

JG: Winter 2003

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During lunch with my thesis supervisor as war in Iraq seemed imminent, and with me about to attend a peace rally in Perth and his daughter one in Rome, he wondered aloud whether peace could simply be reduced to 'the absence of war'. Therein was born the theme for this issue of *Jubilee Grapevine* (and we got back to talking about the use of the subjunctive in non-literary Tuscan of the 15<sup>th</sup> century!).

Many thanks to all those who have made submissions to the three issues of JG upon which I have had the challenge and enjoyment of working. Expressions of interest in editing the magazine are still required. Students or Friends can volunteer to fill the position, and there is an honorarium associated with it. The official job description can be read at <http://www.ascm.org.au/staffing.htm>. I will be most willing to assist the new editor to take on the position. Feel free to contact me to find out more about what is involved. Please direct expressions of interest to Shawn Whelan, the ASCM National Co-ordinator, at [natcoord@ascm.org.au](mailto:natcoord@ascm.org.au).

Pace,

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## Should a Christian ever go to war?

### A discussion on non-violence

*Early this year at the joint day of two of Australia's major youth conferences [NCYC (the National Christian Youth Convention of the Uniting Church in Australia) and NAYG (the National Anglican Youth Gathering)], Bruce Roy, former senior army chaplain, Jon Inkipin, the Manager of the NCCA's Decade to Overcome Violence program, and Justin Whelan, a member of the Australian Student Christian Movement, took part in a forum titled 'Should a Christian ever go to war?'. A month after the event, Jon and Justin got together to discuss some of the important issues that came out of that forum for them.*

*This interview was first published in 'In Unity', the newsletter of the National Council of Churches in Australia, March 2003.*

**Ann-Maree:** Justin, in your opening remarks at the forum you talked about non-violence as the only moral solution to situations of human conflict. Can you tell us a bit more about this point of view?

**Justin:** Yes, in essence my argument was that as Christians we are called to model our behaviour on the radical teaching and actions of Jesus, who rejected the notion of Messianic military triumph that dominated the thinking of his day. Jesus taught and lived active non-violence, even suffering on the Cross, to demonstrate the reality that God 'suffers with', and through the Resurrection triumphs over death (the ultimate end of violence). Christians

ever since have struggled with Christ's call to non-violence in the face of a violent world. In the talk, I highlighted the 'just war tradition', which, among other things, declares a strong presumption against the use of force, which can only be overturned by extraordinary circumstances. The most important test for a 'just war' is that it be the 'last resort'. It seems to me that if we take this seriously, we must put all our strength towards non-violent responses to conflict and suffering, trying every single option, before we can hope to call a war 'just'. Simply threatening violence and calling that diplomacy does not cut it.

I also noted that far from being simply a naïve moral high horse, non-violent action has been shown to have amazing coercive power. It has brought down dictatorships all over the world, from Chile to the Philippines to all of Eastern Europe. Brutal regimes with appalling human rights records, the kind of regimes of whom one might say 'violence is the only language they understand', have collapsed under the weight of non-violent action. It is on the basis of its proven strategic power, as well as its recognition of the humanity of its opponents and submission to Christ's call for peace, that I suggested non-violence was the only moral solution to situations of human conflict.

**Ann-Maree:** Jon, how do you feel about this point of view? Do you think Christians should only ever act through non-violent means?

**Jon:** That would clearly be the ideal, but in practice even committed pacifists must agonise about this. Gandhi memorably once said, “to refuse to struggle against the evil of the world is to surrender your humanity; to struggle against evil with the weapons of the evildoer is to enter into your humanity; to struggle against the evil of the world with the weapons of God is to enter into your divinity.” It is that religious understanding which drew me into the Anglican Pacifist Fellowship in my youth and with which I have wrestled ever since. I suspect however that none of us are able in every situation to ‘enter into our divinity’, whether in peace-making or in any other area of life. Many of us struggle at times just ‘to enter into our humanity’ and I think that the deep humanity of those who unwillingly take military means as a last resort must also be honoured. The equation of pacifism with quietism is deeply misplaced, but neither should pacifists ever come to feel that they have a monopoly of Christian conscience. In its founding articles, my own Anglican tradition explicitly allows for the taking of arms where legitimate worldly authority commands. So, although I would agree with Justin that non-violent approaches to conflict are invariably disregarded or given up on at far too early a stage, I recognise that Christians may profoundly disagree on this question for genuinely Christian reasons. This has been a source of deep soul-searching within the ecumenical movement from the beginning.

**Ann-Maree:** One of those difficult moments you identified at the forum was the use of Australian soldiers in bringing peace to East Timor. That was a strange moment: the peace movement was all for their deployment.

**Jon:** Yes, that was one of those extreme situations in which the use, or threat, of violence did seem to many to

be a necessary ‘last resort’. However, one of the big questions which needs resolving internationally is when, and how, to respond to situations of such crying humanitarian need. Today there is an increasing reluctance to allow the principle of ‘national sovereignty’ to preclude international responses. Yet, as over Iraq, this can lead to justification of all kinds of actions, even the idea of ‘pre-emptive strikes’, which are a very different matter altogether. At the very least, as the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, has suggested, we need to develop a doctrine of “just intervention”, with effective international legal conventions and a variety of sanctions. Such a Christian approach would need however to hear the voices of those arguing for non-violent resolutions, as seen in the recently established Non-violent Peacekeepers and the courageous deliberate ‘human shields’ who went to Iraq. One of the casualties of violence, and accepting the ‘logic’ of violence, is the poverty of imagination it breeds. Our costly witness to Christ cannot remain content merely to follow the ingrained patterns of the world. All too often Christian ‘just war’ arguments simply baptise the ‘wisdom’ of the world.

