Arimco said they were just here for exploration and they wouldn't continue mining if the community didn't want them here. They also said that the exploration wouldn't affect the environment. But the community noticed the water table had dropped, a whole creek had dried up and pigs wandering around the streams near the test-pit died.

In 1997 the mining company found out about Manong Peter and offered him a lot of money if he supported the mine. Manong Peter asked why only him, and

not a pro-mining person or the whole village. They said that he could leave the village if the others would be angry. Manong Peter asked them, "What about my family, what if my children want to come back to Didipio one day?"

In 1998 Manong Peter was threatened by an Australian employee of Climax/Arimco; he was told that if he opposed the mine "something" would happen to him, then the Australian just laughed and said "No Australian would do that". Later his son went outside to check what a dog was barking at and saw a man with a gun run away from under their house. After that, the villagers took turns to watch his house. One day, Manong Peter was walking to the market at 2am to catch the 6am jeep. A man in military uniform, without a name badge, asked Manong Peter his name, and he gave the soldier his neighbour's name. The soldier asked whether Manong Peter was coming, and Manong Peter replied, "Maybe he is on his way now, somewhere behind me."

After the harassment Manong Peter wrote to the local, provincial and national newspapers and the harassment stopped for a while. Then in 1999, Climax/Arimco offered him 20 hectares of land that was available 2 hours walk away. Manong Peter asked why the land was only offered to him and not all the other villagers. Manong Peter is an extremely brave person who supports his whole community and cares about his children's future.

After hearing this from the villagers, they wanted some information from us. They wanted to know if it was true that Climax applied for a mine site in Australia, but opposition from Aboriginal communities stopped their plan, so they came to the Philippines instead. They also wanted to know if we had heard of the new gold mining technology that doesn't use any chemicals – Climax/Arimco said they

had this technology and would use it at Didipio. We responded by showing them Climax/Arimco's 2000 annual report, stating that the Didipio mine would use the conventional flotation method - that's the one that uses cyanide! The villagers also wanted to get our opinion on whether it was true that the company could rehabilitate the land to be better than it is now. So I had the honour of showing them the different methods of rehabilitation and that it couldn't put a mountain back together: how tailing dams work; how it could easily overflow in a storm and poison the land. They all appreciated the information but wanted to know how to stop the mine.

Back in town, Pauli took us through our whole exposure and told us the ways that we could help in Australia. So Peter, Malen and I have been given the following tasks:

- To help provide a regular flow of additional information, especially in regards to Axis and Climax/Arimco.
- To organise experts for conduct of research in the Philippines
- To help provide educational work in Australia which may lead to a support group, eg. 'Friends of the Cagayan Valley' to help raise resources.
- To form an international solidarity support group to have connections with the region.
- Arouse, organise and mobilise, ie. Work towards a rally in Australia
- Support their proposal submissions for money, transportation and food for their rallies in the Philippines.
- A request has also been asked that we look into getting a 500MHZ computer and internet connection for SENTRA/SCMP in Isabella.

So SCM groups around Australia who want to get involved could:

- Make time to go through the education kit I'll have ready soon.
- Distribute it to other social justice groups on campus and church groups in your city.
- Keep an eye out for people with appropriate skills who would like to do some research/ consultancy in the Philippines for awhile.
- Fundraise money for computer, internet connection and educational material for the campaign in Cagayan Valley.
- Encourage other students who may want to go and have a look for themselves and come back with more information.

As an individual you can help the cause in your everyday life by being aware of your consumption, and reducing it. It is our demands for material goods in the developed, rich countries that provide the incentive for mining more resources. Try and avoid large multi-national corporations where possible. The government of the Philippines is encouraging foreign investment which isn't helping the majority of the people. We can avoid those corporations that are exploiting the resources, labour and market of developing countries. Later on in the year a solidarity group will be set up in Australia to support the "Save the Longest River" campaign in the Cagayan Valley. We'll keep you posted.

