

# Jubilee Grapevine

Spring 2003



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Welcome to another exciting edition of Jubilee Grapevine, jam-packed so full of exciting and (cognitively) stimulating articles that we barely have room left for an editorial. Damn.

So, in conclusion, we are your new editors. You must obey us, or we will take unacceptable liberties with the wording and meaning of your submissions. Thanks to Narelle for her fantastic job over the past year, and to ACT SCMerS for your support in producing this edition.

Katie Weir and Daniel Robinson

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

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The views expressed in this magazine are not necessarily the views of the editors (although they quite likely will be as half of it was written by us) or of the ASCM as a whole.

As requested by the Council of Christians and Jews, JG uses the terms Hebrew and Greek Scriptures instead of Old and New Testaments. At least, we would have if any of the articles actually contained these terms.

This issue has been printed on 100% recycled paper.

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# Exchange from SCM Philippines

**Leni Valeriano**

Yes, fellow SCMer, I extend my warmest greetings to everybody! I am glad to introduce myself, Leni B. Valeriano as a youth exchange from the Student Christian Movement of the Philippines (SCMP), a movement in a not-so-remote neighbouring archipelago in the Pacific, South-east of Asia. I am greatly glad to be sent by SCMP for this ASCM-SCMP solidarity program for a year. SCMP, for its part, has always included in its programs the strengthening of its fellowship with other SCMs, especially in the Asia-Pacific ring, and extending its bonds and collaboration with other peace and justice movements at various levels.

SCMP was born in December 1960 as an ecumenical movement of students. It opens itself up to students regardless of denomination, faith, gender, age and social class. And since its establishment, SCMP believes that the essence of the movement is to live out its ecumenical Christian faith, without divorcing it from its social context as an act of faith-reflection - its academic community, the Church and the whole of society. As a community and fellowship of believers, and being a part of the student and youth sector, the SCMP commits itself to be modern Jeremiahs who would speak out the prophetic voice that God has given us.

"Do not say you are too young, but go to the people I send you to ... I am giving you the words you must speak ... I give you authority over nations and kingdoms, to uproot and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant ... " - *Jeremiah 1:1-7*

From its early motto, "Love thy neighbor. Serve the people.", the SCMP's ecumenical tradition has developed alongside the Filipino people's aspiration for a more humane, just and compassionate society with the current motto, "Follow Christ. Serve the people."

For one, I am also nurtured from that SCMP tradition. I started out as an "organizer" in the University of the Philippines-SCMP chapter in 2000 and became part of the SCMP national staff, in the Organising Department, part of the national organising and movement-building line of work. And a year later, I became a part of a team to look after the movement's campaign-publicity work which involved tri-media intervention, research and developing information sheets and publicity materials for SCMP's priority people's struggles and mass campaigns. Also, as SCMP strengthens its ties with ecumenical groups and organizations, I was commissioned to help in the building and strengthening of the Ecumenical Asia-Pacific Students and Youth Network - Philippines (EASY Net - Philippines) as a coordinator.

Going far ashore from the country for quite a long time is not quite usual for Philippine SCMer. As far as I can recall, SCMP had its latest long solidarity program three years ago with SCM Korea (or KSCF) and migrant workers in Korea. Thus, embarking on a deeper solidarity with ASCM is something that is very fitting, especially at this crucial time of un-peace and hostility not just in our region but in the entire world. Obviously, there are

things that both movements want to address and do together, and I believe one is the revitalization of both movements to be more relevant as instruments for social justice and peace.

I will be based in Melbourne, working primarily with SCMerS in Victoria and shall journey with them along the branches' active movement revival campaign. I would also link up with other groups (e.g. Australia based and Philippines based Filipino groups) who are making a concerted People-to-People solidarity effort for peace and resistance to US intervention and aggression - and also to Australia's role as the USA's junior partner in the Asia Pacific.

I open myself to learn the long and glorious history of ASCM, which has weathered more than a century, but which still has that fervent spirit of the movement as an inclusive community. I therefore look forward to a fruitful stay and pilgrimage with ASCMerS, as we share our movement's strengths with each other and learn to respect each other's weaknesses as we struggle to overcome them.

Mabuhay ang ASCM at SCMP! (Long live ASCM and SCMP!)

## **A Short History of SCMP**

**Leni Valeriano**

The ASCM's conference theme "Loving our Neighbours" is very much akin to SCMP's admonishing lines to its members, fellow students and the youth for the past few decades now. We are also proud that the line "Love Thy Neighbor. Serve the People" has become SCMP's rallying point in its life as a movement, and the guiding tenet in its infantile years to discover the signs of times and to find the movement's role in the integral imperative of our times - spiritual and social salvation.

Coming together as a national ecumenical organization since December 27th 1960, SCMP has been challenged to live out the promise of a liberating faith with its communion with the actual aspirations of the Filipinos through constant immersion in the people's realities. SCMP believes that it shall only find its relevance as a Christian movement if it takes the side of the marginalized and oppressed peoples just as Christ did.

We believe that we too are called to bear witness to the suffering of the downtrodden and render the mute and voiceless with voice just as Christ did: "I am sent to give sight to the blind, freedom to all captives."

And always questions arise like, "Who are these blind people and captives in our time? Are we ready to follow Christ and take up the cross to give sight and freedom?"

Thus, the place where SCMP is now - we are indebted to the forerunners and torchbearers in the movement who truly lived out the faith-imperative in "Loving thy Neighbor. Serving the People."

### **Current Concerns**

SCMP had its 19th Biennial National Assembly last May 6-11 in Mindanao and there planned and reflected on the most pressing concerns of the movement, elected the movement's new set of officers for 2003-2005 (both the National Executive Committee and National Council) and affirmed its commitment as a national democratic ecumenical mass organization of students.

The most glaring realization from the assembly is the burgeoning attack and repression by the state and school administrations of the people's rights to express resistance on the most unjust policies of schools and the government. We condemn the rising cases of harassment, threat and even murder of human rights activists who expose and oppose the heightened militarization in the countryside and onslaught of military operations on civilian and unarmed persons.

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SCMP is never exempt from the growing state repression. In May last year, our Senior Friend Edilberto 'Choy' Napoles was slain in the Mindoro Islands by military operatives for his leading opposition to the militarisation of the island and for his involvement in the anti-mining campaign against multinational mining companies (including Australian companies) that displaced the Mangyan indigenous peoples. At this point, justice has not yet been served.

Most alarming also is the suppression of SCMP chapters in the regions of Cagayan Valley, Eastern Visayas and the CARAGA region in Mindanao where SCMP members and leaders are rounded up, 'invited' into military camps for interrogation and sometimes tagged as a member / recruiter of the 'New Peoples Army' (CPP armed component) to de-legitimize our just and legitimate democratic calls and demands.

