



# The Mixing of Oil and Water

*In Praise of the Secular*

by Lloyd Geering, St. Andrew's Trust, Wellington

**For many people the words "secular" and "religious" are like oil and water, they simply don't mix.**

But in his latest series of St. Andrew's Trust lectures Lloyd Geering takes a different point of view. He is at pains to show that today's secular world emerged out of the Christian tradition and from the pioneering efforts of many thinkers in that tradition, like Martin Luther, William of Ockham, St. Francis, and Ludwig Feurbach. Scientists like Darwin also saw the Christian-secular connection and were roundly condemned by the orthodox Church for doing so, but they never saw themselves as anti-Christian.

Geering is also concerned to show that in a secular age — which is not anti-religious — we need some kind of spirituality which he suggests might be termed secular mysticism. This would be focussed not on the saving of our own individual lives but rather on "the welfare of one another, the future of the human species, and the health of the planet." Such a spirituality, on which the religious rituals of the future would be based, require "the great coming together of all peoples on a global scale." Lloyd Geering's vision for the future also provides a challenge, and a hope, for the churches — should they be willing to grasp the spiritually secular nettle.

Earlier chapters in the book outline how our increasingly global and secular world gradually took shape. Darwin taught us that we humans are one species amongst millions of others, like (the author might have added) the Californian dung beetle. In the Judaeo-Christian tradition Geering traces the various phases through which that tradition has passed, including the Incarnation — God revealing himself in this human world and not above or beyond it. As each piece of the cultural jig-saw puzzle falls into place and as we move into the modern secular world, these cultural changes gather momentum. We are now freed from the old external authorities and able to think for ourselves and to be ourselves. But this freedom also brings dangers and responsibilities and these along with the advantages are examined in a separate chapter.

A very useful section on how New Zealand evolved as a post-Christian secular society is included, notably Geering's concern "... that the majority of New Zealanders have been left with little knowledge of our past spiritualities and have been given no guidance as to how to develop their own." Which brings us back to the author's secular mysticism dealt with in the books final chapter.

Over the years Lloyd Geering has had his critics, some of whom regard his teaching as dangerous, even destructive. Richard Holloway, the former Bishop of Edinburgh, writes that the only way to preserve a tradition is to critique it, to be (as Jesus was) subversive of it.

Lloyd Geering is such a subversive. His book deserves a wide readership.

*Alan Goss, Napier*