

# Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

A recovered old Newsletter

## SEA OF FAITH NETWORK (NZ)

NEWSLETTER 16

May 1996

### Come To The Conference

The highlight of the Sea of Faith Network's year is emerging as the annual conference and the one planned for Dunedin in August will be no exception.

The registration form accompanying this newsletter gives full details: I hope they will whet your anticipation, and quickly convert vague intentions about possibly going into a firm resolve.

As you will see, there will be an even wider variety of addresses than at previous conferences—by ecologist Charles Birch of Sydney; Joy Cowley from Marlborough Sounds; Clive Pearson and Bishop Penny Jamieson from Dunedin; and Don Cupitt (unfortunately *in absentia*) from Cambridge in England. Judging by their titles, by the time they have finished we will have dived deeper, learnt how to cope with shifting sands, taken down fences, and lighted on the right questions to ask about God.

Workshops this year are designed to cope with a broadening range of interest. They will include topics as diverse as African religions, Maori spirituality, Christian themes, aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism, eco spirituality, music, art, ethics.

For the celebration on Sunday morning, we shall be tapping the talents of Shona McTavish and Colin Gibson, Ian Cairns and Rosemary Sommerville. Dunedin will also add a distinctive touch with a ceilidh. If you don't know what that is, come to Dunedin and find out.

The steering committee in Wellington and arrangements committee in Dunedin are working closely together to make this a memorable occasion, and

there are signs of good support from network members in the South Island.

So a special word to North Island members: please shift whatever mountains stand in the way of deciding to go. Dunedin may seem a long way to travel, but in fact it is no further for North Islanders to go south than it was for southerners to come north to attend the past three conference, or than it will be to attend next year's. Combine the conference with a visit to South Island relatives, or a holiday swing if you can spare the time. You will not be disappointed.

Ian Harris  
Chairperson  
SOF Network  
Steering Committee

### News From Branch Groups

#### Mana and Wairarapa Two-Day Seminar

The Mana and Wairarapa SoF groups met for a combined, two-day seminar on the final weekend in March. The venue was Frederic Wallis House in Lower Hutt. The House and the surrounding gardens provided an attractive and relaxing backdrop to a meeting which was at once

**Forceful:** Adam Floyd spoke passionately from the heart about people today.

**Controversial:** Barrie Allom discussed spirituality, Maori, and the modern world.

**Educational:** Patricia Rodger's discussion of Paul of Tarsus was excellent.

**Thoughtful:** Graham Armstrong discussed the practical application of spirituality and it was certainly thought-provoking.

**Informative:** Irvine Roxburgh presented some intriguing insights into the origins of Christianity.

**Practical:** Barbara & Paul Morreau gave us all a lot to think about!

The discussion was lively and continued unabated in plenary session, small groups, over tea, in the gardens, with meals, and on into the night. We certainly left with new perspectives on many issues and no doubt others did as well. All in all a terrific meeting! Many thanks to the organisers and those who presented papers and talks.

Helen & Russell Plume

#### SOF Network — Auckland Branch

So far this year we have discussed Don Cupitt's letter Our Dual Agenda and plan to continue at the May meeting.

In March we heard the Rev. David Clark (St. Lukes', Remuera) explain his findings for his dissertation Christian Faith and the Generational Difference focussing on the "baby boomers": that one third of NZ's population which was born between 1946 and 1964.

Our April topic is Building Our Own Theologies — a consideration of five manifestos as a basis for preparing our own.

#### Dunedin Sea of Faith Group

The new year's programme is well under way, following a similar format to last year's: a monthly meal-discussion, with a series of sub groups meeting weekly, fortnightly or monthly.

The March main meeting centred on "**Bereavement**":

(a) what turns me off, at funerals I attend? — mawkish hymns portraying the departed as a plaster saint; concentrating

on the departed only in their old age; Victorian language; descriptions of an "afterlife"; "heaven", "crowns", "harps" etc in literalist terms.

(b) "What is a funeral for?": Thanksgiving for and commemoration of X's life; working through grieving; and coming to terms with feelings of bewilderment, resentment, loneliness, and relief; opportunity to remember; comfort, companionship and sharing; stock-taking.

A lively discussion, with input from resource-person Tricia Warwick, a Dunedin funeral celebrant.

The theme of the April meeting. **"What are my treasures now?"** — People made themselves vulnerable as they shared their appreciation and experience of "paradox", "relationship", "communication", "un-learning", "new perspectives", "empathy with nature", "colour and form".

Sub Groups: A most stimulating "Cupitt Group" meeting fortnightly has just finished reading After All and is about to begin The Last Philosophy. A weekly Meditation group is working month-about on Mark's story of Jesus, and on environmental and related topics. Each session combines input, discussion, silent reflection, and sharing of insights.

A Film Viewing-and-Discussing group is about to get under way; and a group on the

theology of Dorothy Soelle is planned for September.