Now, with the Macapagal-Arroyo administration being a staunch ally and baton-leader of the US 'War on Terror' in South-East Asia, we face the most alarming possibility of open State terror - especially since the government is pushing for an Anti-Terrorism Bill (ATB) patterned after US Patriot Act.

We are blocking the ATB since it contains many provisions that directly trample on the civil liberties of the people, including prolonged detention (15 days!) of 'suspected' persons. We say, 'Never Again to Another Martial Rule!' and 'Never to the Comeback of Tyranny to Our Land!'; having memory of the millions of people who suffered it, and thousands more who gave their own blood and life to defend our freedom. Some of them were our own SCMP martyrs.

Another menace of this ATB is that it would render ever our democratic right to defend our right to education an 'act of terrorism', due to the ATB's ambiguous definition of what really constitutes 'terrorism'. Thus our collective clamour and assemblies for higher state subsidy to education, moratorium on tuition increase and end to all repressive regulations inside campus could be construed as acts 'threatening state stability'. We resist the ATB's vague and ambiguous definition of terrorism for it is always open to misuse and abuse.

SCMP also campaigns to end the government's 'All Out War' in Mindanao, which has already caused an exodus around 300,000 people to cramped and unhygienic evacuation centres without proper food rations. An adjunct of this campaign is the campaign for the resumption of peace talks between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP), the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and the GRP-National Democratic Front (NDF) to address the roots of the armed struggles and civil war.

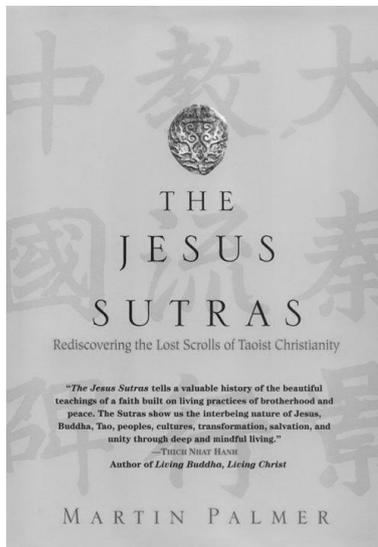
Our cry for peace is a cry for genuine and lasting peace that is anchored on justice. And as SCMP journeys on with the Filipino people on this arduous path to peace, we hope that ASCM is with us to light up the dark ways.

Long Live ASCM-SCMP Solidarity! Long Live our Struggling People!

# East Meets West: Christianity with a Tang

Martin Palmer, *The Jesus Sutras: Rediscovering the Lost Scrolls of Taoist Christianity*, Piatkus, 2001

Anthony Dunicliff-Hagan (ACT)



“My own discovery of this Eastern form of Christianity came in 1972, when I spent a year ... in Hong Kong. I was eighteen years old and my parents and I had agreed that for a year about eight thousand miles between us would be a good thing.” And so Martin Palmer begins the story of his fascination with Christianity as it was practised in China from the seventh century until the ninth. It is a form of Christianity influenced by the religions around it – notably Taoism and Buddhism – and which took great efforts to express itself to the concerns and the culture of the Chinese people.

The “Jesus Sutras” of the title are a number of texts, in Chinese, intended both for instruction and for liturgical use. Some sutras were retrieved as manuscripts from various sites in and near China, and the remainder were inscriptions on stone. As well as presenting new translations of the texts and commentary on them, Palmer recounts the history of the church, and the story of his own adventures in “discovering” the site of a Christian monastery at Da Qin in central China. These two stories make the book approachable for the non-specialist reader, whereas a simple presentation of the translated texts could never have the same appeal. Is this a marketing ploy or does Palmer genuinely want to get some knowledge of the Chinese church and its writings out into the wider world? Judging by the enthusiasm of his narrative, I think he’s genuine.

The official starting date for the Chinese church is 635, when a party of monks and missionaries arrived in Xian, capital of China under the Tang Dynasty. They had travelled along the Silk Road, probably from Persia. With imperial patronage, they established a monastery and soon had a number of converts. Palmer writes of the development of their writings in Chinese; from translations of the scriptures and Syriac texts, to new texts addressing Chinese culture and concerns. Palmer claims that many of the later sutras are well-written texts of substantial literary merit, and draws on the opinions of native Chinese speakers to support this. (Perhaps the Chinese got some better texts than we have, given the reputedly poor Greek in which the gospels are written!)

The church fell from imperial favour in 845, after an anti-Buddhist push resulted in a general attack on all religious monasticism. Palmer draws parallels with the dissolution of the monasteries in England during the reign of Henry VIII.

So what did this church look like? Apparently, unlike Buddhist monasteries, Christian monasteries employed no slaves. He claims that there was equality between men and women, and quotes one sutra's version of the women at the resurrection:

*"The women went to tell all his other students what they had witnessed. As the first woman caused the lies of humanity, so it was women who first told the truth about what had happened, to show all that the Messiah forgave women and wished them to be treated properly in future, for he appeared and confirmed all they had said."* (Sutra of the Teachings of the World-Honoured One, Third Part, 5: 31-32)

Despite its condescending tone to the modern reader, Palmer interprets this in its Chinese context to support a renewed equality. Indeed such an interpretation is entirely consistent with the concepts of the later "Sutra of Returning to Your Original Nature".

Chinese Christianity, never having heard Augustine of Hippo's number one hit "Original Sin", saw humans as fundamentally good, but led astray by the pressures of life. Salvation was thus a matter of retrieving the "original nature". At its centre, the sutra says that the key concepts of this are "the Four Essential Laws of the Dharma": "no wanting, no doing, no piousness, no truth". Here are some selections from Chapter Five, along with some parallels from Matthew's gospel. (Translations are from the New Jerusalem Bible.)

*"...no wanting. If your heart is obsessed with something ... it manifests in all kinds of distorted ways... All the body's openings will become clouded, losing their energy and brightness." (cf Matthew 16:26, "What, then, will anyone gain by winning the whole world and forfeiting his life? Or what can anyone offer in exchange for his life?")*

*"...no doing. Don't put on a mask and pretend to be what you're not. ...don't run after fantasies and illusions! ... That which appears on the outside is not the truth." (cf Matthew 23:27 "You [scribes and Pharisees] are like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption.")*

*"... no piousness. And what that means is not wanting to have your good deeds broadcast to the nation. Do what's right to bring people to the truth, but not for your own reputation's sake..." (cf Matthew 6:1 "Be careful not to parade your uprightness in public to attract attention; otherwise you will lose all reward from your Father in heaven.")*

*"...no truth. Don't try to control everything, don't take sides in arguments about right and wrong. It's like a clear mirror which reflects everything ... without judgement. And you – you should do likewise." (cf Matthew 7:1 "Do not judge, and you will not be judged.")*

In some ways the style is quite Chinese, such as the numbering of the laws as the "Four Essential Laws". Words such as dharma (teaching) have distinctly Buddhist associations. However principles from the gospels stand out. The style of Palmer's translation is quite informal and contemporary and so one could easily imagine the original being used to instruct the faithful in eighth century China.