*Trudi Bennett is an Anglican university chaplain, SCM Development Worker in Western Australia and the ASCM Solidarity Project Officer.*

## National Women's Project

ASCM has had an active Women's Project for over 20 years. In the past the ASCM Women's Project has produced publications about women in Christian churches and in Australian society, as well as other resources.

In 1999 ASCM decided to introduce a new model for staffing the Women's Project. We now have 2 National Women's Officers at all times. Each year we elect a new Women's Officer for a 2 year term, giving us one Women's Officer who has been in the position for a year, and one new Women's Officer. The Women's Officer in her second year then has the chance to 'train up the new Women's Officer, passing on expertise and procedural information throughout the year. This model is working well, and it works best when the Women's Officers are in regular contact to steer projects along.

The Activities of the project are:

- Creating women's only space at national conferences and at campus level.
- Holding regular women's conferences
- Working with Women's Officers in SCMs around the Asia Pacific Region to raise awareness of the situation of women around the region.
- Being actively conscious of gender balance in positions of leadership in the movement, as well as being aware of group dynamics at branch, state and national levels.
- Creating resources for worship that focuses on women.
- Having Women's Project Officers who hold a voting position on the ASCM national executive, and

play a key role in the ASCM Sexual Harassment Policy.

- Encouraging the discussion of feminism and women's issues in ASCM branches around Australia.
- Participating in feminist action within and beyond the church, such as the Fair Wear campaign.

The focus of the Women's Project in 2001 is on developing a set of plans for group discussion in ASCM branches to talk about women and Christianity, and whether it is possible to be both Christian and feminist. The package is still in draft form, and consists of an hour long discussion on each of the following topics:

- Introduction information and guidelines for running discussion groups.
- Five separate pre planned discussion groups on the following topics:

*Women and God*

*Feminism and Christianity*

*Women and the Church in Australia*

*Women and the Church in the Asia Pacific*

*Women and the Bible*

- A book list with brief reviews on helpful Christian, Feminist, and Christian Feminist texts.
- A list of helpful organisations and websites.
- Stories from women who have been either Christian, feminist, or both.

The main activity for the Women's Project in 2001 will be running the five groups in one day at the next ASCM conference, and then using comments from the people involved to finalise the package.

Anyone interested in learning more or being involved, please contact me at [sophiawo@hotmail.com](mailto:sophiawo@hotmail.com)

*Sophia is in her second year as ASCM Women's Project Officer.*

### **Women's Theology Group (SA)**

Every fortnight a small group of women gather to discuss a feminist theology article or to talk about what it means to be young women in the church today. We have a great time eating and sharing our lives together before we try to make sense of the creation story, or grapple with the fact that white women have been oppressors as well as the oppressed, especially of aboriginal women in Australia.

Each gathering is a bit of a lucky dip, with different people attending and a different topic. At the moment the challenge is to become more cohesive as a group. We have been meeting for 2 years nearly every month, yet there have been many who have just started attending. We are hoping to spend our October long weekend together to build a greater sense of community and gain some direction.

I value this group as being a place where I can ask questions and learn about feminism and theology, as well as be supported by and supportive of those who are struggling in their denominational faith community.

*Cate Clarke is Convener for the Women's Theology Group.*

## National Executive Reports

### **National Chairperson's report**

Recently I attended the Commencement Service of the University of Queensland (UQ). I went with my trusty offsideer Matthew Burke, who is a postgraduate in urban geography and the faithful and highly capable leader of an ASCM branch at UQ. The service was organised by the Chaplains of the university who put it together in style. A traditional four-hymn-sandwich, the service boasted a gutsy organ, university orchestra and a moving candle lighting ceremony for the lives of the various faculties. (Ironically, one candle didn't light - bad luck for Arts this year!) The service involved a procession of Heads of Churches, academic staff and dignitaries. Very few students attended. The Chaplains neither recognised nor involved representatives from student Christian groups. By contrast, the hall was filled with mums

and dads listening to choirs of private school students.