**Ann-Maree:** Justin, what do you think of this idea of a “just intervention”?

**Justin:** I totally agree with Jon that we need to address questions of “just intervention”. Indeed, despite constant accusations by right-wing columnists, non-violent activists are often advocating intervention in other countries long before the governments of Western countries. The problem is that many people seem to equate “just intervention” with ‘military intervention’ and I don’t see this as a necessary logical conclusion. For example, in Serbia the NATO bombing campaign actually reinforced Milosevic’s power base and undermined the democracy

movement; the next year the USA government provided a small amount of money to provide some logistical support to the opposition and Milosevic was overthrown quite quickly. Despite these facts, we continue to think that 'violence is the only language they understand', in relation to the dictator of the moment.

**Ann-Maree:** So, where do we go from here? What are the key questions for Christians struggling with issues of peace and war, now and in the future?

**Jon:** Part of the problem with approaching violence is that we always tend to look at things in an either/or manner and leave things too late for many to choose otherwise. The question, in a limited military sense, "Should a Christian ever go to war?" is not the question we should really be asking. Instead, we should be demanding, "when will we properly go to war on poverty, injustice, ignorance and ecological destruction?" These are the true 'enemies' of our world, and the underlying 'battles' to be won. There will always be voices which argue for war, but how many seriously commit themselves to the paths of peace? Surely it is pre-emptive humanitarian strikes we really need, and coalitions of those who are willing to overcome the powers and principalities, and not just the renegades, of the world. It is right and proper to acknowledge those who have given their lives in war for what can be seen as just cause. Yet the Gospel always calls us to a fuller and more lasting struggle. For war is always a sign of failure and of sin. Ultimately, as the Decade to Overcome Violence affirms, our true vocation is to transcend

the 'logic' of violence and share Christ's costly peace with the world.

**Justin:** I agree wholeheartedly. Part of the problem we face as a peace movement is that our governments in the 'liberal democracies' keep stumbling from one violent crisis after another; indeed, often creating the seeds for a new crisis in the resolution of the latest. Ultimately, these problems come about because our governments gear their foreign policy towards short-term stability rather than the democratic and human rights ideals that underpin their own societies. So we find ourselves on the brink of war, sometimes struggling to articulate alternative strategies to the 'first strike'. Those strategies are problematic because they start a long time before the crisis begins - their aim is to help prevent the occurrence of such crises by not supporting brutal regimes for economic or 'strategic' gain. People committed to non-violence need to be prepared to bypass their own governments, if necessary, in making 'humanitarian strikes' through supporting opposition movements around the world working to cast off brutal dictatorships, going on 'humanitarian inspections' to places such as Iraq and Sudan, and committing themselves both personally and politically to building paths to peace and justice. As Christians, this is our witness and our hope: that through the grace of God, miracles of transformation can and do happen in the world. We know this happens. We have seen it happen in our own lifetimes. And yet we still struggle to believe.

Ann-Maree Williams  
NSW SCM

### Peace resource

Yule, Sandy (1988) *Making Peace, Making Sense*. WSCF Asia-Pacific Book 14, Hong Kong.

## The Shock and Awe Song

It's over now -  
the cops sent us home  
with our banners and our rooftop PA  
our bodies in the back,  
they sent home  
our four car peace convoy  
not with glorious arrests  
but traffic infringements  
and a yellow sticker

We're wrecked by media slogans  
and the apathy of cretins  
who hate those troublemakers,  
those hippies who'll pull out  
the ground beneath our very feet  
given half a chance

In Jesus' name the patriots're saluting the flag  
and fucking Howard's undoing  
anything good that ever happened to our country  
since nineteen-fifty

Beneath their homely faces the bullshit conservatives  
are full of fear  
fear of blacks and poors  
fear of rebels and revolters;  
it's crippling, contagious and  
they want us to catch it

Their state where might is right  
and the phallus on a tank  
helps you sleep at night

In my head I'm time travelling  
and I've got another chance  
and I say to the cop,

'Are there causes worth dying for?  
'Are there any worth disobeying for?  
'Coz you seem to think there's some  
'worth killing for.

'Are there laws unjust?  
'Are there times when  
'corpses of kids  
'are worth more than  
'public order?

'In short, I say Mr Officer  
'do you mean you'd  
'never break the law  
'and by this moral authority  
'which you possess

'I never should either?'

This time  
there is no stopping me  
such is the force of my oration:  
they all stand back  
tongues hanging out  
shocked and awed

'I'm sorry Mr Officer  
'you gotta understand  
'the dissent's in my bones  
'burnt in and branded  
'and red like blood  
'and though I hate to make a fuss  
'and though I'm scared when you get angry  
'I've been firmed like metal jelly  
'and I'm a mad bastard of a rebel  
'oh I tried, I tried to fit in  
'and I tried so hard but all I found  
'is that your ways are bad  
'and your means are dumb

'The steam's shooting out my viscerals  
'I wanna put a dent in the world  
'I wanna smash and crash  
'in the name of peace  
'I wanna level your city  
'and start again with some integrity  
'"Against hegemony" they call me  
'my God is a rebel,  
'and he don't like the way things go  
'oh he's a voice in the wilderness  
'a dissenter on the cross,  
'you see, if truth be told,  
'Jesus's been puking his guts out  
'at what's been done  
'by devils bearing his name

'And what I'm saying is,  
'oh what I'm saying is THIS:  
'if the Iraqis arrive tomorrow  
'with their flags and tanks  
'and with true democracy  
'jamming out your radio  
'in captured English  
'as part of Operation Persuasion  
'would you be ready to see the light?  
'If they came here to Perth  
'with planes of death  
'and bright bright bombs  
'seeking out the oil and  
'the mass destroying weapons  
'that only they  
'in their Allah given wisdom  
'are allowed to own,

'if they came and missed  
'and fucked up your suburb,  
'if they blew Willetton into a crater,  
'would you recognise justice  
'when it hit you in the face?  
'What I'm saying, oh what I'm screaming at you,  
'shoving down your channel sevenish throat is THIS:  
'are you ready,  
'are you ready to be liberated?  
'Right here right now on the terrace  
'with all your flashing lights your twenty cops  
'on us seven lefties!  
'Do you remember what the teacher told you  
'in year two?  
"Bullies are bad," she said,  
"no two ways about it!"  
'And have you ever seen a movie  
'where the goodies are the ones  
'with batons and guns  
'uniforms and flashing lights  
'outnumbering seven pathetic  
'baddies in beat up cars?

