

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

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A recovered old Newsletter

SEA OF FAITH NETWORK

NEWSLETTER NO.9. NOVEMBER 1994

Second Annual Conference

Marion Blackburn reports as follows: "This very successful Conference was attended by 240 people, plus a few locals who attended individual sessions. At the close of the Conference a questionnaire was given to participants, which was eventually completed by 172 people (71.7%) - a very useful response.

Overall the responses bear out the general impression that the Conference had been stimulating and enjoyable. Respondents also provided many suggestions for even better conferences in future.

The highest single score was for the meals, which were indeed superb, though a few regretted that the large number attending had resulted in rather long meal queues!

Many people took advantage of the space in the questionnaire to comment and as many as 51 people commented on the lecture sessions, rating Lloyd Geering and Susan Adams very highly. The conference offered three main lecture sessions attended by all, and 35 workshops from which one could attend two - a very difficult choice. Interestingly enough, on a ranking of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest), both lectures and workshops scored 163 from 3 to 5 inclusive.

Suggestions for next time (which is to be in Wellington, from 25 to 27 August, 1995) included a wish for further discussion on "Where do we go from here?" and the possibility of like-minded people considering social action on some of the issues raised. Other suggestions included were singing together, Lloyd Geering please, and can we get Karen Armstrong?"

Bronwyn White has submitted her **Reflections on the Sea of Faith** in verse as follows:

The Sea of Faith
was calmer than I'd thought to
find it:

Anticipating waves
- great breakers crashing on the
shores

of our complaisance -

I found only eddies,
gentle lapping of ideas
the ebb and flow
the dipping in of toes

and then retreating

- waves and toes alike -

back to the safety of a sandy
beach.

Where was the turbulence I'd
thought would be
stirring our breast
and challenging the tide?

Trail-blazing
life-affirming logic
deconstruction of theology -
self-affirmation
anti-chaos theory
suggestion of new
spirituality -

I found all these:
- I'd thought to find
excitement
new inspiration
non-Reality

Instead, I heard "that's
interesting" "She's angry" and
"where's Jesus?"
No whirlpools: just the lapping
of the sea.

I'd thought to see a brave new
Phoenix rising
a tidal wave
of challenge,
minds a-thirst;

Instead I found a Sea of Faith
still wavering
the gentle fluttering spirit
of a dove.

Some Reports from Workshops

(1) Personal Life Stories and the Search for Meaning

The primary aim of this workshop, led by Neville Glasgow, was to identify the creation of our personal life story as a means of giving meaning and purpose to our lives. A secondary aim was to experience the sense of freedom and responsibility that realisation gives us and in sharing part of our story with others to feel what that can mean for us personally.

Generally people feel a deeper sense of unity and purpose when they share their stories with others who genuinely listen. For some it is a new experience to find that they do have a story and one that other people find significant. Listening, too, can be inspiring as we hear other people's stories, realise how much we have in common and also how each story is unique.

To help us identify some of our own stories we explored through brain storming and word association many of the different ways of understanding the concept of "meaning", particularly how we use it in ordinary language and in our daily lives.

We then used "clustering" (a kind of mapping) to explore incidents or issues in our own personal life story that we felt were meaningful for us. This provided the basis for the stories we shared in small groups.

2 Honesty in the Church

This was led by Barrie Allom and was attended by 45 people, divided into two groups.

The subject was opened up under seven topic headings. Each topic was explored using a quotation from a well-known modern or post-modern author, as follows:

1. Truth sacrificed for unity - Spong.
2. The factors which compromise honesty in the Church; "Obsession with power, desire to be governed, reluctance to grow up". - Cupitt.
3. Beliefs which require credulity and promote dependency - Freeman.
4. Loving acceptance with strings attached. - Pittenger.
5. The gulf between academic and popular theology. - Spong.
6. Credal and liturgical double-talk; saying one thing and meaning another. - Freeman.
7. Church dogma; beyond the reach of criticism. - Bowden.

Neither of these two workshops arrived at any heart-stopping conclusions or decisions for action, but there was a strong sense of fellowship and support for each other as members discussed issues of mutual concern.