The ambiguity of the event in the life of the university was highlighted early on in the proceedings. As the service started, a voice over the loud speaker reminded the audience, ahem! congregation that "as this is a service of worship, *not* a *concert*, please refrain from clapping after the anthems".

In content and form the service revealed a contest about the role of spirituality in the university environment. In one sense, the service could be read as a clear expression of the aims of the university to market itself as *the* tertiary option for the top students of Queensland's private schools. In this view, the UQ Commencement Service simply played second fiddle to the modern market-driven ethos of the university. The service also signaled the changed place of Christianity in the university and the wider culture. In my

study of the ceiling, I felt a certain pathos that this grand event was out of place in early 21<sup>st</sup> Century Australian society. Even if students from all student groups had been involved, the hall would not have been filled, as it might have been at the turn of the century, with ordinary scholars dressed in black voluntarily participating in a civic function. The service showed the ability to adapt so characteristic of Christianity, but the maintenance of a model of worship uninteresting to the parents and more relevant to another era was heartbreaking. The service demonstrated that commitment to the gospel and to the institution in which that gospel is expressed is a difficult tight rope.

Spirituality in universities, whether in official functions, or student groups, or in conversation in the corridors of academic departments, involves a certain degree of contest and compromise. ASCMers are implicated and involved in these contests. We believe, like the chaplains at UQ, that you've got to be in there.

Like the chaplaincy service, some may consider ASCM as an institution implicated in the modern university ethos or, more precisely, as an irrelevant relic of the ecumenical winds of the 1890s, 1930s or 1960s. As such, your response may be to keep ASCM at a distance. My experience, however, is that new life is always born of humble ancient institutions, which continue to keep the flame of tradition alive. In ASCM, the particular ethos that is open, intelligent, ecumenical and critical contains the hope of an authentic spirituality that will stand the test of life in the world and the opportunity to develop leaders for the future Australian community and ecumenical movement. Support ASCM: not for what it was in the golden days, not for what it humbly achieves today, but for what, together,

we can do to develop Australian Christians who will serve their God after graduation in the worlds of commerce, industry and the professions into the future!

*Julia Pitman is the National Chairperson.*

### **National Secretary's Report**

As National Secretary one of my tasks is to look at the information we provide to assist Area Councils and Branches to function effectively. To this end I have been updating the Branch Building Handbook, which was last revised in 1996. The latest edition will be available to branches for the beginning of next semester.

In March I made a trip to Melbourne to attend the History Project Group meeting with Caesar Romero from the National Council of Churches (Victoria) to discuss the involvement of the SCM in the upcoming NCCA national forum, to be held in Melbourne in July. The discussion with Caesar led to planning with Ingrid Clancy (NCCA Sydney) for SCM involvement in attending the Hugh Mackay lecture, the opening service and the public worship on the Sunday evening. Claire Vincent is to be the SCM representative at the forum. The SCM running a national event paralleling the conference, with details appearing later in this edition.

The History Project Group has done a sterling job so far in supporting the work of Renata Howe in writing the History of the ASCM. We have undertaken to look at changing publishers as the book is turning out to be a much bigger affair than first thought, We are hoping that we will be in a position to be able to publish the book late this year or early next year and are looking at a national launch in mid 2002.

We have had two executive teleconferences since the January General Committee meeting. This has proved to be an efficient way for executive members to discuss relevant issues and make informed decisions. It is very helpful for people to be able to speak to each other and feel that their opinion has been heard.

Thank you to Melbourne branch for all their effort in producing the last JG in time for O-week. Please remember that this publication is an excellent way of expressing the essence of the SCM to other interested people.

June Searle is the National Secretary

## **National Treasurer's Report**

The months following the January General Committee meeting were incredibly eventful. As a public company, ASCM has to submit certain forms to the Australian Securities and Investments Commission (ASIC). This hadn't been done since 1995! So I went to Adelaide to talk to our accountant and find out what was happening. After two quite stressful meetings, Julia and I took the financial reports he had done, and our cashbooks, and went to find another accountant.