### Contact Changes

**Wanganui:** Tony Gordon, 16 Argyle St, Ph.06.343.1219

**Hamilton:** Peter Timmins, Pencarrow Road, RD3 Hamilton.

**Warkworth (new):** Anne Todd, Old School House, 154 Kaipara Flats Rd, RD1, Ph.09.425.9746

### Contribution

## Three Aspects of Fundamentalism

The predominant current form of Christian fundamentalism is American in its main leadership and its immediate origins. It follows a system of Biblical interpretation and associated prophecy belief known as premillennial dispensationalism. It finds in the Bible teachings that are often different from a plain reading of the text. Equally, it ignores modern scholarly insights into the origins of the Biblical documents. By presenting the Bible as different from what it really is, it misrepresents the Bible.

Other streams of Christian fundamentalism, such as the "fundamentalism" which Peter Cameron encountered in the continuing Presbyterian Church of Australia, have by comparison relatively little importance on the worldwide scene. (Peter Cameron's book Fundamentalism and Freedom was discussed in Newsletter 14.)

In Apocalypse: On the Psychology of Fundamentalism in America (Beacon Press 1994), C. B. Strozier argues that "the apocalypse energises contemporary fundamentalism". The first part of this book uses interviews with members of fundamentalist churches to provide an insight on the thinking processes of members of fundamentalist churches in the U.S.A. In the second part Strozier presents two alternative expressions of the apocalyptic in America for comparison — that of the Hopi

Indians, and the less well defined expression found in the New Age movement. The connection between this second part and the rest of the book seemed to me strained. Finally, Strozier presents his own view of the future of American fundamentalism. While Strozier acknowledges that Falwell and Robertson are ominous, he finds it a hopeful sign that they have "brought fundamentalists into the process of compromise that makes up American politics".

### In God's Own Scientists — Creationists in a Secular World

(Rutgers University Press 1994), Christopher Toomey describes the Institute for Creation Research and other major anti-evolution organisations, and assesses their influence. Much as J.N.D. Darby's views have provided the framework for the interpretation of scripture and for prophetic ideas, so it is Henry M. Morris's flood geology that has prevailed in the interpretation of the Biblical creation and flood stories.

Toomey set out to understand the motivation for creationist ideas and to discover what sorts of people embrace creationist belief. An attraction of scientific creationism may be that it gives the appearance of providing a scientific authentication for important fundamentalist doctrines.

In Under God — Religion and American Politics (Simon and Schuster 1990), Gary Wills explores the huge influence of religion in recent American politics. Wills provides readable and scholarly accounts of the origins and influence of fundamentalist and other American ideologies which have nurtured major political figures — William Jennings Bryan from the 1920s, Gary Hart, Reagan, the Quayles, Jesse Jackson, Andrew Young and Mario Cuomo. Dukakis appears as a secularist who, to his political detriment, did not understand the place of religion in American society.

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### *Surfing:* **Women On The Sea Of Faith**

An anthology of personal reflections of non-realism in which 14 women—all members of the UK SOFN—describe their experiences of "exploring religious faith as a human creation".

For your copy, send \$16 to **Whirlwind Distribution** (Liz Robinson) Box 12256, Wellington or phone Liz on 04-568-2794



For those who have World Wide Web access, you may find these sites interesting:

The UK Sea of Faith: (our New Zealand Network is referenced on it):

<http://www.dungeon.com/~alchimia/sofhome.html>

Religious Books reviewed: <http://www.cup.org/Titles/RELIGIOUS.html>

Encyclopaedia of Mythica:

<http://www.pantheon.org/myth/>

Contra Mundum:

[http://www.wavefront.com/~contra\\_m/cm/cm.html](http://www.wavefront.com/~contra_m/cm/cm.html)

OneWorld Online: <http://www.oneworld.org>

Islam

(conventional exposition): <http://www.host.cc.utexas.edu/students/amso/articles.html>

(upbeat exposition): <http://www.uoknor.edu/cybermuslim/cybermuslim.html>

## Faith in Cyberspace

### 'And When You Pray ...'

The Reverend Kenneth Scott, of Ontario, wrote this ..

"Our universal chair-person in outer space, your identity enjoys the highest rating on a prioritised selectivity scale. May your sphere of influence take on reality parameters; may your mindset be implemented on this planet as in outer space.

"Allot to us, at this point in time and on a *per diem* basis, a sufficient and balanced dietary intake, and rationalise a disclaimer against the negative feedback of others.

"And deprogramme our negative potentialities, but desensitise the impact of counter-productive force. For yours is the dominant sphere of influence, the ultimate capability, and the highest qualitative analysis rating at this point in time, and extending beyond a limited time-frame.

"End of message."

### Glossary

Confused by all the shades and varieties of liberal Christian thought? Confused by acronyms? Perhaps the following will help.... It came from the UK Sea of Faith.

