



# Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

## NEWSletter

### From The Chairperson

This Newsletter comes to you two or three weeks after the Conference and therefore provides many insights into the Conference for those of you who were unable to attend. The 1999 Conference was one of the smaller conferences that the Network has held but was acclaimed by many as the best so far. The venue at Christchurch College of Education was ideal for a Conference such as ours – accommodation being just five minutes walk from the main campus and all facilities being so easily accessible and of excellent standard.

The Keynote speakers – Jane Kelsey, Lloyd Geering and John Peet – all provided stimulating and challenging lectures which provided plenty of discussion for the core groups.

Two of our Keynote speakers – Jane and John – accepted the invitation to become Keynote speakers at a late hour as a result of the cancellation of the two previously arranged speakers. The Steering Committee are most grateful to these two people and also to a number of Sea of Faith members who worked hard to obtain alternative speakers to our scheduled list.

The theme of ecotheology and the title of the conference *Mother Earth v Father God?* were explored thoroughly in elective lectures and workshops. The variety and depth of these was amazing. A number of us chose as our workshop a trip to Hinewai, a reserve on Banks Peninsula which is run by a Trust and ably managed by an enthusiastic botanist. Hugh Wilson welcomed us warmly to the reserve and gave us a wonderful account of the philosophy and development of the reserve and a short walk around this large area of natural vegetation.

As you read through the rest of this Newsletter you will obtain glimpses of the calibre of those who were involved in the conference.

You may regret that you were unable to be in Christchurch for the 1999 conference but hopefully you have already marked 6 to 8 of October in your year 2000 diary and plan to be in Havelock North for our first Conference away from the main cities.

The Steering Committee are already

planning for this Conference with its theme *Beyond Belief* and we would very much appreciate your ideas for speakers, etc. Please do write to me with ideas or phone (04-904-1954) or e-mail to [griffith@globe.co.nz](mailto:griffith@globe.co.nz)

On behalf of the Steering Committee I hope that your summer time will be one of relaxation and enjoyment of the festive celebrations in whatever form they take for you.

Jane Griffith, Sea of Faith Network (NZ)  
Chairperson 1999-2000

### From The Conference Arrangements Committee

Well, it was a long grind but it was worth it! When we in Christchurch put up our hands to run the 1999 Conference, we only had an inkling of what we were in for. However, it was great that things went smoothly, and it seemed to us that everyone gained enjoyment and satisfaction from the weekend we spent together.

Requested papers and notes will be mailed out in the next week or two, and the accounts will be settled and reported in due course. Copies of keynote speeches, and tapes of these and the panel discussion, will be available through the Resource Centre (see p10).

Here for the record, and in grateful thanks, are the names of those comprising the Arrangements Committee, who have worked so hard: Laurie Chisholm, Ian Crumpton, Sylvia Edwards, Alison Eng, John Goffin (convenor), Lorraine Goffin, Rob McLean, Nancy Rudkin, Dawn Tilly, and Louis Young.

John Goffin, Chairperson,  
Arrangements Committee 1999

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**Introducing .....**

**Faith in Cyberspace**

A show of hands at this year's AGM indicated that about 80% of those present had Internet access. To cater for the growing number of web-surfers in our membership we will provide interesting websites in each issue of the Newsletter..

**Searching the Web**

There is an easy-to-use searching tool at:

[www.alltheweb.com/](http://www.alltheweb.com/)

**Globalisation**

For some a spiritual leap forward, for others an economic disaster (see Editorial). Read the 1999 BBC Reith Lectures titled "Runaway World" at

[www.lse.ac.uk/Giddens/reith\\_99/](http://www.lse.ac.uk/Giddens/reith_99/)

**Brainfood**

The after-dinner speaker at this year's Conference, Dennis Dutton, was responsible for setting up an acclaimed source of abstracts and interesting articles at:

[www.cybereditions.com/aldaily/](http://www.cybereditions.com/aldaily/)

**Meta**

Meta is an emailing service dedicated to promoting the constructive engagement of science and religion. For information on how to subscribe (its free) go to:

[www.meta-list.org](http://www.meta-list.org)

**SoFN NZ Website**

[www.futuresgroup.org.nz/sof.html](http://www.futuresgroup.org.nz/sof.html)

**SoF Worldwide Chat**

As a SoF member you can join this chat group. Its free. There is a floating membership of about 80 subscribers, most of whom just read with interest the debates whipped up by the others. For information on how to subscribe, send an email to:

[noel.cheer@attglobal.net](mailto:noel.cheer@attglobal.net)

**SATRS Books**

You can order books directly from The St. Andrews Trust for the Study of Religion and Society, mercifully abbreviated to SATRS: [www.futuresgroup.org.nz/satrs.html](http://www.futuresgroup.org.nz/satrs.html)

**Book Review**

***The World To Come***

This review is by Janet Trisk, a member of the Sea of Faith Network in South Africa. She writes of herself "I am an Anglican priest and teach systematic theology in a seminary. More importantly I have this amazing love-hate relationship with Africa, I am besotted with my cats, am fascinated and inspired by the sea, cook (vegetarian food) and garden for creative outlets...."

