



Pipeline

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TAKING ISLAM SERIOUSLY

At a recent meeting of Wellspring's Brisbane group, Douglas Golding invited members to look seriously at the faith which has put religion back into the news headlines, although the news is generally bad!

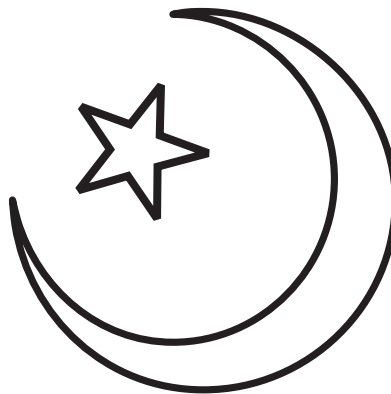
"Dr Doug" spent more than 50 years as a journalist and lecturer in journalism, and as a preacher and church worker in the Methodist church and later in the Anglican church. In his "retirement", he is working for a higher degree in theology at the University of Queensland and is a regular lecturer in comparative religion at UQ and for Griffith University in Brisbane.

The good news about Islam, Doug says, is that, like Christianity, it is a religion of peace and goodwill, a religion which worships the same one God as Christians and Jews. The strongest condemnation of terrorist attacks by Muslim extremists, like September 11 in the US and the Bali bombing, comes from moderate Muslim leaders.

The *Glorious Qur'an* allows Muslims to fight back in self-defence if their faith is attacked. And many Muslims believe their faith **is** under attack from the West, led by

the "Great Satan", the United States.

In the past 200 or so years, colonialism, materialism, hedonism, communism, capitalism ... all the isms of European and American culture have invaded Muslim countries uninvited.



In the early 20th century, the rise of secular regimes in Turkey and later in Egypt led to the formation of Muslim brotherhoods like Hamas. Then, in 1948, came the "intrusion" of Israel, with US financial support. The attack on Iraq

is the latest example. Now Islam is fighting back

Doug led the Brisbane group in a comparative study of the Muslim and Christian faiths, exploring the "10 dimensions of religion" which he uses in his lectures. His comparative chart is on page 2.

Doug and Marty are spending Easter in Jerusalem, studying at St George's College. In July Doug will be in Sydney delivering a paper on "Religion and popular Western culture" at the annual conference of the Australian Association for the Study of Religion at the University

Islam and Christianity

1. The Divinity – spiritual dimension

<p>God is a Person. God is all-powerful. Humankind is made to submit to God.</p>	<p>God is a Person. Love is the supreme attribute of God. Humankind is created in God's image.</p>
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2. Revelation – experiential dimension

<p>Revealed in the Recitations to Muhammad – the Qu'ran</p>	<p>Revealed in creation in history; supremely in Jesus Christ</p>
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3. Myth – narrative dimension

<p>Muhammad's life The recitation of the Qu'ran Expansion of the community (Sunnah)</p>	<p>History of Israel. Life of Christ. The church – the new Israel.</p>
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4. Scripture – authority dimension

<p>The Qu'ran (primary) The Ha'dith (secondary)</p>	<p>The "New Testament" (primary). The "Old Testament" (secondary).</p>
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5. Doctrine – philosophic dimension

<p>God is One Muhammad is the last and greatest of the prophets</p>	<p>God is One in three Persons Jesus is the Incarnation of God in human form The Christian is defined by Belief</p>
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6. Ritual – practical dimension

<p>Five pillars of faith Friday prayers, extra merit in the mosque The Muslim is defined by ritual</p>	<p>Sacramental worship; two key sacraments Non-sacramental worship Faith is expressed in good works</p>
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7. Organisation – institutional dimension

<p>Many sects and groups worldwide Three main strands: Sunni, Shi'ite, Sufi Authority derives from local community</p>	<p>Many sects and groups worldwide Three main stands: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant + bridge denominations From 20th Century – ecumenical movement</p>
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8. Morality – the ethical dimension

<p>Communal, expressed in Sha'riah</p>	<p>Individual, expressed in love</p>
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9. Society – social dimension