'Oh, don't you know what Hollywood says?  
"THE UNDERDOG IS ALWAYS RIGHT!"  
'But Hollywood is horsely shit  
'I'm with you there at least

'And all I'm really saying now  
'all I really want  
'is for you to have a heart  
'just don't fine me or jail me  
'coz I'm tired  
'and I ain't got money,  
'or none to speak of.'

And maybe then  
he'll be convinced and let us go  
this second time around,  
let us finish off our crusade  
and it's then, just then when  
he thinks he's got me beat  
that this corrupted oath  
I swear to myself

'Don't think I'm giving up  
'coz when I'm gone from this place  
'oh when you've sent me on my way  
'I'm going to rage and flail  
'for I'm given to hate  
'yeah, I'm red as it gets,  
'hate in the name,  
'oh the sullied name,  
'of love.'

Nathan Hobby  
24 March 2003

[www.geocities.com/savageparade](http://www.geocities.com/savageparade)

## Elvis legs on the path to inner peace

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My first yoga class. My calisthenics' teachers of years ago would have cracked up at the very notion. Okay, so I'm not particularly flexible. But this was a New Year's resolution. And it wasn't just to improve my level of fitness (although raising the latter above zero would have been useful). It was part of my bigger plan to find inner peace. I could find it in a seven-week yoga course, couldn't I? And at \$10 per one-and-a-half hour session it was going to be the bargain find of the century. Sure, I knew that inner peace was not a nice little entity that one could 'get' from somewhere. However, I thought that yoga may have some of the answers. It would at least get me out of the library and away from my thesis once a week.

My interest in taking up yoga was sparked during a WA SCM retreat held last year. Trudi Bennett, our then Development Worker, ran a couple of yoga sessions over the weekend. Not many of the retreat participants were interested in doing yoga. Perhaps that was because the sessions were conducted early in the morning before breakfast. Ordinarily, you wouldn't want to speak to me either until I've had an hour to read the paper and eat breakfast. Nonetheless, I was keen to

try yoga. I was attracted by the combination of movement and meditation. The positions we learnt weren't exactly easy but nor were they too physically taxing. Not too heavy. Not too light. I discovered that my taste for yoga was greater than that for cereal.

According to the blurb of *Recreate*, the promotional magazine of The University of Western Australia's Sport and Recreation Association, yoga was going to do wonders for me. It was "a way of stimulating vitality, developing fitness, enhancing good health and increasing the ability to relax". Just what I needed. It was also going to provide "the opportunity to bring about a deeper understanding of ourselves through the practice of postures and breathing techniques". That inner peace was within grasp. The yoga sessions were also to include "limbering, stretching and strengthening within the body". Would it matter that I thought limbering was stretching? The blurb was quick to reassure us that classes were "suitable for beginners and those with some experience". But should I have been concerned that we had to "inform the instructor of any injuries or medical conditions"?

So I was a little apprehensive about going to my first class. I was also almost late to it. Yes, well done, Narelle. That would facilitate the relaxation part of the session handsomely. The class was held in the university's boatshed on Matilda Bay. Its glass panels provided exquisite views of Perth's Swan River. Well, they would have been if the class wasn't held in the evening...Still, we could hear the waves below. Actually, during the initial relaxation segment of the lesson, I hadn't been particularly aware of the noises in and outside of the boatshed, at least not until the instructor said: "If you find yourself drawn to outside sounds and thoughts, return to your breathing"! Coupled with the fact that my heart was still pounding from having rushed to the class, I wouldn't have called it a good start!

The instructor learnt our names very quickly. Having done lots of relief teaching in primary schools, I was, at first, slightly in awe of this ability. "Narelle, feet wider apart". "Narelle, arms horizontal...no...pretend to be a plane, Narelle". Oh. This teacher was going to be a pain. A pain in the neck, a pain in the arms, a pain in the legs, a pain in the ankles, a pain in the wrists. On the bright side, I discovered new muscle groups. Clearly, Trudi had gone easy on us.

In fact, it became apparent that this was not the only thing about which she had deceived us. On the retreat, we had been warned that yoga works on one's digestive system. One was therefore not to be embarrassed by any loud output that one's body might make during a session. After all, the retreat cook had had a penchant for lentils. Given that there were 20 of us and only one open door, I decided to err on the side of caution before taking any such liberties

in my first class. Thank goodness I did so, as our instructor didn't issue any such invitation!

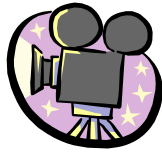
We were, however, invited to put our bodies into all sorts of exotic positions. Many of these were difficult. The blurb had said nothing about contortion. And just what exactly were that foam block and material strap for? I hoped that everyone else was busy trying to hold the positions so that they wouldn't see how much my body was shaking during my attempts at them. I accepted that I was unfit and inflexible. I knew it was going to take some work. That's why I was there. Yet at the rate I was going, I'd probably have had better luck picnicking in Yellowstone Park.