Palmer handles each sutra with some introductory commentary, and then gives a full translation. Not being particularly familiar with Buddhist and Taoist imagery, I would have preferred much of this commentary to be included as footnotes, on the same page as the text, which would have made reading just that bit easier.



Guanyin

Just as Christianity borrowed from other religions present in China, Palmer devotes some space to the way in which all religions in the East borrowed from each other. For instance, the manner in which Buddhist iconography depicts the Buddha is influenced by ancient Greek depictions of

Apollo. The male Buddhist deity Avalokitesvara became, in China, the female Guanyin. He attributes this divine sex-change operation to the influence of Christian depictions of Mary, the mother of Jesus. As Guanyin is often depicted holding a child, the influence of Marian iconography is obvious.

All up, I think there are two important messages in this book. Firstly, there is the breadth of Christianity: it has taken diverse forms in different cultures, and it is nonsensical now to classify any one brand as normative. Secondly is the impact which many of the major religions have had on each other. This is not the simplistic statement that “all the world’s religions are basically the same”, but a recognition of the value of dialogue. Dialogue has spread good ideas in the past, and with a bit of luck can do so in future.

## **Christian-Muslim Dialogue**

**James Macdonald (ACU Banyo, Qld)**

*Article submitted to the Catholic Leader, in press*

While the disaster of the World Trade Centre has led to an escalation of tension between the USA and her allies, and the predominantly Muslim countries of the Middle East, it has paradoxically provided new energy and motivation to Christian-Muslim dialogue within Australia. This point was made by Dr. Nasir Butrous, head of the School of Business and Informatics at ACU Banyo (Brisbane), and chairman of the Archdiocese inter-religious commission working on Muslim dialogue. Formerly living in Bagdad, Dr. Butrous has many years experience working within a Muslim culture, and was able to share his insights during a lunchtime meeting convened by the Student Christian Movement at ACU Banyo, in Brisbane, on 11 September 2003.

The relationship between Christians and Muslims remains a topic of great interest. This was demonstrated by the variety of questions posed to Dr. Butrous. It was of particular interest to hear what a stereotypical Muslim view of Christianity might be. It is clear that Muslim understanding of Christianity is not helped when it is perceived that all Westerners are Christian and their conduct therefore reflects the Christian faith. Unfortunately, similar judgements are made about Islam by Christians, based on the behaviour of certain high profile individuals. Christians could also gain from reflection on the devotional life of Muslims, where five-times-daily formal prayer is common among ordinary Muslims and not the preserve of clergy and the religious.

Dialogue requires trust and can only occur when the motivation is the deepening of mutual understanding and not attempted conversion. Christians and Muslims share a rich common heritage with many points of contact. Inter-religious dialogue has the potential to deepen the understanding of one’s own faith as well as that of the other. There were so many questions that our meeting went overtime, and we plan to hold another meeting next semester. SCM, and Campus Ministry at ACU Banyo, are very grateful that Dr. Butrous was able to share his time with us.

# Missing the point: The Homosexual Dilemma

Daniel Robinson (ACT)

Like the Australian Democrats, the Christian church is an organisation that should by now dread any sort of media attention. Despite the wide-ranging work of both, it seems that only their squabbles and spats are truly newsworthy these days and the church's often quaint-seeming quarrels are particularly entertaining to the everyday masses. Right now the Uniting Church is bubbling furiously over a national-level decision to allow for the ordination of practicing homosexuals (not that there was anything preventing them in the first place) and Rev. Fred Nile has decided to leave the denomination of which he has been a somewhat incongruous leader for many years.

How is it that an issue which has borne unprecedented changes in social attitudes in the space of only a few generations can be such a sticking point for an institution that apparently prides itself on openness and compassion? How has something that has practically no effect on the average person become as polarized an issue inside the church as the abortion debate is in wider society?

What it all comes down to for both issues is that both sides have no idea where the battle originated and why they are having it. Abortion advocates are not sadistic vacuum- and scalpel-wielding maniacs who perform partial-birth abortions for recreation, nor are their opponents misogynists who chain their wives to the bed and refer to women as their 'baby machines'. In the same way, those who seek to restrict the participation of practicing homosexuals in church life are not homophobic rednecks; nor are their opponents weak and worldly sell-outs trying to please everyone.

The thing about the debate concerning the ordination of homosexuals is that it really has nothing to do with sexuality at all, and everything to do with the scriptural basics of Christian faith.

How do you approach the Bible? It's not thought about and talked about as often as you'd think. But ask around any church, of any denomination, and you'll find a pretty wide range of answers among both clergy and laity.

Some people are strict literalists. They believe that every word of the Bible is the inspired and infallible, authoritative Word of God. There are certain appealing aspects of this approach, although their usefulness is usually overstated. Some perceive this approach as ensuring consistency and certainty in doctrine, although it doesn't take much examination to realise that varying ideas and interpretations have rendered a gargantuan spectrum of differing opinions on just what the Bible says, even among adherents to biblical infallibility.

Most advocates of this approach base their belief on a combination of things – bible passages that could be said to imply it directly,<sup>1</sup> Jewish deference to scripture which appears to have been shared by Jesus,<sup>2</sup> and the 'movement of the spirit'. The first of these considerations is obviously circular

and the third, in my opinion, quite ambiguous; however the second is a critical point which needs to be addressed by those who do not hold to infallibility. It cannot be denied that there is evidence suggesting that the proper Christian attitude is to treat the Bible as divine and infallible, however it is still clear that there is reasonable room for rejection of this approach – particularly as the burden of proof lies squarely on those who claim infallibility. I don't, after all, assume that my History textbook is the Word of God until shown otherwise – no matter how accurate it is.

And all this is not to say that literalists are unyielding. The Bible leaves a lot of room for interpretation and explanation and even the most ardent literalists will usually admit the need for pragmatism and consideration of issues such as the cultural context within which the books were written and the author's intended purpose. Most Christians would admit to the use of metaphor and non-literal imagery and allegory at least in the book of Revelation; others are open to the idea that it has been used in some of the older and less historically grounded tales such as Genesis and Job.

