



# 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*

## Exploring Jesus and Paul with John Dominic Crossan

- Touching the ancient world (15 minutes)
- Non-violence and justice bring peace (7 minutes)
- A vision for saving the world (9 minutes)
- An alternative for the 21<sup>st</sup> century (9 minutes)

## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### THE DVD

After a brief introduction to John Dominic Crossan, the DVD provides short interviews of between 7 and 15 minutes each - a total of 40 minutes. The DVD could be used in one session of approximately an hour and a half, providing time for discussion after some of the 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 “Touching the ancient world”**

DOMINIC CROSSAN introduced the word “matrix” to refer to everything interactive you have to know about the worlds of Jesus and Paul. He said that if you simply read the text of the New Testament you can read into it what you want. But if you know what terms originally meant you can know what Paul meant. One of his illustrations was that “The Lord” was applied by Romans to the Caesars. So when Paul said that “our Lord is The Lord”, that was a claim for an alternative vision for saving this world - and Romans saw that as treason.

- Did the discussion of the original meaning of some of these common Christian terms open any fresh understandings for you?

DOMINIC CROSSAN painted a vivid and horrifying picture of Roman imperial power and brutality in destroying the town of Sephoris just 4 or 5 miles from Nazareth close to the time of Jesus’ birth. Jesus would have grown up in a town where a lot of conversation was about Romans, violence and when God would do something to end injustice.

- In what ways did Crossan provide help in understanding Jesus’ teaching about God’s rule coming on earth now?

### **DISCUSSION AFTER “Non-violence and justice bring peace”**

DOMINIC CROSSAN contrasted the Roman claim that Caesar brought “Peace through victory” with the claim by Jesus and Paul that peace comes through non-violent resistance and justice.

- ✚ In what ways does the distinction between “retributive justice” (punishment) and “distributive justice” (“when most people get a fair share”) have implications for our lives?

### **DISCUSSION AFTER “A vision for saving the world”**

DOMINIC CROSSAN contrasts Paul’s description in his letter to the Galatians of how he became an apostle of Jesus Christ (Galatians chapter 1 verse 1 and from verse 11) with Luke’s dramatic story of conversion on the road to Damascus (in Acts chapter 9) which was “describing to fellow Christians how they were blind before being baptised”.

- How did the description of Paul's method of going to major cities to contact Gentiles who were associated with Jewish synagogues because they respected the Jewish God and Jewish morality help to explain the spread of Christianity?

## **DISCUSSION AFTER “An alternative for the 21<sup>st</sup> century”**

DOMINIC CROSSAN said that Paul took the message of Jesus out of the Jewish homeland in language the people he spoke to could understand. He was the first great Christian theologian and in absolute continuity with Jesus. His message was that grace brings peace.

- What do you think of the statement that the challenge for today is not the propagation of the church but salvation of the world through non-violence – a vision of the alternative to peace through victory?
- ✝ “Belief is not a list of propositions but commitment, ‘I’m with the program’”. As you reflect on this exploration of Jesus and Paul, what could it mean for you to say, “I’m with the program”?

## **CONCLUSION**

- John Dominic Crossan is passionate and eloquent about the difference it makes to our understanding of Jesus and Paul when we see and hear them against the background of Jewish and Roman theology and politics in the first century. **How has this helped you to understand the message of Jesus and Paul?**
- 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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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