"Oh dear," I thought as I opened Lloyd Geering's *The World to Come: From Christian Past to Global Future*, another book about the millennium." I need not have worried. This is not just another book about the millennium, that "human convention created by western culture, projected upon the planet...(that) has no actual existence, let alone significance" as Lloyd Geering describes it. Indeed, far from being just another book about the millennium, this most engaging book and its "plot" had me reaching keenly for the last chapter to "see what happens".

Despite the weightiness of the subject matter and enormous scope of material covered, the book is free of academic jargon and reads as easily as a good novel. The idea of the year 2000 is of course derived from a particular culture—western Christianity, and as Geering points out, based on somewhat dubious calculations at that. However, the thesis of the author is that the year 2000 is, in a symbolic sense, an important one. It is an invitation to recognise the end of both Christendom and Christian orthodoxy and the beginning of the global era. A distinction is made between Christian orthodoxy and Christendom, which is that society in which Christ rules and is the result of Christianity becoming the defining religious tradition, backed by the ruling authorities. Christendom came into being from about the 3rd or 4th century of the Common Era and persisted until the Enlightenment. Christian orthodoxy, which pre-dates Christendom, and

has survived its demise, is however, similarly in irrevocable decline, fatally eroded by modernism.

The key question of the book comes in the opening lines of chapter 5:

**"If Christian civilisation is no more, if Christian orthodoxy is disintegrating and if Christian Modernism has failed to rescue it, where does this leave Christianity? Is it also facing its demise?"**

Although there is no clear answer to the question: "What constitutes Christianity?", many would affirm that Christianity is not synonymous with Christian orthodoxy (or, more correctly, Christian orthodoxies). Christianity for many, is more a matter of lifestyle than belief. Even that lifestyle though, is in decline. Nevertheless, suggests the author, a stream of Christian influence persists and is one of the formative factors in the growth of a new global culture.

Having journeyed through 10 chapters describing the decline and fall of Christendom and Christian orthodoxy, the reader is faced in chapter 11, with the stark pictures of possible "scenarios for the future". If those scenarios don't give you nightmares, nothing will. From thermonuclear holocaust and world war to mass starvation, terrorism, social and economic chaos, the pictures are all eminently and terrifyingly probable.

It was therefore with a huge sigh of relief that I turned to the closing chapter "A Faith for the Future". "He's going to offer me hope," I said to myself. The fact that I was looking for answers and found fewer than I hoped, probably says more about me than about Lloyd Geering. There simply aren't answers. At best there are glimpses, suggestions, indications of possibilities, and all of them wrapped up as challenges.

Most readers of this book will, no doubt, be white, educated, residents of North America, Britain, Australia and the writer's native New Zealand. It seems uncharitable

therefore to criticise the book from the perspective of an African. As a South African, this reviewer is caught between two worlds. South Africa is both African and also quite different from the rest of sub-Saharan Africa. However the African context does pose some challenges to aspects of this book. As the writer himself points out, unlike other parts of the world, Africa is witnessing a daily growth in the adherents of both Christianity and Islam. There is no disintegration of orthodoxy in Africa. In the Christian context at any rate, there is a concerted effort by many theologians, clergy and laity to inculcate Christianity, drawing on the myths, traditions and cultures of African people. The attempt is to strengthen Christianity as an African religion, rather than one imposed from the west. Secondly, the faith of the future for which Lloyd Geering hopes, could only have been envisaged by someone who has the economic, social and political freedom to make the choices he suggests. For example, the call to "develop a lifestyle consistent with preserving the balance of the planetary ecosystem on which all living creatures depend" (page 159) is a value to which I subscribe. However, for many Africans, the vast majority in fact, who do not have sufficient food, fuel or any shelter whatsoever, this is an added cruelty. Every living creature is a possible meal. Every tree is potential fuel. Similarly, "to place the needs of the coming global society before those of our own immediate family, tribe or nation" (page 159), appears to many Africans, like a renewed attempt at the colonisation which wrought such devastating effects on our continent and cultures over the last 300 years, and from which Africa is only just emerging.

These may seem unfair criticisms, given the outstanding quality of the book, the broad scope of the writer's vision and the compelling conclusions he draws. Maybe the African situation (and

others like it) are simply the last vestiges of the tribalism which Lloyd Geering identifies. The future of religion in Africa is a matter for much debate. I raise the issues, because it is sometimes too easy to draw grand theories, or global conclusions, from our own perspective; and the perspective from Africa, for this reviewer, is complicating and confusing. This perspective should not detract from an excellent piece of writing. I enjoyed every page. The courage to see our situation and the ability to describe it is rare enough.

The vision and hope to offer possibilities for the future is nothing less than prophetic.

