



EXPLORING OPEN CHRISTIANITY

Presented by the Progressive Christian Network of Victoria Inc.

A series of DVDs for study groups and individual reflection exploring Christianity open to contemporary scholarship and new ways of understanding Christianity in our time

1. Exploring the future of religion with Sir Lloyd Geering

- Religion in a process of change
- A progressive awakening
- Some signs of hope

DISCUSSION GUIDE

THE DVD

After a brief introduction to the series and to Lloyd Geering, the DVD provides three interviews of 10 to 15 minutes each. The DVD could be used in one session of approximately an hour and a half, providing time for discussion after each of the three interviews. Alternatively it could be used over two or more sessions to provide increased discussion time. In either case, select the questions that are most appropriate for your group.

PREPARATION

The venue should be arranged so that everyone can see and hear the DVD interview and then easily move to discussion – sometimes in small groups of 3 or 4 people.

Allow time for introductions, getting to know names of participants, and to describe procedures and times.

Some of the questions are about personal experiences and life journeys. They are best discussed in groups of three, or at most four, people. Trying to discuss them in larger groups will exclude some people from an opportunity to reflect on and talk about what is important to them. In the following discussion guide, these questions for groups of three or four people are marked with the symbol †

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AFTER ANY INTERVIEW

There are three questions that can be used after each viewing of an interview. Each recognises and affirms the different points people are at in their faith journey.

- What stands out for you from that interview? Was there something the speaker said that is particularly important for you?
- Was there something in the interview that raises questions for you or that you would like clarified?
- What would you like to follow up?

These questions are likely to result in a number of different responses. You can say, “Let’s hear from a number of people and then discuss some of the ideas”. Invite a flow of brief responses from as many in the group as would like to comment before moving to discussion. Having someone list key words on a whiteboard to note the responses will give you a topic list for the following discussion.

Following are some additional specific questions that may focus discussion after each of the interviews.

DISCUSSION AFTER “RELIGION IN A PROCESS OF CHANGE”

LLOYD GEERING uses the term “axial age” (or time of pivotal change) to refer to periods of great change in human religion and philosophy. The first axial age from about 800 BC to 200 BC was a time when great religions and philosophy developed independently in India, China and the West and influenced how people understood life. It was a period when the great religions of the world came into being (Christianity and Islam grew from Judaism). The “second axial age” began with the Enlightenment and the growth of science from the 17th century. Geering describes this latter period of great change in which we are now living as posing big challenges that the churches have not dealt with adequately: “Many parts of traditional churches are living like islands of the past in a sea which has grown” and “The church began to defend itself from new thinking ... and this is where the rot set in”.

- Can you think of examples of the church defending itself from new thinking? Do you think this has affected attitudes of the general population to Christianity?

On the other hand, Lloyd Geering said that the modern secular world embodies values that came out of Christianity. Examples he gives are democracy, acknowledging women’s rights, rejecting slavery, responsibility for the poor expressed in social welfare systems and attitudes to racism. But this is “not now under the flag of Christianity”. “Christianity in its traditional form has passed its use by date”.

- For some people, Christianity in its traditional form retains high value; for others it has no relevance. How can we respond to this situation? What are some implications for us individually and for our churches?

DISCUSSION AFTER “A PROGRESSIVE AWAKENING”

Lloyd Geering is very positive about change: “We need to continue to change because the world around us is continuing to change”. “I like the word ‘progressive’ in ‘progressive Christianity’ ... because it is about accepting positive change.”

- ✚ In what ways have your understanding of Christianity changed during your life?
- ✚ Has your experience been that you have received encouragement to change in a positive way in your faith?

Geering described the work of the Jesus Seminar and its work to communicate the results of 200 years of changes in understanding the Bible, especially about what Jesus said and did. There is a lot of information about the Jesus Seminar on the internet. Start with:

www.westarinstitute.org

- Has the church done enough to help people become informed about recent scholarship about the Bible and about Jesus?
- Geering says that the sermon is more for inspiration than education. Is there a need more opportunities for teaching about contemporary understandings of Christianity?

DISCUSSION AFTER “SOME SIGNS OF HOPE”

Geering sees some signs of hope in

- discussions about religion that are taking place outside the church
 - terms such as ‘spirituality’ rather than ‘religion’
 - language that people in the secular world can understand
 - the green movement which is about our dependence on the natural world
 - the Bible as a rich treasury of the wisdom of the past rather than as an authority.
- What signs of hope do you see for Christianity?
 - Lloyd Geering said that he hopes that we can rise to the occasion to make Christian faith one of the instruments to help us respond to the challenges of our time. How can we contribute to this hope?

CONCLUSION

- After seeing this interview, what are some of the ways it has encouraged you to be open to new ways of understanding Christianity in our time?

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Website: <http://www.pcnvictoria.org.au>

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1. Exploring doubt and faith with Dr Val Webb
2. Exploring the future of religion with Sir Lloyd Geering
3. Exploring the future of a faith community with Peter Kennedy
4. Exploring Jesus and Paul with John Dominic Crossan
5. Exploring the future of the Bible with Dr Greg Jenks