<p>Islam is the faith of the community</p>	<p>Christianity the faith of the individual, called to live in community</p>
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10. Artefacts – material and artistic expression

<p>Science – Art – Cathedral Mosques – local mosques, meeting places</p>	<p>Art – Drama – Cathedrals – Parish churches, "gateway to heaven"</p>
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Leaders' Letter

I was born into a Congregational home and church tradition and knew early the value of coming to a consensus even if it took more than one occasion to talk the issue through. The notion of the 'priesthood of all believers' was very familiar and we were encouraged to speak to 'the Almighty' in our own voices, and not feel the need for an intermediary. We were expected to think through our own faith knowing that 'the Lord has yet more light and truth to break forth from his Holy Word'.

It was therefore a surprise to me having travelled from Sydney to Dorrigo when I was about 12 years old to join in the worship of my cousins. I was invited to sing in the choir during the month I spent with them, and, by the end of the time, I could recite *The Apostles' Creed* (we were very wary of creeds), recite whole passages of *The Book of Common Prayer* as responses, and 'sing' the service for the congregation. We also wore surplices and cassocks and lit candles. It was heady stuff for a non-conformist! So that was my introduction to ecumenism.

I was privileged during my working life to spend most of my time with children and adults whose background cultures were different from my own. But while this has given me a great deal of knowledge of language and cultural difference, the experience did not touch on interfaith differences to any great degree.

So I turned to a very useful interfaith resource by Keith Rowe: *Living with the Neighbour who is Different – christian faith in a multi religious world*. (Uniting Church Press, Melbourne: 2000). He first challenges us by taking away the capital in the word **Christian**, and elevating the **Neighbour who is Different** with capitals. So the scene is set.

When we read this report, (commissioned by the 1997 Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia) it calls all Christians to feel divine

obligation to act in neighbourly love toward those who belong to other faiths. Because we live in an age of human division, we are asked to express love by sharing with others

'the riches of Christ and at the same time to search for ways we may work together for a unified world living in diversity and peace. The form this love takes can be described as "life in conversation" containing the components of dialogue and sharing in the midst of peaceable difference.'

This means that we need not be afraid to talk about our faith and the life of Christ, but that we will also listen to others express their faith in conversation. Maybe, like Congregational pilgrims, we will come to a consensus where our beliefs and values intersect, learn to respect differences and look for things in common. My understanding of a 'peaceable difference' would be to regard the 'other' as friend and colleague, and even after a fiery debate where differences cannot always be resolved, to continue to be friends, or to be able at least to shake hands afterwards.

The mission of the Christian Church must reflect this new understanding. Keith Rowe believes that this style of life is precisely what Jesus proclaimed as the Kingdom of God.

Our Wellspring Community Cell Groups are rich sources of ecumenical sharing for some of us. In our general community and in more recent times, particularly in groups such as refugee support groups, we have encountered people of many faiths. We value Australia's peaceful traditions, but now recognize that we must work harder to create religious understanding and cooperation.

Peggy Goldsmith

Alive, to be fully alive –
 This is the glory of God!
 Not to creep about in fear,
 Analysing every step,
 But to leap into life, as into the ocean;
 To dive & splash & swim
 Exploring the depths
 And rising back up to the crests,
 Exhilarating.
 Then shall I be ready
 To face whatever comes,
 Having lived fully
 And loved all that I've been given.
 So then, let me rejoice
 And embrace
 All of life.

Libby Mortimer 13/3/04

WELLS,
 HILLS,
 CROSSINGS –
 WEAVING TOGETHER THE STORY OF MY LIFE.
 I KNOW NOT WHERE THEY BEGIN OR WHERE
 THEY END.
 SO SKILFUL THE WEAVER THAT WARP & WEFT
 SEEM SOMETIMES ONE.
 YET, THROUGH THE PAIN AND JOY OF MY
 EXISTENCE,
 THE CRAFTER'S HAND IS STEADY & SURE,
 AND LOOKING BACK A PATTERN EMERGES,
 VAL – AN UNFINISHED TARTAN.