At the Sunday morning celebration the workshop convener spoke some thoughts gathered from the two groups, emphasizing that honesty in the church is in the search for truth rather than in proclaiming truth in absolute terms. The thoughts ended with the question "Can I be honest and remain within the Church?" The questions must be asked repeatedly and can only be answered personally and individually.

3. The Workshop of Buddhism

Barrie Suckling, who attended this workshop, has provided the following:

* Buddhism is a philosophy of living. As such there is no conflict with other belief systems. There is no compulsion to accept dogma. There is no missionary movement, and there has never been a holy war. There is no requirement to accept the existence of a God. It is all a matter of personal choice.

* Change is universal. There is

constant change in everything, both external to us and in our own thoughts and values. Our natural desire for security, familiarity, dependability and permanence is destined to disappointment because of universal change. Let go from attachments, obsessions, and clinging. Nothing ever really belongs to us. Life is only a passage. "We never step into the same river twice".

* Quote from the Buddha: "Do not believe in anything merely because it is said. Nor in traditions simply because they have been handed down from antiquity. Nor in writings by wise men just because wise men wrote them. Nor in the mere authority of our teachers and masters. But do believe when writings, doctrine or thinking is confirmed by your own reason, consciousness and experience".

Reflections on the Conference

as a whole are offered as follows by Allan Goss:

1. The traditional picture of a monarchical God "out there", a supernatural benchmark against which humanity is judged, acquitted, or found wanting, has finally been laid to rest. We create our own images of God, our morals, our values, our interpretations of life's purpose and meaning.

2. Lingering concepts of a modified objective God, e.g. "a monarch who reigns but does not rule" nevertheless survive, and were expressed in various ways by some platform speakers.

3. Landmark lectures by Lloyd Geering and Susan Adams chiselled radically new and exciting shapes on the besieged face of traditional Christianity.

4. The Sunday celebration used contributions from other faiths and a variety of symbols and messages, separated and surrounded by silence. The conference thus created new

forms of spirituality which might be developed locally and elsewhere.

Noel Cheer remembers hearing the following nearly 30 years ago on a radio devotional programme. He later found it in print, long ago committed it to memory and recited it within the Conference celebration. He thinks the author may have been a W.H.Carrurth (Does anyone know?).

"Each in His Own Tongue"

A fire-mist, and a planet:
A Crystal and a cell;
A jelly-fish and a saurian
And caves where cave-men dwell,
Then a sense of Law and Beauty
And a face turned from the clod,
Some call it Evolution
And others call it God.

A mist on the far horizon:
The infinite tender sky;
The ripe, rich tints of the
cornfields
And the wild geese sailing high.
And all over upland and lowland
The charm of the golden-rod.
Some people call it Autumn
And others call it God.

Like tides on the crescent sea-
beach
When the moon is new and thin,
Into our hearts high yearnings
Come welling and surging in;
Come from the mystic ocean
Whose rim no foot has trod.
Some people call it Longing
And others call it God.

A picket frozen on duty;
A mother starved for her brood;
Socrates drinking the hemlock;
Jesus on the rood;
And millions who, humble and
nameless,
The strait hard pathway plod,
Some call it Consecration
And others call it God.

SOF Conference Audio-Tapes

Those who ordered tapes or copies of scripts at the Conference are hereby notified that they will certainly come but there has unfortunately been some delay in the copying process.

The following tapes are all available for \$10 each (this includes postage and packing) from: E.C.Storey,

117 Ohaupo Road,
Melville,
HAMILTON.

1993

1. Neville Glasgow - "Directions - Exploring the Meaning of Life"
2. Betsan Martin - "Postmodern Possibilities for Disrupting Dualistic Faith Discourses - a Feminist Perspective".
3. Lloyd Geering - "From Heavenly Father to Earthly Mother".

1994

4. Allan Webster - "Multiple Cultures & Emergent Spirituality", A Small Society Reflecting Global Change.
5. Susan Adams - "The Tree of Life?" - a Feminist looks at the Cross.
6. Lloyd Geering - "Tomorrow's Spirituality".