Then, of course, there are those (probably more among the larger and older denominations than the newer and more evangelical ones) who simply don't hold the Bible to be literal and infallible at all. Some still believe that it's divinely inspired but nonetheless a product of fallible humans; others believe that it's nothing more than our best historical source of information about the man they've chosen to follow and thus subject it to the same conditional acceptance as they would any other historical text. For spiritual guidance, these people are more likely to look to the direct 'working of the Spirit' and to the experience of life in general, accepting Biblical values because they align with life experience and Biblical facts because they prove historically reliable.

When a contentious issue arises in the church, the divergence of opinion can generally arise simply from different pragmatic approaches being taken by people with similar basic beliefs about the Bible. A literalist can just as reasonably believe that Paul only took issue with the specific behaviour of the uneducated but often outspoken women in the early church as that he intended to impart a universal order that women should not teach in church.<sup>3</sup> Thus, many evangelical churches whose congregations are predominately quite literalist can happily hire female pastors while many supposedly more liberal denominations duke it out over the issue.

With homosexuals, it's unfortunately a little more black-and-white. If you believe that the Bible is literal and infallible, you really have very little room to move on the issue. Although some cultural and linguistic analysis allows us to explain 1 Corinthians 6:9 as being condemnatory of Greek man-child relationships for their exploitative nature rather than their same-sex nature, numerous other passages and a little historical analysis make it clear that homosexual relationships were simply



Sydney members of the Catholic 'Rainbow Sash' movement

not acceptable in Jewish and early Christian culture, and that the Bible affirms this approach.<sup>4</sup>

Conversely, those who don't accept arguments for infallibility have little reason for condemning homosexuality. It's not inherently harmful, it aligns with the bleedingly obvious fact of life that a whole heap of people do fall in love with those of their own sex even in the face of condemnation, violence, and discrimination, and the attitude espoused throughout the Bible is easily attributable to a cultural taboo which has been happily overcome.

Before the issue of gay ordination, gay marriage, and other associated homosexual questions can ever be properly addressed there needs to be a systematic acknowledgment of the far more fundamental issue that divides the church with regard to it. Top-level decisions are useless unless their reasoning is understood and accepted by the laity, as the Catholic experience has on occasions shown. It is time for churches to drop the façade of unity and address this major inconsistency within themselves. Not just in papers and speeches but in a way that involves the congregation in direct dialogue, to lead them to acknowledge the unspoken but diverse assumptions that guide their opinions on biblical issues. To lead them to consider the radically alternative formulations of Christianity within their own seemingly harmonious churches. And, most importantly, to identify issues like homosexual ordination as nothing more than the spawn of a more fundamental and distinct disagreement, rather than a self-standing dispute.

There are obvious examples of this very discussion in many churches, but not nearly enough. It is a fundamental issue for every Christian church, whatever its denomination, no matter how traditional or progressive. No doubt it's a discussion apt to involve much passion and much misunderstanding. No doubt it would comprise a much bigger shit-fight than the ordination of homosexuals. But in the end it can lead Christians to understand the unavoidable diversity of Christianity even within their own faith communities, no matter how insular those communities are, and bring to light the unavoidable necessity of accommodating radically different ideas in sometimes uncomfortably close communion with their own.

### Footnotes

For more resources on homosexuality and the church, please visit:  
[http://clubs.anu.edu.au/clubs/Student\\_Christian\\_Movement/resources/homosexuality.html](http://clubs.anu.edu.au/clubs/Student_Christian_Movement/resources/homosexuality.html)

<sup>1</sup> The most commonly cited is 2 Timothy 3:16 – “*All Scripture is God-breathed...*”; other examples can be found in 2 Peter 1:19-21 and 1 Thessalonians 2:13.

<sup>2</sup> John 10:35 – “*...the Scripture cannot be broken...*”; Matthew 5:17 – “*Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...*”; Matthew 15:6.

<sup>3</sup> The latter argument is generally supported by 1 Timothy 2:11, 1 Corinthians 14:34-5 and 1 Timothy 2:13-4. The former argument is generally supported by Galatians 3:28, 1 Corinthians 11:5 (noting also v13) and John 4.

<sup>4</sup> Some passages are Leviticus 18:22 and Leviticus 20:13 – “*If a man lies with a man as one lies with a woman, both of them have done what is detestable.*”; Romans 1:26-7 – “*...God gave them over to their shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural relations for unnatural ones. In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed indecent acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their perversion.*”

# Tackling Darwin

Richard Dawkins: *Unweaving the Rainbow*, Penguin, 1998  
Christiaan Mostert: *God and The Future*, T & T Clark, 2002

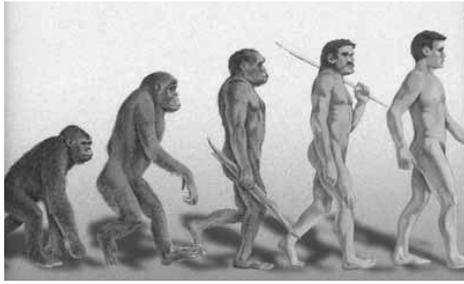
**Robert Tulip (ACT)**

Richard Dawkins is justly famous for the remarkably lucid and coherent evolutionary philosophy he has developed in his books *The Selfish Gene*, *The Blind Watchmaker* and *Climbing Mount Improbable*. Dawkins presents Darwin with power, logic and clarity, effectively rebutting the old fundamentalist idea of God as an interventionist designer. For Dawkins, evolution is the real context of thought, and the Darwinian logic of cumulative adaptation is entirely sufficient to explain all apparent miracles of evolution, from Cambrian phylla to bat's ears to eagle's eyes to human brains. He considers that any thinking which fails to engage with scientific understanding sets itself outside the boundaries of intelligent conversation.

*Unweaving the Rainbow* further develops these evolutionary themes, with different approaches to the rainbow providing a motif for the cultural battles faced by scientific understanding. For Dawkins, Sir Isaac Newton's use of the prism to explain the structure of light has a beauty which can only add to our subjective vision of the beauty of rainbows in nature. By contrast, John Keats' comment that Newton 'destroyed the poetry of the rainbow' by reducing it with 'cold philosophy' actually diminishes the scope of our imagination. Science is the foundation of creativity, so when poets like Keats deride knowledge out of some romantic nostalgia, they push our culture away from the engagement with reality that has to be the source of any improvement.