Even though the financial reports for 1999 and 2000 weren't ready, our solicitor advised us to lodge the previous financial reports and to tell ASIC about our new National Secretary. Chris MacRaild and I were amazed by the bureaucratic efficiency and indifference displayed by the ASIC staff. The forms were stamped, the fines were paid, and no-one would have known we had presented him with paperwork dating back five years!

The good news is that since then our new accountant has finished the reports for 1999 and 2000. We are now completely up to date, and hopefully wiser for the experience. We have adopted a new system for making payments that will make it much easier when our accounts need to be audited.

On the money side of things, January conference made a loss of about \$275. In the day-to-day running of things, we've incurred a deficit of just over \$5,000 since the beginning of the financial year (1<sup>st</sup> Dec 2000). However, a successful appeal and enthusiastic fundraising by Area Councils should improve this situation.

*Rachael Osmond is the National Treasurer.*

(Advertisement)

### **A FRESH LOOK AT JOHN'S GOSPEL**

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by Ray Barraclough

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*Ray is Convener of the SCM Area Council in Queensland*

## **Regional Reports**

### **ACT report**

#### *West Timor SCM President visits Australia*

In the historic August 1999 referendum in East Timor, despite dire warnings from the Indonesian army (TNI), nearly 80% of the people voted for independence. TNI then carried out their threats. With their militia, they began a systematic program of murder, looting, burning and rape to destroy everything they could in East Timor. 400,000 East Timorese fled to the mountains, while 300,000 were taken by the Indonesian army in planes, boats and trucks to refugee camps in West Timor. People were intimidated into leaving their homes, and the Indonesian forces separated parents from their

children, sending them to different refugee camps. The displacement and separation for the refugees often followed the intense trauma of murder and rape of family members. Many refugees have since returned home, but more than 100,000 East Timorese are still held captive in refugee camps in West Timor.

The plight of the East Timorese refugees was raised during a recent visit to Australia by Winston Rondo, President of the West Timor branch of the Indonesian Student Christian Movement (GMKI). Winston was invited to Australia by the National Council of Churches of Australia (NCCA) for a three month English language course at the University of Canberra, in order to

improve his ability to work with international aid agencies in Timor. NCCA staff had met Winston in West Timor where they saw that he was a powerful advocate for justice and human rights. The information in this article comes from my conversations with Winston. During his visit Winston met with Canberra SCM and other church and community groups to tell us about the grim situation in his homeland. He also visited Melbourne and Sydney before going home to Kupang. In Melbourne, Winston had a meeting with some local Timorese and several SCM Friends at which a local West Timorese suggested SCM taking up a project of reconciliation with West Timorese, East Timorese and Australians involved. He also gave a nationally broadcast interview to Radio National's Asia Pacific program, in which he clearly stated that the main problem in West Timor is the continuing power of the Indonesian army and their militia.

Most of the refugees want to return to East Timor, which is now at peace, but they are prevented from leaving the camps in West Timor by militia and TNI. In effect, they are prisoners of war, held hostage to the murky political agendas of TNI. If things go badly for TNI, for example if Indonesia starts to break up, the lives of the East Timorese refugees in West Timor could be in real peril. For this reason their return home is an urgent humanitarian and political concern. To give a picture of what life for the refugees is like Winston described one refugee camp, at Toapuken, which has more than 20,000 refugees in less than three square kilometres. The refugees are held at the centre, surrounded firstly by a ring of paramilitary supporters of the militia, then by a ring of militia members, and on the outside of the camp live TNI who formerly served in East Timor. The militia and their supporters actively prevent the refugees from returning to

East Timor, saying that refugees who advocate return are traitors. No external information gets to the refugees, except for false newsletters spread by the militia claiming it is dangerous to return to East Timor and attacking the UN. These people are now largely forgotten by the world. Hunger is serious, with rice rations not enough to live on. Most refugees have few clothes, and hygiene and sanitation are poor. Each day, five children are estimated to die in the camps, mainly from malaria and diarrhoea. Few refugee children go to school, most are malnourished and begging is common. Many refugee women have children fathered by militia or TNI men who have abandoned them, and many women die in childbirth. Worse even than these conditions is the fact that the refugees are effectively prisoners of war. The Indonesian government refuses to let the refugees go home to East Timor, even though most want to return.