S.O.F. LOCAL GROUPS &/OR CONTACTS

(The following is as a complete a list of local groups as we now have. Please report any omissions or corrections to Jane Griffith).

Bay of Islands

Dick Poutsma, P.O.Box 335,
Kaikohe

Ph. 09.401.1023

Hibiscus Coast

Cornelius Cannegieter, 2/191
Centreway Road, Orewa.

Ph.426.7279

North Shore

Clyde McLaren, 35 Craig Road,
Milford, Auckland 9. Ph.
486.3043

Auckland

Murray Jenkin, 112B Arney Road,
Remuera. Ph. 524.8518 OR

Barbara Miller, "Long Barn",
Ngarahana Ave, RD3, Albany.
Ph. 413.8513 Fax 09.413.8145

Hamilton

Wilf Ford, 122 Totara Drive,
Hamilton. Ph. 849.6421

Te Kuiti

John Earwaker, 2 Ngatai St,
Te Kuiti. Ph. 07.878.8062

Whangamata

Val Bailey, 207 Bellona Rd,
Whangamata. Ph. 07.865.7232

Katikati

Kath Kenyon, 11 Riverlea
Cres., Katikati Ph.07.549.0586

Tauranga

Basil Kings, 60 Tilby Drive,
Tauranga. 07.576.7665

Te Puke

Ivan Frost, 23 Cameron Road,
Te Puke. Ph. 07.573.8164

Rotorua

Cornelia Leenman,
P.O. Box 244,
Rotorua, Ph.07-347-8643

Gisborne

Jean & Robin Bennett,
P.O.Box 1229, Gisborne.
Ph. 06.867.2383 (evenings)

Napier

Alan Goss, 4 McDonald St.,
Napier 4001. Ph. 06.835.9594

New Plymouth

John Eaddy, 58 Liardet St.,
New Plymouth Ph.06.751.1619

Wanganui

Kathleen & Terry Douglas,
76 Virginia Rd. Ph.06.345.6483

Wairarapa

Kate & Barrie Allom, 41B Cole
St. Masterton. Ph.06.377.5777

Kapiti(Ephesus)

Bee Salmon, 15 Moa Rd, Raumati
Beach. Ph. 04.298.4992

Mana

Irvine Roxburgh, 3 Picket Boat
Lane, Whitby. Ph. 04.234.8613

Hutt Valley

Brian King, 49 Tilbury Street,
Lower Hutt. Ph. 04.567.7246

Wellington (Ephesus)

Ian Harris, 88 Evans Bay Parada,
Balaena Bay, Wellington
Ph. 04.382.9773

Blenheim

Allan Herron, 9A Manor Place,
Blenheim. Ph. 03.578.3839

Christchurch

George Ridley, Courtenay Rd,
(P.O.Box 92) Kirwee, Canterbury.
Ph. 03.318.1545

Timaru (Ephesus)

John Meredith, 49 Broadway Ave.,
Timaru. Ph. 03.686.1932

Timaru

Bob Hayward, 9 Waipori Place,
Timaru.

Dunedin

Mae Cairns, 51 Garfield Avenue,
Dunedin. 03.467.5058

Invercargill

Cliff Broad, 73 Russell St.,
Invercargill. Ph. 03.218.8629

Books of Interest

Silence in Heaven, a Book of Women's Preaching, co-editors Heather Walton & Susan Durber, SCM Press Ltd, 1994
(available from Epworth Bookshop, PO Box 6133, Te Aro, Wellington, \$38.65)
[Reviewed by Jane Griffith]

The sub-title indicates *Silence in Heaven* is a "book of women's preaching" which in itself makes this book unique as it is the first time a book of British women's sermons has been published. As the introduction notes some of the sermons have been preached in pulpits, some in women's gatherings or on 'special' occasions whilst others have never been preached "because what they say cannot yet be said in churches".