I believe that Christian theology should engage with ideas such as those of Richard Dawkins in order to retain credibility and contestability in the broader intellectual community. Dawkins is an avowed atheist, with good reason considering the lame ideas about God he has encountered, symbolised by the religious demand that the rainbow can only be appreciated as a whole rather than as the sum of its parts. Theology needs to unweave such 'rainbows' as its approach to the trinity, to creation and to the meaning of heaven and salvation. For example, a key error of many Christians is the belief that God is like a heavenly watchmaker, designing each creature to fit its place. Charles Darwin showed that this theory about God is incorrect, because the only mechanism of design is natural selection. Dawkins provides a brilliant modern explanation of why the theory of evolution is so compelling, and why it is simply wrong to reject Darwin. However, he does not properly engage with the theological conversation around these topics, appearing to say the refutation of incoherent ideas also serves to refute coherent theology.

Theology should have the capacity to engage with Dawkins' critique, developing its own coherence by systematic logic grounded in both an understanding of natural processes and of the meaning of divinity. To this end, the way of thinking I would like to explore sees God as the ultimate adaptive possibility towards which humanity must evolve if we are to fulfill our purpose in life. A way of putting this in terms of evolutionary biology is to



say God is 'the niche of the world'. This approach sees the infinite and eternal God as revealed in that structure of reality (our ecological niche) that will maximise human flourishing. By definition, if humanity lives according to the will of this God we will prosper and grow, but if we live contrary to the will of this God we will suffer, decline

and perhaps eventually become extinct. Connection with the divine reality promotes salvation, understood in entirely evolutionary Darwinian terms, while disconnection from this reality promotes destruction. There is one truth, with the big picture equated to God and revealed in science. The divine human niche is the global, even cosmic, ecological sum of factors that enable human life.

I like to think of this divine niche as our telos - the Greek word for purpose. On this basis, teleology becomes the study of how we can adapt to our real niche, rather than the pre-Darwinian teleology which claimed that God is somehow actively shaping us to fit nature. Operating as a whole, our niche is largely passive, consisting of natural structures that are set in place and mostly continue for eons. The activity is on the part of organisms, which must find their way of living in harmony with these natural structures if they are to prosper. Like a hermit crab that must find a suitable shell to protect it, humanity must find our ecological niche if we are to prosper. God has created us as complex free beings, with power to choose if we will live by faith or not.

Can this approach reconcile with Christianity? My own belief is that Jesus Christ provides the model of human evolution through his claim that we can connect to God through grace. Further, I believe that trinitarian theism is absolutely necessary in a cosmic sense if we are to develop a vision of salvation that builds on our scientific understanding. If the niche of human potential may properly be identified with the Christian God, we are called to live in the image of this gracious and glorious God, representing truth through language and establishing the Kingdom of God in the world by promoting the Christian teachings of meaning, purpose and love.

If God is revealed in the cosmic force of nature, the question arises how this force can be represented in human life. This is where the Christian trinitarian conception is so powerful. When Jesus said 'Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father in me' (John 14:11) he claimed to incarnate the cosmic spirit of truth. His ethic of love, courage and sacrifice led him to the cross and the resurrection, whatever that may really mean, and this ethic continues to reverberate in our world through the holy spirit. It is not necessary to postulate an anti-scientific personal God as Heavenly Father to see that God became personal in Jesus Christ.

In grappling with these ideas I have found the work of Christian Mostert immensely helpful, in his *God and the Future*, a study of the great German thinker Wolfhard Pannenberg. Mostert provides a masterly presentation of an entirely coherent and compelling vision of God, with potential to help Christian theology engage more broadly with the best of contemporary thought. Recognising that 'the reality, power and goodness of

God are radically debatable' (155), he supports Pannenberg's contention that the doctrine of the Trinity provides the framework for understanding creation and history. The Trinity is often misunderstood, so Mostert's complex orthodox 'unweaving' of this topic is refreshing - especially his focus on the relations between the Father, Son and Spirit, and his argument that for God to be a God for humanity, the Father needs the Son just as the Son needs the Father. Mostert quotes Pannenberg's statement that 'the resurrection of Jesus is just as constitutive for the divinity of the Father as for the Sonship of Jesus' (p196), a confronting idea which really helps to understand what it can mean to say the infinite God of the universe cares passionately about humanity. Although Mostert is critical of process theology, I would claim my own idea of God as revealed in the niche of the world finds support in his statement that 'if Jesus' message of the coming kingdom of God is taken seriously, our view of God must include God's power over all finite reality, which can only be awaited from the future. This is the key point for any theology which intends to do justice to eschatology' (p.151). The implication is that the power of God will provide the meeting point for theology and ecology within human history.

Biblical prophecy claims to anticipate the future rule of God and to explain what people must do to participate in that future. I would suggest we can get a better understanding of the parameters of that future by combining the scientific framework of evolution with the Biblical framework of trinitarian eschatology. This points to three areas where I would be interested to see Mostert expand; firstly, his understanding of divine purpose or telos, secondly, the role of the Son in the consummation of reality (a role Mostert assigns to the Spirit), and finally, his reading of the Book of Revelation, and whether any of that mysterious book can be rehabilitated as we seek to understand God and the future.

### **Author's Response**

As part of a response to the above review by Robert Tulip, the author of *God and the Future*, Christiaan Mostert wrote:

Your final three points, briefly alluded to, are interesting. Let me say briefly:

1. I understand the divine purpose in term of the benevolent, kindly, loving rule of God in and over all that is other than God - the entire cosmos - yet in such a way that human freedom is respected. It is a 'rule' in which human and other creaturely flourishing have a very high value. The acknowledgement of God must come freely, or else it is worth nothing.
2. There is certainly a role for the Son in the consummation of all things. In traditional language, the Son is associated with the judgement of all things and the handing of the kingdom back to the Father.
3. I think there is a great deal about the book of Revelation - and apocalyptic thought generally - that is compatible with a theology of history (all the way from beginning to end) that might challenge our narrow views of history today. We must learn, however, that the wood matters more than the individual trees.

# **A Cooks Tour of SCM National Conference, July 2003**

**Bronwyn Hatwell\* (WA)**

We begin our tour with breakfast, as one always should. I would strongly recommend the cooking of our three chefs – nothing gets you ready for the day like a hot breakfast. We experienced many forms of eggs, tomatoes, mushrooms, beans and toast which were all very gastronomically delightful. Much of an improvement on the food provided on the plane, though apparently some people think this is lovely too so we must recognise the diversity of tastes.

Then we follow with introductions. We had people from all walks of life and locations – the business elite of Sydney, the culturally experienced of Melbourne, the rouged people of Perth, some sun-soaked Brisbanites, the natural beauty of Tasmania and a hint of the international flavour from Cambodia.