Val Bennett 13/3/04

Written at the Retreat at Sevenhill Winery
 in the Clare Valley, South Australia



*Friends, Mary and Mark
 Hurst and Margaret
 Gregory at the Outer
 South Sydney Cell Group
 gathering*

*NSW Cell Group –
 Outer South Sydney –
 met in the home of Eric
 and Jill Drury (centre
 right) in January for
 fellowship and planning
 for the year. Leader,
 Neil Holm, visited and
 managed to get in a
 photo or two. John
 Burnard on right*



Summer School in Morpeth (Wellspring Friends Jon Inkpin and Judith Keller)

Visual art, drama, dance, pottery, dynamic liturgy and stimulating audio-visual presentations were all part of this year's Spirituality Summer School at Morpeth last week. Led by the Revd. Dr. Jonathan Inkpin, supported by an ecumenical team of creative artists, this sought to explore ways into cultivating peace in our own lives and wider world. Drawing upon the national and global resources of the churches' Decade to Overcome Violence, the aim was to open up hearts, bodies and imaginations, as well as minds, to that peace of God which passes all understanding and which reconciles every aspect of our world.

The four key themes of the Decade to Overcome Violence in Australia (compassion, truth, community and justice) formed the framework for the summer school, with presentations, theological reflections and bible studies in the mornings, followed by a choice of creative workshops in the afternoons, and three special evening sessions on key aspects of peacemaking today. The four symbols relating to the four key DOV themes provided a focus for each day: the symbol of the heart and nurturing Compassion; the symbol of the sunflower and the Truth of God's transfiguring word; the symbol of the (concentric) circle and the cultivating of harmonious, inclusive Community; and the symbol of (sharing) hands and the doing of Justice.

Highly enjoyable workshops were led by Pene

Brook (painting), Penny Jones (storytelling, drama and dance), Judith Keller (circle dance and the labyrinth), Rhonda Osborn (pottery), Barbara Pengelly (creating our own peace projects) and Trish Watts (singing and meditation), whilst Rod Bower shared some imaginative multi-media reflections and the amazing Kerry Bower ensured that all ran smoothly. Other highlights included Trish Watts' evening meditative liturgy; the creation by the whole group of a powerfully moving summer mandala; and an illuminating evening seminar, chaired by Bishop Roger Herft, with Muslim, Buddhist, Baha'i and Quaker speakers, sharing their own faith traditions' insights into peace.

The summer school had a wonderful ecumenical feel to it, with an excellent balance of Catholics and Uniting Church members as well as Anglicans, whilst participants came from as far afield as Bridgetown in Western Australia and far north Queensland as well as the Hunter Valley closer to home. The deep ripples of peace experienced in the summer school will thus continue to be felt throughout the country and across our churches in the days ahead.

Photos from the event should be available on the DOV website in the near future, at:

[http://www.ncca.org.au/dov/events/opening_up_to_peace_\(summer_school\)](http://www.ncca.org.au/dov/events/opening_up_to_peace_(summer_school))



Wellspring Retreat

AT SEVENHILL, NEAR CLARE, SA MARCH 12 and 13 2004

On the 12th March 21 people met at the Sevenhill Catholic College for a retreat titled "Sacred Spaces" led by Howard Groome. The retreat was a time of Celtic reflections over four sessions: The Infinite Knot, The Well, The Hilltop and The Crossings.

We arrived and were welcomed warmly in more than one way. The hospitality of the College was wonderful. We had a lovely dinner waiting, very elegantly served, and many warm greetings from dear friends. Barbara and Neville Washington were new friends of Wellspring and at their first

Continued on page 7

A Plea for Respect

This morning I received correspondence from the Director of Islam-Australia, offering a response to a recent newspaper feature article describing the distribution in Iraq of Bibles by an American evangelical organisation. Representatives of Islam are, naturally, concerned with this practice, and the letter outlined its disquiet on two counts, first, the unseemliness of opportunistic distribution of “aid with bibles” amongst traumatised people, and, secondly misunderstandings between Christians and Muslims. The organisation seeks resolution through debate.