The instructor was want to move around the room assisting students. He happened to pass me at a particularly shaky moment. "Look at that – Elvis legs". I'd swear the pine floorboards had amplified his comment by several decibels. People laughed. Thank you. Thank you very much. Despite my embarrassment, it had served to relieve some tension in the room. Maybe I would get the hang of this. I relaxed considerably (and continued to shake).

\*\*\*

As I prepare this article for publication, I have finished the seven-week course. I think that I've come a fair way in my practice of yoga: I don't stay as sore for as long after a session; I now know how to use all the equipment; and I'm getting closer to being able to touch my toes without squatting. And that inner peace I hear you ask? Elvis and I have enrolled in the next course.

Narelle M<sup>c</sup>Auliffe  
WA SCM



## Film review:

### Mythology of *The Matrix*

What makes *The Matrix* so seductive and exciting? Not the philosophy, not even the action. The real heart of this movie is the way its amazing amalgam of Christian and Greek mythology speaks to us more deeply than we realise.

*The Matrix* and its recent sequel, *The Matrix Reloaded*, are set on a near-future Earth where machines have taken over and made a world of complete illusion. All human freedom has been eliminated except for the beleaguered community of Zion. Neo - the chosen one - must use his miraculous powers to save Zion from the threat of destruction by the Matrix.

The plot develops at three levels: action, philosophy, and spirituality. As an action movie, the fights and chases reach surreal heights of absurdity, but are at least made plausible by the device that anything is possible within the illusory world. At the level of philosophy, the film has been focused upon for the ideas it raises about freedom of choice and knowledge of reality.

My own view is that the real message of *The Matrix* is at the level of mythic spirituality. A key theme is how the Messianic remnant must overthrow the evil imperial system in order to institute the rule of truth and justice. The story of moral victory against the overwhelming power of a soulless machine speaks to a deep sense that our world system has something fundamentally wrong in its organisation and goals. Drawing on millennial visions of salvation, this spiritual theme deserves to be the central point of analysis of the movie,

in terms of how it resonates with mythic themes at the heart of Western thought.

Other major movies are also based on this theme, notably *Star Wars* and the *Lord of the Rings*. They have also struck a deep chord with the public through their treatment of this Messianic myth. We relate profoundly to the idea that only the pure faith of the chosen one can save us, whether it be Neo and his kung fu wizardry and Superman flight, Frodo Baggins and his perilous journey to Mount Doom in Mordor to break the spell of the magic ring of power, or Luke Skywalker and his miraculous reliance on 'The Force' to destroy the imperial death star.

The common salvation myth in these movies involves an apocalyptic showdown between the forces of good and evil. The origin of this story is the Book of Revelation, the final book of the Bible, the Apocalypse of Saint John. Generally regarded as too weird for normal interest, Revelation contains powerful images which are remarkably well-known for all their strangeness. For example, it tells of the millennial rule of the Lamb of God in the holy city of New Jerusalem, the battle of Armageddon, the fiery wrath meted by God on the faithless city of Babylon, the four horsemen of the apocalypse, and the mysterious prediction that the number of the beast would be 666. Much of the strangeness of Revelation derives from its resolutely unscientific aspects, such as its claim that the future can be predicted and involves Messianic salvation, a claim reflected in Morpheus' total faith in Neo. Revelation calls the saints to persevere in hope and love, in

recognition that the world around them is built on lies. Its central story is the prophecy of the domination of the whole world by the power of evil, and the eventual victory of the divine forces of justice, truth and light personified in the Messiah.

*Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars* and *The Matrix* are essentially newly-packaged versions of this core Christian myth. Watching *The Matrix Reloaded*, I was struck by how much it draws on Christian symbols. For example, Neo himself is a Christ figure, his lover Trinity brings in her name the Father, Son and Spirit, and their mission is to save Zion, itself named from the holy city of Revelation 14. When Neo finally meets the architect of the Matrix, we find a wealth of Biblical undertones. In telling Neo that hope and love are meaningless, the architect sounds rather like Pontius Pilate and his question to Jesus Christ about truth. The choice he presents to Neo between reason and love is like Satan offering Jesus all the power and wealth of the earth if he would deny God. The central Christian question of whether salvation comes from faith or works also finds a reflection in *The Matrix*, with the debate between leaders in Zion on whether to rely on faith - by relying on the chosen one, Neo - or on works - by ensuring all their resources are deployed according to military logic.

The Christian dimension of *The Matrix* presents a provocative parable of our society. Jesus Christ told us we cannot worship both God and Mammon, meaning that greed for wealth for its own sake prevents the spiritual openness we need in order to find God. It sometimes seems that our capitalist culture promotes a fantasy world of total selfishness rather like the Matrix, cutting people off from nature, from God and from each other, by teaching us to place total value on material consumption and prestige. Jesus taught that real relationships are the only basis for life, and that reliance

on false and superficial relationships causes us to wither and die. Neo and his team have the same motive for their attack on the Matrix as Saint Paul's critique of Rome, namely that it seeks to replace the truth with a lie.

The power and complexity of *The Matrix* really start to hum when we see how the movie goes beyond the Christian frame by drinking deeply from the ancient pagan wells of Greek mythology. For example, Neo's heroic quest takes him via a wise old woman, similar to the old grey women who helped the Greek demigod Perseus find the snake-headed gorgon Medusa. The wise woman guides Neo to two intriguingly named characters, Merovingius and Persephone, where we also find the hideous gorgon in the form of two Rasta-haired cool suits who then pursue the hero with ectoplasm and machine guns. And when Neo saves Trinity from certain death, it looks just like Perseus flying in on his winged sandals to save the beautiful princess Andromeda in the Greek myth.