Now for a conference entitled “Loving our neighbours as ourselves” it is vital to have some neighbourly input. This came in many, many forms over the course of the conference and I can but describe a trivial amount of what we gained over the days spent in listening, thinking and heated discussion. Following are the highlights for myself:

## **Fresh scripture – Feminist reading**

I must admit I have never been one to study the bible particularly closely, but when pressed to name 12 women I thought I was of a higher standard than someone who could only provide 6 and had to cheat to manage that. Very confronting from stage one. But I do believe there is hope for me yet – as I read my bible now I am putting more focus on the historical context of the document and considering the perspective and ideas of the writer as well as the characters.

## **Indonesia – James Haire**

I don't think I have as good an understanding of Australian issues as I do now of Indonesian. The personal experiences of James Haire were particularly touching, as he spoke of the horrors that he has seen and believes to have occurred in this beautiful place. Thoughts of holidays in Bali are now tinged with ideas of what Indonesian life is really like.

## **Massage**

This activity is much improved by the quality of the massage partner I must admit, and the touch of Dorothy Barraclough is a true joy. I myself have always enjoyed a good massage, rub or even hug for that matter. Now I also

consider these with a new light as I think of the communication that is occurring between the massager and the massagee.

### **The South-Pacific**

The mixed input and open discussion of issues in the Philippines, Cambodia, Solomon Islands, New Zealand and Tonga was very exciting. Geography was something I enjoyed at school, probably from the colouring-in more than what the little shapes on the maps meant though. The added depth experience of a culture brings to the discussion is amazing. Did you know that to sell stuff in Tonga you need free t-shirts??!!

Much frivolous fun was had as well as all this serious learning though, as we were young and on holiday in a foreign-ish place. The things I would recommend to see in Brisbane include: drinks in the right places, foreign films at the university, games in the drawing room, walks around the city, trips on the hover cat and though not much, seeing the smell from the XXXX brewery will make your eyes water.

One of the best parts of a July conference in Brisbane has to be the liturgy though. So uplifting and so calming all in one – our liturgical leaders must be congratulated on their insights. My thoughts were most evident to those attending my Confirmation this September as we sang “She sits like a bird, hovering on the waters...” I happily drift back to those warm afternoons drinking tea and discussing on the lawns of St Francis’s College.



\*This document is possibly partly fictional so the author takes no responsibility if people think I got it wrong.

***Eds:*** *Bronwyn and the others from Western Australia were so inspired by the conference in Brisbane that they are now very busy organising next year’s National Conference which will be held in sunny (and hopefully warm) Perth in July 2004. The WA SCMerS have been extolling the virtues of their state to everyone else for quite a while now, so expect a fantastic time!*

# Theology, Spirituality and George Eliot's Novel 'Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe'

Ruth Dunicliff-Hagan (ACT)

## Background – summary of Silas Marner:

*George Eliot's Silas Marner tells the story of a middle-aged man, a weaver, who lives on the edges of a somewhat remote English village of Raveloe. As the story unfolds we learn that his lack of interest in close relationships and community arise from his past experience with another community in which he had experienced betrayal and rejection.*

*As a resident in the town of Lantern Yard he had been an active member of a small evangelical 'chapel' community, where he had experienced close fellowship. All this was to change however when a bag of church money went missing and Silas was falsely accused of being the thief when circumstantial evidence links him with the crime. The horror of betrayal by his closest friends hits Silas when he realises that this circumstantial evidence was unquestionably 'planted' by his friend.*

*At first Silas says nothing, declaring that God will clear him. Yet a drawing of lots 'declares' him guilty and when he subsequently accuses his friend, the community does not appear to hear him. He returns to his home a broken man and turns to his work at the weaving loom as a refuge from the horror of a betrayal of not only a close friend, and a community, but also apparent betrayal by his God. He leaves the town, uprooting himself from all that he has known of life and settles near the stone pits at the edge of Raveloe.*

*In Raveloe the loom remains his refuge from the world, and his social interaction is limited to that of a weaver (and hence provider) of cloth for the villagers in exchange of gold and silver coins. Fifteen years pass but Silas remains the isolated weaver. Human greed and chance, however, once again intervene in Silas' life and when he returns to his cottage one night he discovers that his accumulated coins have been stolen.*

*Silas' grief at his loss knows no bounds. Further, his loss and suffering move the villagers to pity for him and they attempt to reach out to him -- and Silas, for once, does not reject these attempts. Yet even these kindly attempts can not help rouse Silas from his grief. It is the appearance of a golden-haired toddler at his fireplace, who creeps in through his door one night when Silas is briefly caught in an epileptic trance, that succeeds where the villagers could not. The little girl's mother is found dead nearby and it becomes clear to Silas that Providence has left this child in his care. The day-to-day business of caring for this child, and loving this child, gives Silas new purpose to his life.*

Critics such as Terence Cave have described the novel *Silas Marner* as having the 'stuff' of fairytales and indeed it is a simple story with something of a magical quality about it. Essentially *Silas Marner* is the tale of a disillusioned and socially isolated man who, through the chance entry of an orphaned baby girl into his life and his heart, rediscovers hope and the joy of living. It even concludes with a fairytale wedding! Yet this shortest of Eliot's novels has great depths to it and it is not shy about exploring the nature of deep suffering, as well as deep joy. From the first this text invites us not only into the world but also into the shoes of its central character, to feel and to understand Silas' deep suffering and despair. Wright and others understand the central theme of this novel to be the power of redemptive love. Yet redemption, as a theological term, means salvation and usually implies guilt. And Silas is a man who is more sinned against than sinning. I suggest that this is a story about personal transformation, about "resurrection", and the movement of active Love within the world.

When we are first introduced to Silas we encounter him as a man who is regarded by his neighbours with suspicion both on account of his 'mysterious trade', and his eccentric appearance and behaviour. He is an alien and an outsider and on the whole, unknown. Unknown too is his history and the events that drove him to Raveloe some fifteen years before. But we, the

readers, are soon drawn into the past world and community of Lantern Yard in which Silas Marner had been an active participant. Marner is here revealed as a good, kindly and naively trusting man whose belief in love, in humanity and in community are shattered following his betrayal by 'friend' William. His shattered belief in God is evident when he says, "there is no just God that governs the earth righteously, but a God of lies, that bears witness against the innocent." We cannot help but be moved by Silas' pain, and by his deep sense of injustice. He is rejected and abandoned by his community, as well as by his closest friend, and even by his fiancée. Recalling some of the last words of Christ on the cross in St Mark's gospel, "my God, my God, why have you abandoned me", we can even perceive Silas to be something of a Christ figure.

His decision to seek refuge in the loom and his weaving is not a temporary flight from "benumbing unbelief" – the loom becomes his very 'way of life' in Raveloe. His move to Raveloe cuts him off from the difficult past, but also from all he has known and all he has been – he loses all identity except that of 'weaver'. Silas' obsession with weaving, his preoccupation with the accumulation of gold and silver coins and his lack of interest in human interactions are all signs of his virtual abandonment of life. Further, his shunning of human relations seems to be an effort to cut himself off from all feeling. The stone cottage near Raveloe, and the loom it contains, becomes effectively Silas' tomb.