Why is this happening? Behind the militia is the controlling hand of TNI, who want revenge against East Timor for achieving independence and ending the army's economic empire there. TNI also want to intimidate separatists in West Papua and Aceh, and to retain and increase their wealth and influence by holding the refugees hostage. The West Timor Government wants the refugees to return to East Timor, but TNI refuses to allow them to go home. Indonesia's President Wahid appears to have no authority over TNI.

Since three UN workers were massacred in West Timor last year, the UN will not return to the camps until the militia are gone. Humanitarian support is urgent. Few doctors have been in the camps since UNICEF pulled out in November except for medical teams from the West Timor Bethesda Hospital. Other support has come from the Indonesian Red Cross, local NGOs and

churches, and some international sources including the Catholic Refugee Service, the Uniting Church of Australia, and the National Council of Churches of Australia. The West Timor branch of Indonesian SCM (GMKI) began working in East Timor in February 1999, together with non-government organizations, especially the Solidarity Council for East Timor Students, to support democracy and human rights against the militia and TNI. GMKI has established a small office serving the 30,000 refugees around Kupang, but working in the camps is dangerous due to the presence of militia and TNI, chaotic situations of violence and drunkenness, and frequent gunfire. GMKI volunteers are working without salary, and are often exposed to traumatic incidents and stories. GMKI is strong in West Timor, with over 4000 members and strong political links help Winston and his colleagues to continue their difficult work.

Winston Rondo's visit was a real inspiration for Canberra SCM as he showed us a direct and practical way to follow Jesus by loving our neighbours as ourselves, through prayer and support for the refugees in Timor. Winston showed us how our solidarity with the suffering people of our region should be at the centre of our Christian faith. The story of the destruction of East Timor has direct parallels with the crucifixion of Jesus. Just as Jesus predicted his own death at the hands of the Roman Empire and his resurrection through the power of God, so the people of East Timor saw clearly that their decision to vote for independence would bring the wrath of TNI on their heads. Their faith in themselves is now being repaid as East Timor builds a new independent nation.

Numbers attending Winston's talks in Australia were regrettably very small. The broader student and church communities did not seem interested in

what he had to say, even though he was telling us about a real and present risk of a major human catastrophe on Australia's doorstep. GMKI, with 40,000 members, and its West Timor branch with 4000 members, are larger than any Australian University Christian groups, but they are very poor and are living in dangerous and turbulent times as Christian witness in Indonesia becomes more difficult. ASCM is the only Australian University Christian group which has a direct link with GMKI through our affiliation to the World Student Christian Federation. Through this link with WSCF, ASCM is part of the Christian family of the world, inspiring us to follow Jesus' teaching to love your neighbour as yourself. Winston said the GMKI calls on the international community to provide humanitarian support to the East Timorese refugees in West Timor, to put political pressure on the Government of Indonesia and TNI, and to pray for a resolution to the problems of the East Timorese refugees.

*Robert Tulip is a member of the ACT Area Council.*

### **Queensland Report**

SCM continues its life amongst students at the University of Queensland, Griffith University and the Australian Catholic University. As well there are opportunities for students to gather from across campuses at the following activities:

1. SCM Movies evening with a discussion of recent films over coffee and dessert at the home of Ray and Dorothy Barraclough. Next evening is on Friday, 18 May, with the SCM moviegoers giving their searching theological and ethical considerations on *Traffic*, *The Exorcist* and *Crouching Tiger - Hidden Dragon*.