Both these issues have touched my life as the minister of a church who has sought to give local aid to refugees and asylum seekers who are also Muslim. While our aid was primarily material, it is now essentially advocacy for severely traumatised individuals who are in danger of being sent back to areas they believe to be unsafe.

Because God is a primary topic of conversation amongst peoples of the Middle East and our personal engagement has been necessarily strong, perspectives of faith have been freely shared. Our workers have been deeply blessed and educated through this exchange. We have found that, while our refugee neighbours are deeply committed to the ways and practices of Islam, they have a deep and lasting admiration for genuine Christian compassion. There is also a willingness to engage in discussion on the teachings of Jesus, revered in Islam as a greatly respected prophet. There is genuine respect within Islam for those who genuinely seek to reflect the ways of Jesus.

My conclusion is that resolution of differences between Islam and the Church will not be resolved through debate, but through genuine and mutually respectful engagement – sharing life, laughter and tears with each other.

Dennis Ryle

Dennis Ryle is the Minister at the Wembley Downs Church of Christ. His strong interests are Social Justice and Ecumenism and he is actively involved in the Spirituality Programme at the Dayspring Centre for Christian Spirituality.

Ecumenical Summer School Blessing

May God bless you with discomfort:
discomfort at easy generalisations,
half-truths, and superficial relationships
– so you will look people in the eye,
and see each as they really are:
fellow seekers of the truth.

May God bless you with anger:
anger at injustice, oppression,
and the exploitation of people
– so you will hold the passion and the commitment
to work for justice, equity and peace.

May God bless you with tears:
tears to shed for those who suffer
from pain, or rejection, or patronising attitudes
- so you will step out of your comfort zone
to walk beside them, and together
be able to change the pain into joy.

May God bless you with foolishness:
the foolishness to think YOU can make a difference
- so you will do one thing in your faith community
to change despair into hope
for the church of the future.

Jill Tabart, Feb 2004

[based on material from the DOV resource kit]

Christine Fensham attended this Summer School and shared this blessing.

Thanks, Christine!

Continued from page 5

gathering. All the others were regular friends. The Anglican parish priest from Clare joined us for the Friday evening.

The conversation was rich and the sharing of insights was deep and meaningful. This was really a great time of reflection and getting to know each other at a deeper level. The surroundings were beautiful and everyone agreed that they would like to go back. The walks and silent times were wonderful. The weather was perfect.

It was a time of looking back from the hilltop, looking over the past 20 years of our lives and where they have led us, having a view of where we have come from, and a distant view of where we

are going. We have come through many huge changes in our lives over the past 20 years and we feel that God has been preparing us for such a time as this. I had to come home and write down my insights so that I would not lose them.

Many friends will remember John and I sharing at the first Wellspring annual gathering in Adelaide, just after our son's sudden death. That was ten years ago now, which has been a significant time of moving on and gaining from what his life has taught us.

I am sure this was a very significant time for many others who were present.

Fiona Cockington

Farewell

George Harverson died on 9th of February, 2004, after several years of poor health. George was a loved and respected member of the Blue Mountains Community where he was involved in many community support groups. His interests lay in Indigenous issues, Refugee support and bush walking and he was a tireless worker in the Leura Uniting Church. He cared for his wife Betty, through several years of sickness, until her death three years ago. Betty attended the Leura Catholic Church. She and George, forged strong friendly relationships between the Catholic and Uniting churches. They travelled to many parts of Australia with

friends of both Churches and could relate many interesting experiences.

George is survived by his two children Jonathan (in Sydney) and Catherine (in Perth) and two sisters. For his funeral the Leura Uniting Church was filled with friends and relatives from many parts of the country. George had worked in Queensland and lived and worked in Turramurra, Sydney for many years before retiring to the Blue Mountains. Wentworth Falls, which he loved so much, was his home for 14 years. May you rest in Peace, George.

Jim Croft, Wentworth Falls.

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