Strangely, it is the loss of his money that awakens him to some level of feeling once again – although of deeper remorse and despair. These feelings prompt him into action, to seeking help from some of his neighbours for the first time. The observance of his grief transforms the attitudes of the villagers and they attempt to include him to some extent in their community. Yet, this was not enough since "the kindness fell on him as sunshine falls in the wretched – he had not heart to taste it, and felt that it was very far off him." Silas' true transformation begins with the appearance of Eppie. That Eppie is a blessing is initially suggested to Silas by the golden colour of her hair because it resembles the colour of the coins he once possessed. Indeed, his poor sight leads him to first mistake the appearance of her golden hair in front of the fire for his lost gold – and he thinks that his gold has been returned to him. When Silas discovers the feel of soft curls rather than hard coins he is captivated. The child stirs in him "fibres that had never been moved in Raveloe – old quiverings of tenderness – old impression of awe at the presentiment of some Power presiding over his life." Silas senses that there is something 'magical' (or even sacred) about the replacement of his gold with this golden-haired child. And something within him links the cause to his former life of belief in Lantern Yard – links the appearance of the child with God.

The discovery that the child's mother is dead impresses upon Silas' mind that the child has been sent to him and placed in his care. It is partly the Silas Marner of long ago (of Lantern Yard) who had "loved his fellows with tender love and trusted in an unseen goodness", hitherto unknown to the Raveloe villagers, that is reawakened as Silas becomes a father. The act of caring and loving this child, and the joy of receiving affection and being loved in return, is what brings about the transformation and new life ('resurrection') in Silas. As readers we are invited to partake in the joy of Silas 'coming back to life'. As Christians or 'spiritual people' we could interpret this further as the raising of

a man from death through the 'chance' action of a loving God. Yet this Silas is not quite the old Silas, the Silas of Lantern Yard. Here is a Silas whose faith is both deeper and broader than the superstitious faith of the Lantern Yard community. We sense a deep joy in him that seemed to be missing from his life before. The risen Christ was not immediately recognised by his followers – he had changed. Would the Lantern Yard community have recognised this Silas Marner? In the process of celebrating the transformation of Silas I might also call to mind moments of transformation in my own life, or in the life of others close to me. The text can encourage me, through my own beliefs, to rejoice not only at the miracle of a man's transformation – but also to marvel at the events of the sacred (or Mystery) breaking through into human existence.

The story also celebrates all that the child represents – just as much as it celebrates the transformation that her coming brings about. It is not by chance that Silas names the child Eppie (from Hephzibah – meaning 'God's delight'). There is certainly a mystery, a sacredness about Eppie and I would contend that this particular character presents us with an opportunity to reflect on the nature of the Divine, of the incarnated God. Certainly Eppie seems to draw Silas to a greater awareness of the Divine within *this* world. Through her own gentle 'business' of discovering and delighting in the smallest wonders of life and creation, Eppie causes Silas to also marvel in awe and wonder at the sacredness of life. In some sense, Eppie draws Silas into a deeper relationship with the Mystery at the centre of life, a Mystery some of us call God. Joyce Rupp, in her personal reflections on the biblical feminine figure of Divine Wisdom (Sophia), recalls how the observance of a young child at play brought to her mind a description of Sophia from Proverbs (8:30-31): "I was at God's side . . . delighting God day after day . . . at play everywhere in God's sight". Rupp in fact describes Sophia as intimately bonded with God. Similarly, the evocative descriptions that Eliot gives us of Eppie at play can point us to certain aspects of the Divine which institutional Christianity has given limited emphasis.

The narrator in *Silas Marner* also points, in an explicit manner, to the way in which the 'mystery of love' can move within human lives in the following passage:

*In old days there were angels who came and took men by the hand and led them away from the city of destruction. We see no white-winged angels now. But yet men are led away from threatening destruction: a hand is put into theirs, which leads them forth gently towards a calm and bright land, so that they look no more backward; and the hand may be a little child's.*

The narrator is suggesting that the 'miracles of old', such as St Peter's deliverance from prison by an angel (Acts 12:6-11), are not simply something of the (pre-Enlightenment) past – that we may yet observe or even experience miracles if we are attentive to the Mystery (or God) revealed in 'ordinary form'. In this case it is the Divine at work in humanity, in the form of an ordinary human child. The story of *Silas Marner*, literary critic Wright suggests, demythologises the doctrine of the Incarnation, and reveals "the divine qualities of the human heart". This can challenge those of us who are Christian or 'spiritually-minded' to recognise the immanent (not just the transcendent, heaven-bound) God. That is, to recognise that – in the words of Richard Rohr - 'God comes to us disguised as our life'. Finally, the story of *Silas Marner* seems to emphasise that it is the belief in the sacred mystery of

life (which Silas senses to be, but does not directly name as, God) that gives Silas 'life', and not the rigid God of superstition of Lantern Yard.

A brief examination of the life of author George Eliot (Mary Ann Evans) suggests that Silas' faith/theological development may echo her own. She was originally brought up in the Anglican tradition but, as a teenager, was drawn into evangelical and Calvinist Christianity. As she grew older, however, she became more interested in the possibility of spiritual practice outside of the church. Although Eliot is often understood to have been an agnostic, she explored questions of faith and religion throughout her life. The unconventionality and scandal of her de facto relationship with George Lewes, a married man, put her outside of the institutional church anyway. Yet it is worth considering the fact that her unconventional views on Christianity, spirituality and the spiritual life would not be so different from the thinking of many 'liberal-minded' Christians, and others who are spiritually-minded. There would certainly be some consistencies between Eliot's spiritual beliefs and the contemporary Australian spirituality that David Tacey (author of *Re-imagining: A New Vision of Australian Spirituality*) and others have outlined. Perhaps some of the power of Silas Marner as a source of theological reflection is due to the ambiguous position, which might be described as being 'at the edges of belief', that its author seemed to occupy.

## **ANU Branch Report**

**Katie Weir**

This semester we had some interesting lunchtime discussions, including some on the theology of George Bush, and current developments within the churches. We had a particularly lively discussion on our email list prompted by the Uniting Church's struggle with the homosexuality issue, about the interpretation of scripture.