As a person who very rarely reads sermons and wonders at the relevance of such a monological method of presentation of material in the 1990's I approached this book with a certain amount of hesitation as well as anticipation.

Twenty eight women contributed to this book. These women are from many different backgrounds and theological stances and therefore it is understandable that not all the sermons would appeal to every reader. For me as a woman I warmed to much of the female

imagery and the unique way some of these women wove their experiences of conception, birthing, maturation and dying into the framework of their sermons. The language and imagery used in many of the sermons is most powerful and highlights the differing perceptions of women and men.

Silence in Heaven is divided into five sections. The sermons in each section share a common theme, make use of female imagery, and often provide a new perspective to familiar myths and texts.

Use of female body imagery introduces a new angle to the stable scene in Bethlehem, the massacre of the Innocents and the haemorrhaging woman as well as speaking about Christian survivors of sexual abuse and the Church's silence on this subject. Some of the sermons have developed from women's pain, some from the frustrations of having a basic text (the Bible) written entirely by men.

But from out of this comes a recognition that now is the time to ask new questions and use alternative strategies to listen to women's voices and tell the Biblical stories from a woman's point of view. This is precisely what this book is attempting to do and many of the sermons published show that there are women preachers in Britain who are successfully achieving this.

Don Cupitt and the Future of Christian Doctrine by Stephen Ross White, SCM Press, 1994.

UK price FIFTEEN POUNDS.

The author is an Anglican Dean in Ireland. He agrees that Cupitt "is a major theologian whose radicalism must be seriously reckoned with...he has opened the way forward to a new kind of theology. The world he has shown us is one which theology must enter if it is to retain any semblance of

intellectual respectability". "Cupitt is attempting to relate the areas of personal faith, intellectual discovery, and the world in which these must live, in a manner intelligible to, and believable by the temper and mind-set of his age and culture".

White first surveys Cupitt's work and does so reasonably sympathetically. Then, secondly, he subjects them to criticism and expounds in response a more orthodox understanding of God which he calls one of "critical realism".

In this reviewer's opinion he does so quite unconvincingly having failed to grasp the significance of the points Cupitt has made. It cannot therefore be recommended.

The Deity and the Deep Blue Sea

(Extracts from an article by Christopher Mordaunt in the *Manchester Guardian*, July 94.

"The organisation Sea of Faith does a great service by bringing together people with a wide range of "non-realistic views about God. But the sea of faith is a broad one....

We have to start on dry land with the atheists who say that the whole idea of God is meaningless..But there is a more sympathetic sort of atheism. It involves saying, like sacked vicar Anthony Freeman, that "God" stands for our values.

There is a related view, very popular, which is purely pragmatic. A large number simply think the church is a good thing but do not have any particular beliefs about God. If questioned, they might express their beliefs in traditional terms but at bottom they are sympathetic atheists.

The difference between the broadly realistic believers on our right and the broadly atheistic on our left is obvious. For those on the right "Jesus is the son of God" is

literally true, while "God is love" is a metaphor. For those on the left it is the other way round.

Beliefs in the depths of the middle allow for some uncertainty. Beliefs in the shallows on either the right or the left have this in common; they treat religious statements as either true or false. Beliefs in the middle are more inclined to say that the position is ambiguous or that a proposition may be true for me but not necessarily for everyone.

Few of us are entirely consistent but shift about from one view to another. A priest like Anthony Freeman, who shows that he is still passionately interested in these matters and sufficiently concerned about his flock to talk about them is worth ten who are simply going through the motions. If we are not open to those of differing views within the sea of the Christian faith, how can we possibly be open to the ocean beyond?

Renewal of Subscriptions

September 1 was the renewal date for the annual subscription of TEN DOLLARS, per household, for the Newsletter. Subscriptions should be sent to Jane Griffith, 82 Kinghorne St., Strathmore, Wellington. If your newsletter has a red dot on it that means your subscription has not yet been received. If it is not received in due course it will be assumed that you do not wish to renew your subscription and consequently this will be the last you receive.

The next Newsletter is planned for February, 1995. Any material or news you have to offer should be sent to the Editor:

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