2. The SCM Dinner Parties have been beautiful so far, with one in February (hosted by SCM'er Helen McEnery), one in April (hosted by staff worker Marilyn Cullen) and the next planned for Friday, 29 June (with the gamble of Ray Barraclough cooking). Each guest brings a plate or drink. These are pleasurable gatherings to put into practice the expression of the kingdom of God and feasting that Luke's gospel associates with Jesus.

3. Later in the year there will be an *SCM Weekend of Relaxation, Meditation and Refreshment*. Situated in an old 'Queenslander' (that's a house) near the Bunya Mountains National Park. SCM'er Antonio Cagnoni will lead us in a mini retreat as well as joining us for dinner under the stars, a visit to a winery, and other pleasures.

*Ray Barraclough is the convener of the Queensland Area council*

### **Victorian Report**

Melbourne SCM has experienced a stimulating and at times challenging programme this semester. We have continued our Thursday lunchtime meetings, focusing discussions around issues relating to the Trinity.

Rev. Alistair Macrae was invited to lead the first session, and whilst not quite prepared to die for the Trinity, explained why the doctrine of the Trinity is fundamental to his understanding of Christianity. Rev. Dr Coralie Ling spoke with us about feminine models of the Trinity in worship. Melbourne SCM's manual dexterity was also put to the test when asked to draw trefoils and quadrifoils using a compass and ruler during Claire Vincent's talk on Trinitarian knots and geometry. We also discovered that whilst Rev. Dr Con Apokis could certainly lead an intense and challenging discussion on the Trinity and Ethics, he couldn't give us the

answers. The Trinity as understood by Orthodox Christianity was also explored by Chris. A trio from the United Faculty of Theology, facilitated by Dr Catherine Massen, led a discussion about the Trinity and other Faiths, particularly in relation to bridging the division between Christianity and Judaism. The Trinity and early 20<sup>th</sup> century philosophy was considered by Rev. Chris Mostert. Other speakers included Rev. Dr Morag Logan in the Trinity and the Bible, University Chaplain Sean Whiting on the History of the Trinity; and the Trinity and Community with Victorian Development Worker Jenny Hayes. The semester was wrapped up by a reflection on Semester One, facilitated by David Osmond, where some ideas were generated for another full program next semester.

In addition to our Thursday lunch time meeting, Melbourne SCM has continued its "Sunday afternoon at the Movies with God" session. Informal in nature, SCM'ers gathered at North Melbourne Uniting Church to share a meal, watch a video and discuss what issues relating to faith the video may have raised. Paul Teusner introduced the series with "Sleepless in Seattle", illustrating the methodology by which we can study film. We also watched "American Beauty" with Kylie Vincent discussing the many complex issues raised by and symbols used in this movie. We shall also be watching "The Matrix", with discussion led by Rev'd Dr Morag Logan.

This semester has also seen the initiation of Tuesday social evenings. Among other things we have drunk lots of coffee, met for a meal at the Clyde Hotel and played Frisbee by moonlight. These gatherings have been small, friendly events and have provided a welcome break from the mid-week stress of uni life.

Melbourne SCM currently has a website under construction, which can be found at [www.ascm.org.au/melbourne](http://www.ascm.org.au/melbourne)

On the first of May, SCM participated in an ecumenical vigil recognising the plight of clothing factory workers and outworkers in Australia and throughout the world. The vigil was organized by the Fairwear Campaign, with a different faith community preparing a liturgy for each hour of the day.

Melbourne SCM, and especially the new Chair, David Wolstencroft, has also directed a lot of energy towards organising the upcoming debate between author Ian Fry and university lecturer Rev. Dr Chris Mostert, on the doctrine of the Trinity. This event is shaping up to be a highlight of the year and is eagerly anticipated.