One of our new members, Griff, offered to lead a study of the book, *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, which ended up being one of our liveliest recent sessions. Coelho draws on Catholic tradition, but the story is essentially a parable about finding one's destiny, in a setting which is not specifically religious. The book claims that 'a person's only obligation is to realise their destiny' and this sparked discussion about what we saw as the goal or aim of our own lives. Some of us thought that pursuing one's own happiness and the happiness of others was a good philosophy to live by, as this involves loving one another. On the other hand, there was a feeling that happiness was an illusion and we will never be truly happy if we continually seek it. One person suggested that a truer alternative was to live by compassion, through relationships with others, which may not always involve happiness.

The main character in *The Alchemist* is led on his journey by learning to read omens and signs, which made us wonder how/whether we could recognise these in our own lives. We started from the sceptical position that

divine communication is as verifiable as communication with a block of cheese.

Our major task this term was to organise the local service for the World Day of Prayer for Students in August. We decided to depart from the usual traditional church service and instead hosted an agape meal shaped around an adapted WSCF liturgy. We had a lunch of international food with many of the local SCM Friends and prayed for peace in the various regions of the world.

We are currently planning a reflection day in the mid-semester break based on the themes of spring and renewal. This month we also bade farewell to one of our members, Anastasia Dalziell, who will be studying at Oxford University for the next year.

## **ACU Banyo (Qld) Report**

**James Macdonald**

Our second semester had a slow start, but we have had some good meetings with guest speakers.

The first meeting was led by Fr. Morgan Batt, ACU Banyo RC chaplain. He is a keen mountaineer, and presented a talk 'Getting high on God', which related the spirituality of mountains, including a PowerPoint presentation on various places he has been and an entertaining dialogue. There were a number of visitors who came for this meeting.

Other meetings have been: praying with the songs of Taizé, Rosie's youth mission, and Christian-Muslim relations. Attendance has been small (usually 4-5) but constant. The last meeting on Christians and Muslims gathered a crowd of 15. Together with campus ministry we have started midday prayer on Fridays, which is contemplative prayer using the songs and prayers of Taizé, with attendance at 4-5 per week.

The funds allocated to SCM Banyo have been gratefully put to use with photocopying and in getting gift vouchers for guest speakers. I think I have been able to build up some goodwill among our speakers despite our small numbers, and this will make it easier in years to come to arrange programs.

Towards the tail end of term now, many of the nursing and teaching students are away on 'prac', and the rest are concentrating on exams and assignments. We have had some good informal discussions over lunch in passing. I am planning one further meeting this year, hopefully in conjunction with Andrew Beiers, Campus Ministry, to look at next year. It will be important to get a good speaker early on, and have a well organised programme for the first half of semester, as that is the time when people are most open to joining in. Hopefully, now that the university is settled into the new campus, we should be able to get things going more easily next year. Within Brisbane those of us studying off-campus are looking at having more off-campus meetings during the year next year.

I will be returning to full time work next year, and will only be able to take a peripheral role in SCM activities. We at Banyo will have to do some thinking about how to proceed and what we will do. By the grace of God, however, I am quietly hopeful that good things will continue to emerge.

## **Melbourne University Branch Report**

**Kate Barnard**

Languid Sundays, roaring fires, decadent alcohol and exquisite poetry...

Just a sampling of the excellent SCM camp this semester (which was attended by 13 people! Albeit at different times), and indicative of the fun SCM has in general ;-)

This semester has been a busy one for MUSCM. A sexuality forum was organised early in the semester with the title 'Queering Christianity: Reconciling Spirituality and Sexuality'. It was recorded by the local Melbourne radio station Joy FM, and over 60 people attended - it was a great success!

Our program of weekly meetings continue with the theme for this semester being 'Spirituality'. Our three speakers from the sexuality forum (Avril Hannah-Jones, Jonathan Jones and Michael Kelly) each came to a lunchtime meeting to further discuss spirituality and sexuality. James Tonson from the Uniting Church's Decade to Overcome Violence task group challenged us to think about the different levels of violence in our lives and what role we play in violence. Sean Whiting led a discussion on 'A Theology of Tears' which included talking about sin - something it seems we don't talk about in SCM. Maureen Postma from the VCC talked about ecumenism and the difficulties of churches working together.

One of the most exciting things to happen this semester was the arrival of Leni Valeriano from SCMP. She will be working primarily with Victorian SCM, but also ASCM in general. After much bureaucratic red tape and visa difficulties, it was really fantastic to have her at the camp!

MUSCM has also been developing links with other groups on campus. We now have a very good relationship with both the Women's and Queer departments. In the spirit of ecumenism and focussing on common goals, we are in dialogue with Students For Christ (another Christian group on campus), and attended a benefit gig for refugees that they organised early in semester. We also have close links with Pride - the broad coalition of left wing groups that ran in this year's student union elections.

The success of our re-envisioned Victorian Area Council - now called Veges and Christ - continues, with one highlight being our last VSC meeting where several SCMerS went dressed as their favourite vegetable, and much laughter and good conversation ensued :-)

MUSCM is planning a gender conference for later in this year, possibly 8-11th December, and it's sure to be thoroughly excellent, so keep it in mind when making your plans for later in the year!

## WA Report

**Bronwyn Hatwell**

To make a happy and healthy SCM in WA just follow the recipe below ☺

### Ingredients

1 cup biblical input  
1 cup critical thinking  
1 cup spiritual thought  
1 T good community  
a sprinkle of prayer  
many chefs

### Method

The continued nourishment of the SCM in WA comes from the exciting ways our chefs find to bring together all the ingredients at their finger tips.

Shared Space is a very popular method of adding critical thinking and spiritual thought, as well as developing good community, among our chefs. Challenging topics such as 'how are we all saints and sinners' and 'exploring biblical paradoxes' can be confronting for traditional cooks – but are definitely great for spicing up your spiritual thought.

Blending biblical input and critical thinking through interesting seminar speakers, such as Revd. Ian MacPherson discussing the 'Theory and Practice of Walking on Water – an exploration of the miraculous', is very rewarding for chefs. Posters and emails help to include new chefs and always try to make them feel part of the good community. Prayer often helps here too.

Spiritual thought is used extensively by our chefs on Ecumenical Youth Network worship visits. It is essential to add some critical thinking if you are visiting so many too. Recently our chefs have tasted the delights of Lockridge Baptist, Wembley Downs Church of Christ, Northbridge Lutheran Church and Northbridge Salvation Army. It is also recommended to include some quiet time in the form of a retreat to allow these Ecumenical ingredients to simmer and bubble and this will be happening later.

Including events such as the World Student Day of Prayer allows all chefs to be part of the cooking process. When organised by student chefs and enjoyed by senior chefs the cooking process is very much inspired.

The future of the SCM-WA meal is looking delicious, with many activities to ensure all our chefs can be involved and prosper on their culinary journeys.

Bon appétit!