As an aside, it is interesting to note that the Merovingian dynasty were the French sorcerer kings of the early Middle Ages. Secret Masonic legend says they were descended from Jesus Christ. Books such as *Bloodline of the Holy Grail* by Laurence Gardner tell how the Merovingian kings were renowned for their secret wisdom, while official Catholic history deliberately suppressed much of the story of Jesus. In a similar way, Merovingius in *The Matrix* hints at the sense that all is not as it appears. Perhaps his name is a mere gesture, considering his murderous hostility to Neo's mission, but Merovingius does at least play an essential role in the quest by introducing Persephone.

In Greco-Roman myth, Persephone is Pluto's bride, Queen of the Dead, and the source of new life and the seasons. Persephone's defiant role in *The Matrix* contains amazing depth of

symbolism - she leads the way to the keymaker in return for Neo kissing her with the passion he reserves for Trinity. Persephone makes her cold lover Merovingius look like the dark king Pluto. Her sad, beautiful passion and essential contribution to the defeat of the Matrix allude to the role of her namesake in overcoming the annual death of winter.

Carl Jung explained how the symbols of popular myth should be understood as archetypes - themes which resonate with deep meaning for our lives. This archetypal mythic

dimension is not just the re-packaging of old myths, but also involves the creation of new myths for a post-modern world. The story of *The Matrix* has power precisely through its integration of archetypes - the apocalypse, the heroic quest, the fear of machines, and the biggest archetype of all, the idea that we are saved not by our own deeds but by placing complete trust in God through Christ.

Robert Tulip  
ACT SCM Area Council Secretary

### The Trail

*This reflection was written by Matthew Lamont, who works as a Community Mental Health Worker for a non-government agency in Perth, in January of this year, following a client of his being taken into custody for stealing.*

Sadness. Melancholy. Anger. Waiting.  
I wait...  
I wait because 'I give a shit'.  
Even though part of me says...  
'Here we go again' and 'Why bother?'  
Throwing away life through drugs and stealing.  
Didn't take long to track you down.  
This trail's pretty worn that you been down.

In court. You appear. Guards.  
Innocent. Child-like. Quiet. Curious.  
Cold in body. Nervous.  
You see me. A glancing look.  
No sign of acknowledgement.  
The you're off for a week-long mental state check.

Back to waiting. Heavy. 'What if...?'  
Useless. 13 months of hard yakka.  
Maybe you're angry at the limits I've set.  
Maybe this is the turning-point.  
I wait and watch from the sidelines now.

I let go of my need for your life...  
To go a certain way.  
I think. Maybe life is not about creating 'successful outcomes'.  
But being present. Being touched by what I cannot touch.  
I wait. You wait.  
Sleep well brother.

## Daughters of Sarah: 'Women Doing Theology' in the Philippines Report

Take a moment to reflect on how patriarchy has affected your life. Female or male, young or old, wealthy or not, you're sure to have experienced it. Think about your schooling, your worship community, your domestic life, your workplace...patriarchal institutions and structures are still a reality today.

In February this year I attended a World Student Christian Movement programme entitled 'Feminist theology: A review of its impact on women in the Asia Pacific'. The conference was hosted by the Philippines SCM, and gathered together women from Sri Lanka, Indonesia, North and South Korea, Bangladesh, India, Hong Kong, New Zealand, Taiwan, Singapore, the Philippines, and Australia. Most of our time was spent at the 'Women's Ecology and Wholeness Centre' in Cavite (several hours out of Manila). This place is stunning - it is situated in the middle of an organic farm. All food prepared and served at the centre is grown on the farm. The centre is run by women, and provides educational sessions on women's issues and organic farming, as well as retreats.

The fact that we were given ten days together to share our stories, lives and experiences seems to me to be recognition that no matter where on the globe you live, women still live in a society where we are disadvantaged by virtue of our gender. This realisation was a challenge for me. People were quite open about their hurts and frustrations - I found the degree of honesty and trust surprising. I asked one of the other delegates why she felt comfortable sharing so much, and whether this was an acceptable thing to do in her society. "Of course," she replied. "It's by talking about our lives with other women, and naming the

problems, that we can empower ourselves to fight for change". I think I went to this conference with the idea that as a white, middle class Australian, my experience of sexism would be trivial in comparison to that of most of the women I would meet. However, consider for a moment the governing institution of Australia - can you imagine having a female Prime Minister? I certainly can't. Many of the countries represented at the programme have had several. When I try to think of a prominent female politician, the first person that springs to mind is Pauline Hanson. Enough said. I came away wondering if it's because Australians come from a wealthy, developed country, that we think we've got it so good that we're not willing to admit to the problems that are staring us in the face.

Feminist theology. You've probably got a sense of the feminist element by now, but where does the theology come into it? The conference I attended was part of a broader 'Women Doing Theology' programme. The emphasis was very much on the 'doing'. We were a group of women worshipping together, reading the Bible together, and discussing God, Jesus, Religion and Spirituality together. That is, creating a living, breathing theology.

I remember sitting in a circle on the grass one morning, listening to the silence of a hybridised Quaker-style worship. I am a Quaker, and after explaining the concept to several people, it was suggested that we give it a go. I was quite nervous - worrying that people would feel uncomfortable or think it was too strange an idea. Fifteen minutes went by, focusing on each other's presence and listening to the sound of chooks scratching around

nearby. Then someone spoke. And after them, another person. By the end of half-an-hour, nearly everyone had felt moved to share some form of worship with us.

We did several different Bible studies together - at one time we were asked to find, name, and describe characteristics of women from the Bible. One such example that came up was of the Syro-Phoenician woman (Matthew 15:21-28; Mark 7: 24-30). This is a passage I have often found problematic. It tells the story of a woman who wishes Jesus to heal her sick daughter. The woman is not a local, and Jesus refuses, saying that to do so would be like throwing the master's food to the dogs. The woman retorts that even the dogs eat the scraps from the master's table. Jesus relents, and the sick child is healed.