- **Christian or religious humanist.** One whose humanism finds expression within some form of Christian or religious tradition.
- **Humanist.** One who believes that all values are the product of human culture and are not derived from some extra-terrestrial source. Some forms of humanism are expressly anti-religious while others see religious language, ritual, art and practice as creative expressions of the human spirit.
- **Non-realist.** SoF uses "non-realism" to refer to the belief that God has no "real", objective or empirical existence, independent of human language and culture; God is real in the sense that he is a potent symbol, metaphor or projection, but has no objective existence outside and beyond humanity.
- **Post-Christian.** One who has passed through and gone beyond Christianity. The Post-Christian may acknowledge roots and values deeply embedded in Christian culture and tradition, but has cut loose or drifted free from Christian dogma, doctrine, and belief-systems, and perhaps from participation in any kind of church life and practice.
- **Post-Modernist.** The post-modernist believes that there are no objective facts; there is only language and interpretation. If "God" is a useful concept for structuring our experience, that makes him as real as anything else.
- **Radical Christian.** To some, radical Christian applies to those whose faith finds expression in radical politics, such as liberation theologians. More broadly it can refer to those who want to reform Christian theology literally "from the roots", which may or may not include taking a "non-realist" view of God and religious faith.
- **Reverent Agnostic.** One who is basically humanist, but believes that there is more to life than bread and ethics, i.e. a spiritual dimension. S/he doesn't believe in the supernatural, but may feel that creation has a purpose and that there is a transcendent force for good at work in the world.
- **Spiritualist.** The spiritualist may not be sure about God, but has a sense of the holy, the transcendent, and other dimensions, including possibly the magical. New Agers fall into this category.
- **Theist.** The theist believes that God exists realistically, objectively, independent of human thought; God created and sustains everything, is omnipotent and eternal, but is personal, interested and answers prayer.
- **SoF.** The Sea of Faith. The title is taken from Don Cupitt's book by that name, which in turn refers to Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach". Not to be confused with....
- **S of F.** The Society of Friends, also known as the Quakers.
- **SCM.** The Student Christian Movement. SCM Press is the chief UK publisher of liberal and radical theology.
- **SPCK.** The Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge.

## Booklist

This is a cross-section of the books cited at the Book Workshop at the 1995 Conference.

Uncommon Wisdom	F Capra
The Quantum Self	D Zohar
The Mythmaker: Paul & the Invention of Christianity	H Macabee
Paul and Hellenism	H Macabee
Cosmos, Chaos and the World To Come	N Cohen
Jesus Before Christianity	A Nolan
The Gospel According To Women	Karen Armstrong
A History of God	Karen Armstrong
Death of the Body	C K Stead
Telling Lies for God	I Plimmer
The Open Society and Its Enemies	K Popper
Eunuchs for The Kingdom of Heaven	U Ranke
Cosmos	C Sagan
Fire in the John	A Gingold
A Book of Angels	S Burnham
Uh-Oh	R Fulgham
Defend? All Flags	E Waugh
Manufacturing Consent	N Chomsky

This book includes excellent tutorial material on American Christian fundamentalism. The reader will learn much else besides. There are three chapters on "politics and pornography", a chapter on "feminism and fundamentalism", and four chapters on the background to the legal separation of church and state.

**John Maindonald**

## Oops ...

The Audio/Visual Resource List which accompanied Newsletter 15 failed to identify all the "B"-numbered items as books which may be borrowed. We've since sent a revised List to Branch contacts.

## New Tapes

This supplements the list referred to in the last item:

### New Audio Tapes

- A.21 The Faith of A Radical Christian  
Don Cupitt and Neville Glasgow
- A.22 and A.23 Rethinking Religion  
Don Cupitt
- A.24 The Nature and Role of Dissent In The Christian Church:  
Cupitt/Spong/Geering
- A.25, A.26, A.27 Tomorrow's Spirituality:  
Lloyd Geering; Dr Susan Adams; Neville Glasgow
- Conundrum:** A RNZ series investigating the moral implications of current affairs.
- A.28 Euthanasia/Censorship
- A.29 Protest/Religious Diversity
- A.30 (3 tapes) The Persistence of Faith  
Jonathan Sacks
- A.31 Unitarians/Krishnamurti
- A.32 God and The New Physics

Lloyd Geering at St Andrew's 1995

A.33 Speaking of God: Keith Ward and Stephen May (also **Creation Myths**)

### NZ SOFN 1995 Conference

- A.34 Buddhist and Christian Faiths in dialogue
- A.35 Passing It On: Transmitting Values Between Generations
- A.36 Faith Journeys: Peter Donovan, Jean Holm, Ian Harris, Barbara Calvert.
- A.37 Perspectives On The Future: Lloyd Geering

### New Video Tapes

- V.8 The Sea Of Faith (two tapes)  
Don Cupitt's seminal series
- V.9 Art Meets Science and Spirituality  
Panel discussions and interviews
- V.10 The Power Of Myth: (two tapes)  
Interviews with Joseph Campbell
- V.11 The Big Questions  
A series of interviews of Paul Davies
- V.12 Jesus, The Evidence
- V.13 Three Aspects Of Dying (one tape)  
i) Death On Request — the Dutch documentary on euthanasia  
ii) Kill Or Cure — a programme on euthanasia  
iii) The last interview with Dennis Potter
- V.14 Two People Who Shaped Western Thought: Carl Jung, Roger Bacon

### Enquiries

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07-578-2775.

## Next Newsletter

Copy deadline 24 June.  
Send to the acting editor, Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay. Diskette or e-mail (to cheer@vnet.ibm.com) are a boon but hard-copy is welcome too!

