



# into the Melting Pot

*the question is more important than the answer*

Sunday 13 January 2019

## **Progressive Christianity and Saving Jesus From The Church Part 1**

We started this 2019 season watching a video of the inaugural Progressive Christianity Lecture at Pitt Street Uniting Church in Sydney Australia 2016 given by Rev Dr Robin Meyer based on his most recent book.

It can be found at <https://www.youtube/watch?v=cnfJcZkZ2OU&t=56s>, or by searching for 'Robin Meyers – Saving Jesus from the Church' in the YouTube app.

### **Timings (part 1)**

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| 00:00 | Introduction, including the recognition of Aboriginal land rights |
| 00:41 | Progressive Christianity – the idea of 'common dreams'            |
| 03:06 | definition of Progressive Christianity                            |
| 04:00 | Rev Dr Robin Meyers introduction                                  |
| 06:40 | Start of lecture  |
| 37:45 | A good place to break   |

### **Notes from the session**

*These were written up as an article in the March 2019 edition of the Christchurch magazine 'Wider Horizons'*

The Minister, Rev Dr Margaret Mahman, in her welcome gave a useful description of Progressive Christianity as characterised by

- a willingness to question tradition
- a celebration of human diversity
- a strong emphasis on social justice
- care for the poor and the oppressed
- seeking environmental justice for planet earth

It embraces multiple theological streams (including liberalism, post-modernism and liberation theology), and is an imaginative and creative re-expression of our inherited tradition in ways that resource us to live well, open to the sacred, and in loving one another. It brings together our heads, hearts and hands; it is theological, spiritual, justice-seeking and compassionate.

That was worth a discussion in itself.

In speaking generally about the state of the Church, with particular reference to his home in Oklahoma, USA, the first half of the lecture lambasted the timidity of clergy for killing the Church with their lack of courage and intellectual honesty - church was no longer relevant nor dangerous. By ignoring scholarly research into the Bible and biblical times, and by holding on to past traditions, they were not connecting with the lives of ordinary folk today.

He listed a number of things taught in seminaries that rarely seem to make it to the sermon:

- where the Bible came from, who wrote it and how it was put together
- all the 'gnostic' gospels, and how they became labelled as 'heretical'
- the Bible comes to us through multiple translations and edits
- the authors of the four canonical gospels 'borrowed' (or were given) names of the Apostles to give authority to their writings
- Jesus, Paul and John had different approaches to faith
- most of the doctrines that define Christianity today (divinity of Jesus, the Trinity, blood atonement, etc) were all inventions of later theologians and not Jesus
- the role of women in the church was marginalised and then removed as patriarchal control was taken by a succession of 'fathers'.

There never was a single 'early Christianity' – people argued over everything: the divinity of Jesus; what happens when we die; are non-Jews to be accepted; circumcision; eating meat offered to idols; the role of women; what happens to Jews who don't accept Jesus.

Orthodoxy and heresy (as we understand them today) did not exist then as the early followers of the 'Way' worked out their own understanding of the teaching of Jesus.

The movement was a response to the empire that tyrannised them. It used to be dangerous to be a Christian.

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*The article above was sent to our minister Rev Dr Roberta Topham, as I didn't want her to think that I was using the article, critical of ministers, to be critical of her. She wrote a response which h was also published in WH March 2019.*

Steve has kindly let me see in advance the article about the last Melting Pot as it reports on a talk that is very negative about ministers. These ministers (particularly in Oklahoma) seem to get the lion's share of the blame for killing off the Christian faith. Like many ministers, local / lay preachers, preachers and Christians, I am signed up to the work of making our faith as relevant as possible for all of us today and am open to suggestions and opportunities to do this in new and developing ways.

The Bible to me, as to many Christians, is sacred Scripture. That means I hear from the Bible the story of how people of faith have understood God and built a relationship with God. That in turn helps me to know God and follow the way of Jesus. People of faith do read the Bible in many different and varied ways. There is a lot of interesting scholarship about many aspects of the Bible, much of it debated and contested even between the scholars themselves. I am sure we will have caught something of this in the interesting TV programmes and books which are around today.

It strikes me that a key question in all of this is "does the way that we read the Bible and interpret it mean we are changed ever more into the likeness of Christ and show the fruit of the Spirit in our lives?" For some of us we will want to engage actively in textual and source criticism and the kind of matters that are reported from Robin Meyer's talk. For others we will want to do more simple reflecting on the Scriptures and internalising it in our hearts and minds. Probably, like most things, a bit of both is a good way forward. We can benefit most perhaps by looking, as always, to learn from each other as we work out the faith we have received.

If anyone wants to talk to me about anything I have written here, or you read in the 'into the Melting Pot' series, please do get in touch. Like Robin Meyer, I think it is really important to take the Bible seriously and engage with it in every way we can.

*Roberta*