This was cited as an example of women being persistent, courageous and assertive. While I think it is useful and empowering to see women as active, strong characters in the Bible, nothing was said of Jesus' blatantly sexist and arrogant attitude. I would have liked to have spent more time examining how we relate to Jesus, given that he was a man operating within a patriarchal society and experiencing all the benefits of his gender. I was also slightly disturbed that no one seemed to bat an eyelid when sexist language was used. In a five minute break one afternoon, someone took the opportunity to start up a song. It was a song I remembered from beach mission camps:

“Father Abraham has many sons,  
Many sons has father Abraham,  
I am one of them, and so are you,  
So let's all praise the Lord”.

I was shocked that I hadn't ever realised I would never be a son of Abraham. I wondered whether anyone else felt uncomfortable singing this song.

We also studied a text from the Hebrew Scriptures: Exodus 1:8-22. This passage tells the story of Shiphrah and Puah, two Hebrew midwives living in Egypt. They are ordered by the King to kill any male Israeli babies at birth. Shiphrah and Puah fail to carry out this task, claiming that Hebrew women give birth so quickly that they cannot get to the births in time. This story was seen as an example of women acting in an overtly political way out of faith. We considered who the present day kings and midwives are, and which countries can be thought of as a present day Israel. We were encouraged to take on this action, and to use our strength and creativity to 'give birth' to change and movement.

It struck me that no matter where you come from, SCM is understood to have a strong social justice focus. In the Philippines, this is expressed in part through 'exposures' - a small group of SCMs visit an oppressed community, live with them for a few days and come to an understanding of its hardships. During the conference, I spent three days on exposure. My group focused on workers and unions, visiting factories and picket lines. We stayed the night at the Nestlé picket line. I was pleased to be given the chance to talk with striking workers and to learn about Nestlé's practices - in Australia, you often hear that we should boycott Nestlé products, but no one seems to know why. Nestlé workers have been on strike for nearly two years now. They are demanding sick pay and retirement pay (there is no social security in the Philippines) - the Supreme Court ordered the company to make these payments in 1991, but this order hasn't come to fruition. This picket line has been violently destroyed several times by armed forces paid by Nestlé. Workers live on the picket line, sharing what food they have. Some money is earned through driving motorbikes, but they rely heavily on the

support of the local community. I came across this incredible sense of courage, determination and community spirit time and again in the Philippines - it was very inspiring.

Despite general exhaustion, the trip from Cavite back to Manila (from where we would depart) was spent singing and causing general driving distractions. I

sat wondering how the last two weeks had changed me, and how I could bring my experiences back to Australia. A new song started. I grinned and joined in: "Mother Sarah, has many daughters...".

Kerensa M<sup>c</sup>Elroy  
VIC SCM

Image not available

Parliament House, Canberra: Image from a protest against the war in Iraq that was attended by some members of the ACT SCM.

## Giraffe 2004

I would like to share with the SCM community the project that I am currently working on, and invite anyone interested in participating to contact me. When I'm not at my 'real job' as a historian for the Heritage Council WA, I have set aside most of this year to putting together a Giraffe course – hokey name, but a great course. I am passionate about Giraffe and hope to share the experience with a community of about 30 people at a beautiful bushland campsite (with pool) in the Perth hills for all of January 2004. It's an adventure in exploring faith, developing leadership skills, and learning to live in community with other Christians – it is so, certainly, for me, as I plan, pray, and stress (quietly at this point, but there are still six months to go...and counting), and hopefully will be also for the participants, come January.

Giraffe is a four-week live-in ecumenical youth leadership and personal development course, run by the Lutheran Youth of WA (that's me in another incarnation), in conjunction with Uniting Youth, from 3-30 January 2004. The course has been run by the Lutheran Church in Australia for twenty years, to high acclaim.

The first Giraffe course was run in January of 1983, and called 'Giraffe' because the organisers felt they were 'sticking their necks out in faith'. Giraffe began as a ministry programme of the Lutheran Youth of Queensland, which aimed to train people 'who take Christian youth ministry and service seriously, and who want to reach young people with the Gospel of Jesus'.

Since 1983, 22 Giraffe courses have been held across Australia, attended by people from Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Malaysia and the USA.

From those early days, Giraffe has grown to be a highly respected programme of the Lutheran Church of Australia & New Zealand, and is currently offered twice a year. Although Giraffe courses generally draw on the expertise of a wide range of churches, and non-Lutheran participants have always been welcome, Giraffe 2004 in Perth will be the first time that the Lutheran Church has partnered with other denominations to create a deliberately ecumenical course. I am excited about this aspect of Giraffe 2004, and also a bit nervous. Despite having lived in the SCM-linked community house in Perth for a couple of years now, my own experience in leadership has been primarily within the 'safe' environment of the Lutheran church culture I grew up with. Anyone with tips or 'must knows' for organising ecumenical events, feel free to send me an email so I can learn from your experiences!

Giraffe has grown out of an evangelical church culture, and started out specifically training leaders for youth ministry. Over twenty years, the course has developed to focus more on challenging and inspiring participants in their individual lives, developing their relationships with themselves, each other, and God. With me in the leadership role, Giraffe 2004 is shaping up with something of an SCM 'flavour' (if there is such a thing!), with workshops on gendered spirituality, social justice with young people, and Christian ethics in a violent world all miraculously slipping into the programme. Participants live on-site for the full month, and the deliberate development of Christian community, with all the joys and challenges involved, is a key part of the Giraffe experience. Workshops will also include some introduction to Biblical studies, skills training for leadership, theoretical frameworks for youth ministry and exploration of

various Christian traditions. A number of practical ministry experiences will also be undertaken.