*Kerensa McElroy is a member of Melbourne branch and responsible for establishing the branch website.*

### **Western Australian report**

This year the SCM in WA has been focusing on the continual development of the UWA branch, which is now thriving. We now have 15 members with between 4 and 8 people coming each week. As most of the members are new, we started the semester with general faith discussions and now we are moving on to an introduction to Christian

Action. We took our usual pilgrimage to Toodyay for Good Friday, which allowed students at universities where SCM isn't operating this year to catch up with old and new friends and to keep the SCM link going.

This year we have also seen the beginning of a Young Friends of SCM group consisting of people who were in SCM during the last 10 years and students belonging to universities where no SCM is present. Our first gathering was a play about an ex-SCMer now in England, Nick Gill. Future visions include gatherings every few months to discuss work issues and to be a Christian community for young adults.

There also has been a move to set up SCM groups at two church high schools, this process is still in the development phase.

At the Conference of Churches in WA AGM it was agreed upon that ASCM-WA would be made an associate group to the Conference. Discussions with the Conference of Churches have begun, talking about how ASCM can once again pick up its role in ecumenical leadership training among young people.

*Trudi Bennett is WA Development Worker and an Anglican University chaplain.*

### **'Cunnamulla': A review of Dennis O'Rourke's documentary**

This is an intriguing film about a country town 800km west of Brisbane in the months leading up to Christmas 1998. Dennis O'Rourke follows some pivotal characters around town - the scrap metal collector in trouble with the local council, two 13 year old girls in trouble with the community, the local punk DJ in trouble with his sweaty father, a young Aboriginal man in trouble with the law

and the taxi driver and his wife, Neredah, who is the quasi-narrator of the story. It is not just a portrayal of a hot and impoverished country town, but a distillation of an essential part of the nation. At the end of the railway line, Cunnamulla is struggling for a clear cultural identity between lizard races, Slim Dusty songs, street parades, rodeos and a few classical and heavy

music fans. It is a poignant and tragic tale, which is also defined by some of the funniest scenes I've ever come across on the screen. This film has obviously upset some of the locals, but it could also be seen as a portrayal of Australia rather than an attempt to capture the town's image in its entirety. Issues about family, adolescence, rural lifestyles and belonging are painfully

held up for the viewer, but the filmmaker's sympathy for the community is never in doubt. Sure to be a great discussion-starter and eye-opener for those who need a greater understanding of the outback - i.e. all of us.

*Mark Young is a Queensland SCM'er and past editor of JG.*

## SCM Noticeboard

### **A heartfelt plea from the Asia-Pacific Women's Project Officer**

Praxis is the World Student Christian Fellowships Asia-Pacific quarterly newsletter. From the next issue onwards, I would like to put a little more attention to Women's art, poems or personal reflections. I believe it is important to encourage female SCMs to share more of their artistic talents. Further, it is important to encourage all SCMs to be conscious about art created by female artists.

Hence, I need your help in finding any female SCMer who could share her art in Praxis or contribute poems or personal reflections on her womanhood journey. Alternatively, if you find any female artist in your own country who is willing to contribute her art/poetry to us, please encourage her to do so.

Sincerely

Yock Leng

Asia Pacific Regional Women's  
Coordinator.

If you are interested, contact Sophia  
Wooldridge.

[sophiawo@hotmail.com](mailto:sophiawo@hotmail.com)

History of the University Unit  
Seminar Series

### **"A University within a University"**

**The Australian Student Christian  
Movement at the University of  
Melbourne.**

Thursday 18 October  
Gryphon Gallery, 1888 Building  
University of Melbourne

Dr Renate Howe

Chair of the ASCM History project will  
speak of the importance of the ASCM to  
the life of the University of Melbourne.

**All welcome**

**World Student Day of Prayer Service**

This is an invitation to all members and friends of SCM to attend a service to mark the World Student Day of Prayer.

This afternoon service will be held at Hotham Parish – North Melbourne.

Sunday 9 September.

For further information closer to the day contact David Osmond

03 9421 4872 or

[dosmond@optusnet.com.au](mailto:dosmond@optusnet.com.au)