Giraffe 2004 costs \$1100, all-inclusive, and is open to anyone over 18, although those completing high school in 2003 who are not yet 18 are also invited to participate. Registration and information packages are available from me at (08) 9472 7857, 128 Westminster St, East Victoria Park WA 6101 or [giraffe2004@myfastmail.com](mailto:giraffe2004@myfastmail.com).

Applications close 31 October 2003. I also have really cool glossy colour postcards as handouts, so if anyone would like a bunch to pass on to people, give me a yell. Oh, and if you are a Perth person and would like to be involved in helping out with bits of the planning, I have plenty of jobs of assorted sizes needing volunteers, and would welcome your help with great rejoicing and possibly chocolate...

Clare Schulz  
WA SCM Friend

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## National Co-ordinator Semester One Report

Warmest winter greetings!

This semester has been a very busy one for me, with the result that I've not been able to keep in touch as much as I'd have liked, at least with folks outside Victoria (sound familiar? sorry!). Here's a brief update...

Plans for the national conference are coming along very well. I visited the Queenslanders in early May and they are doing a great job. As indicated by the title of the conference 'Loving our neighbour as ourselves', the programme promises a great balance of inward- and outward-focused sessions.

At the conference, we will be joined by Im Thano, the National Co-ordinator from the brand new Cambodian SCM. By sponsoring his airfare and exposing him to how the SCM works in Australia, we're putting the conference theme into practice in an important way. I can also vouch for the fact that Thano is a great guy, and we'll learn a lot from him too!

The General Committee meeting, following the conference, faces a very significant decision to reincorporate the

ASCM in a new, less onerous legal form. Along with the discussion of the proposed new Rules (constitution), I'm hoping that we'll have a good opportunity to share ideas and inspiration for planning national and local activities.

Our Philippines SCM intern's arrival has been held up by visa red tape, and it now looks unlikely that Leni will be here in time for the conference. However, we've had some very encouraging financial support from a local church in Melbourne, and a Directions Group made up of students and Friends will start planning for her arrival as soon as exams are over.

Based on the email lists and the personal contacts I've had this semester, I'm really encouraged by the community-building, activism and theological reflection that continues to go on in the name of SCM around Australia. Keep it up, everyone!

Shawn Whelan  
ASCM National Co-ordinator  
[natcoord@ascm.org.au](mailto:natcoord@ascm.org.au)

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## ACT SCM Semester One Report

This year started with a burst of activity for us. Amidst protesting at Parliament House against the (then impending) war in Iraq [see photo on page 15], lots of effort was put into our stall at Market Day during Orientation Week. We had yummy goodies to hand out to people and a table of 'candles for peace' for people to light. We had a good response on the day and, as a result, a group of new members who we got to know at our welcome dinner (very kindly funded by our Students' Association).

Our focus for much of the first term was the war in Iraq. Margaret Bearlin, a local peace activist and SCM Friend, led our O'Week forum on 'A just war?'. The resulting discussion was very interesting for many of us, and kept us going for a few weeks. Margaret's unending enthusiasm for non-violent resistance was inspiring.

We also had a very cool movie night, showing *Jesus of Montreal* in conjunction with the Chaplaincy. Lots of popcorn and theological discussion and a great opportunity to meet other people connected with the Chaplaincy, particularly members of the local Filipino community.

After concentrating largely on practical social justice issues, the ANU group decided to focus on questions of spirituality. With new members curious about Christian spirituality, we decided to spend our lunchtime meetings attempting to explore the relationship between reason and faith and the 'wisdom of the heart'. Our Development Worker, Ruth Hagan's current studies in spirituality and theology at the Australian Catholic University have been a very useful resource and starting-point for this exercise, and we're all taking

advantage of the philosophy studies of a few of our members.

One particularly fulfilling session was spent looking at one of Michael Luenig's prayers using *lectio divina*, a method often used for Bible study, where a passage is read over a few times without discussion, but with careful reflection, and then people share exactly what they get out of the passage. The difference in perspectives was fascinating. We also spent a session following up on discussion



which had been going on on the national email chat list about what it means to be a Christian. As on the email list, there were a surprisingly wide variety of opinions on this one.

As well as exploring the theme of spirituality in our regular meetings, we were again offered the chance by active SCM Friend, Peter Bailey, to have a local retreat at his beach house near Bateman's Bay. The weekend was a welcome opportunity for some of us to take a relaxing break and gently explore the ideas of faith and doubt, ably assisted by our resident theologian, Heather Thompson. A lead-in was watching *Shadowlands*, a film about CS Lewis, which left many of us sniffing in the end.

We are continuing our close links with the ANU Chaplaincy, both through Ruth's membership of the Chaplaincy team and the Chaplains' frequent participation in our discussions. We are hoping to continue on the themes of spirituality and theology for at least a while next term as all of those involved are finding it fulfilling.

Katie Weir  
ACT SCM

## Melbourne University SCM Semester One Report

Greetings from Melbourne Uni SCM!

After staying up until the wee hours of the morning the night before the start of O'Week, we finally had a brand new banner painted, and our propaganda ready to go. Home-made cordial, feminism flyers, queer Christianity flyers, SCM bookmarks, and peace and justice flyers were all distributed to as many people as we could give them, and with lots of interesting conversations, our O'Week campaign was a success. In our effort to make new people welcome, a games night was organised, and while it was only a small group, everyone still had a great time with much fun, laughter and enjoyment all round :).

A somewhat hastily organised camp happened early in semester, and six SCMs went out to 'Gembrook Retreat', a beautiful property about an hour-and-a-half out of Melbourne. We drank port, ate chocolate, read poetry, had deep theological discussions, did a Bible study, explored the property, had Quaker-style worship infused with Bible readings and prayers, roasted chestnuts on the open fire, and generally had a good time away from the city.

MU SCM, like many groups, has been deeply disturbed and angered by world events, particularly the US war on Iraq. The newly painted SCM banner was proudly held at peace rallies [see photo on facing page]. We chose to make peace our theme for this semester, and this was explored in many of our weekly meetings. We looked at violence in the Hebrew Scriptures, West Papua's struggle for freedom, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and had a discussion on love and fear, drawing on Michael Moore's film *Bowling for Columbine*. In an effort to counteract some of the racism that we saw as being encouraged by the war, we wrote a letter of support to the

Melbourne Uni Islamic Students' Society. We were also challenged by the moral dilemmas of the Uniting Church's Asylum Seeker Project, particularly, whether they should accept money from the government for home detaining asylum seekers.

MU SCM has remained a vibrant community, welcoming new members this semester (we even had 13 people at one of our meetings – a record for sure!). The wonderful Morag Logan, Uniting Church Chaplain, continues to provide us with lunch every Thursday before our meetings, which gives us a



chance to take a break from our busy lives to chat and eat good food. We have also maintained our contact with the wider church community, with members from both Victoria Uni and Melbourne Uni attending a dinner put on by the Victorian Council of Churches, where a talk was given on ecumenism.

The format of Area Council has been changed this semester, and it is now more of an SCM community gathering, with some speedy business at the beginning. This format is less draining, and enables the focus of the gathering to be on the sense of community we share, rather than business.

We have struggled this semester with trying to be completely open, inclusive, welcoming, and encouraging of free discussion and thought, while at the same time knowing how essential it is that SCM is, and remains, a safe space. We want to make it very obvious that we welcome people of all Christian denominations, indeed of all faiths (we have even had a Jewish person come to some of our meetings!), and that we are feminist and queer friendly, and focus on social justice. In particular, we have reaffirmed our acceptance of queer

relationships, and as part of this focus, we are in the process of organising a forum on sexuality, which aims to explore spirituality and sexuality in a positive environment, whilst also promoting SCM as a queer friendly Christian group [see ad on page 22].

Next semester we are hoping to have an intern from the SCM in the

Philippines come to Melbourne to help build the movement, and enable a sharing of culture between the SCMP and the ASCM.

In Peace and Joy,

Kate Barnard  
Melbourne Uni SCM Staff Worker  
[melbscm@yahoo.com.au](mailto:melbscm@yahoo.com.au)

Image not available

The newly painted banner that was held at the Palm Sunday service and peace rally in Melbourne.

# QUEERING CHRISTIANITY:

# Spirituality

*Reconciling*

➤ **MICHAEL KELLY:** **and**  
*Writer and speaker on Gay  
Spirituality, activist with the  
Rainbow Sash Movement*

# Sexuality

(A forum)

➤ **AVRIL HANNAH-JONES:** *candidate  
for ordained ministry (Uniting Church),  
Ph.D. on "The Sexuality Debate in the  
Uniting Church."*

Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> August  
Melbourne University  
Public Lecture Theatre  
Old Arts  
6.30 pm

➤ **JOHNATHAN JONES:** *Youth  
Pastor, Metropolitan Community  
Church, Sydney*



Student Christian Movement

[melbscm@yahoo.com.au](mailto:melbscm@yahoo.com.au)

## WA SCM Semester One 2003

The year started very well for the WA SCM, with people coming together regularly and energy levels being very high. The UWA and Curtin fledgling branches began splendidly, growing through new networks and friendships. The UWA group has been meeting fortnightly with a TEAR group for lunch and open discussion and this will again be floated as an idea next semester. The Curtin group is still very much in its infancy as we decide on a meeting time and space.

Shared Space and the Ecumenical Youth Network remain the most popular of the WA SCM's activities. Shared Space has taken on new and contemporary topics over the semester, including preparing for Lent, and the role of the Church in worship. The Ecumenical Youth Network visited the Syrian Orthodox Church for the

Prayers of Ten Virgins in April and is planning to visit an Indigenous Uniting Church congregation later this month.

Our recent retreat was also a highlight of the semester as we escaped to the beach at Point Peron, just south of Perth. It was rather chilly, being May, but sitting on the grass in the sun learning to massage my toes was a great way to spend a Saturday afternoon.

Plans are afoot for many wonderful things next semester as our thoughts turn to a July National Conference in the sunshine and recharging our batteries with nationwide excitement.

Bronwyn Hatwell  
WA SCM Staff Worker  
[wa@ascm.org.au](mailto:wa@ascm.org.au)

### A wedding

Justin Whelan and Ann-Maree Williams, NSW SCMs, married on 20 April 2003 in Paddington Uniting Church, NSW. Ann-Maree laughing and Justin kissing typified the day!

Image not available

## Vale

Edwin Brian Mowbray  
Died 23 March 2003 (aged 89)

Leader of the SCM at the University of Sydney in the 1930s and later in the 1940s.  
It was his request that donations be given to the SCM in lieu of flowers – thank you.

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John Cochrane O'Neill  
8 December 1930 – 30 March 2003

Involved in the SCM in Melbourne both as a student and leader.

---

Lloyd Percy Prewett  
22 December 1918 – 11 July 2003

## Peace activism

How do we keep going as peace activists when we never seem to get anywhere? That's a question I often hear, and one that I feel deeply myself. I had the privilege of meeting Fr Dan Berrigan at a retreat and asked him. His response – coming from someone who has been at it since the '60s and is still nonviolently resisting in his 80s – was both comforting and disturbing: "As Christians, we aren't asked to be successful. We are called to be faithful."

Shawn Whelan  
ASCM National Co-ordinator

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If undeliverable, return to:  
Australian Student Christian Movement  
PO Box 4386  
University of Melbourne  
PARKVILLE VIC 3052