Janet Trisk

## Workshops

### Ecotheology: Worshipping at the Temple Within by Bruce Spittle

Bruce contrasted the traditional external entity God with a contemporary understanding of the god within and left the group to consider the significance:

(a) whether caring for our bodies and relationships is a logical outcome of the changing view of the nature of God

(b) if this is accepted as a reasonable objective, then how is this best done in practical terms.

A lively conversation followed which considered the quality of interpersonal relationships and community concepts and how these impacted on our health and well-being. We considered how these concepts of God affected our co-existence with all other living forms on earth.

Miri Jones

### Earthy Spirituality for and Evolving Planet by Len Pierce

In the opening exercise (structured one-to-one) sharing highlighted that spirituality is about what gives life. We were then introduced to Creation Spirituality as enunciated by Matthew Fox who shifts from the Fall/Redemption theology to a Creation Centred Spirituality where "God is in everything and everything is in

## Editorial

**"For better or worse, we are being propelled into a global order that no one fully understands, but which is making its effects felt upon all of us."**

So said Anthony Giddens in the 1999 BBC Reith Lectures (see *Faith in Cyberspace*, on page 2).

While SoF people by-and-large applaud the growing global consciousness so persuasively advocated by **Lloyd Geering** in his recent books and at this year's Conference, there are other groups as diverse as trades unionists and environmentalists who draw our attention to sinister implications: for example protests at the globalisation facilitated by the WTO.

Our other two keynote speakers were unimpressed by **economic** globalisation.

**Jane Kelsey** argued that New Zealanders "have been sucked into believing that there really are no alternatives. A large element of this is built upon the myth of economic globalisation ..."

**John Peet** quoted with approval Ken Piddington:

**"the assumption that in the globalized economy of perpetual growth there are no limits, no resources which are depletable, no hazards which hold the seeds of future economic collapse ..."**

Highlights of the three Keynote speeches occupy 60% of this Newsletter. Full versions of the speeches are available from the Resource Centre (see page 10).

Perhaps Lloyd's position embraces all positions, after all:

**"The loving care of Mother Earth, and all which that involves, is to a large extent replacing the former sense of obedience to the Heavenly Father."**

Noel Cheer, Editor

Next Newsletter March 2000,  
copy deadline February 15th:  
if Y2K doesn't get us!

God!"

Further, we heard of the role that Fox has played in the recovery of this lost spirituality. He gives us four paths of Creation Centred Spirituality:

- 1) path of awe and delight
- 2) suffering, darkness, letting go - letting be
- 3) listening to our own creativity
- 4) justice-making, compassion and celebration

Enough shared to whet our appetite!

*Gordon Seater*

#### **Eco-Engineering by Andrew Daker**

A most informative lecture, ably supported by interesting slides, illustrating the far-ranging and worldwide application of Eco-Engineering.

One example: vacuum toilets which separate urine and fecal matter reduce water usage from 107 litres per person per day, to 3.2 litres.

Engineers in the past have been absorbed in technical sophistication, mainly unaware of environmental impact. Awareness is growing of how ecologists and engineers can work together for the enhancement of human health and well-being. We should aim to mirror and live within the limits of natural systems. According to Andrew, this ideal is not as simple to realise as we may wish.

*Cora Leenman*

#### **Living a Spiritual Life by Margaret Lovell-Smith**

Margaret opened by sharing some of her own story of the past 20 years in which she found ways to support her own spiritual life without help from the Church and then left it over to us to run with the ball.

A very personal discussion centred around "worship, friends, community, ritual, participate, belonging, support." There was general agreement that people could, and many of us did, find these needs met outside the Church, except for the word "worship". In this case one's answer depends on how specific or how broad one makes its meaning.

The level of the quite personal sharing of experience made this a very satisfying workshop.

*Donald Feist*

#### **Aotearoa-NZ: Re-examining Our Past by Hugh and Rhona Thorpe**

Hugh and Rhona shared with us their exploration of a more-nearly **real history** of New Zealand. We had all been brought up on **Our Nation's Story** — a school publication giving a very limited "fairy-tale" history of colonisation.

James Belich's new text **Making Peoples** was highly recommended by Hugh and Rhona for its scholarship lightened with intriguing snippets. They outlined the structure of the book and took us through the major steps before colonisation—an area of history of which we knew little.

*Althea Morrison*

#### **Eco-Ethics by Eric Kirkness**

Eric presented this workshop in a manner which provided for regular group discussion. He quoted some interesting extracts from a variety of sources including Mechtild of Magdeburg, Hildegard of Bingen, Meister Eckhart, St. Francis and Julian of Norwich. He also made frequent reference to works by Matthew Fox. He concluded by saying "All creation is a blessing to us."

In a summary he wrote:

**"The Creation Spirituality Movement, widely sponsored by Matthew Fox, produces many new translations from mystics and theologians. For them there is no theistic God separated from us by original sin who could be pleaded with to intervene and save us from the evils of nature, but involved with everything and depending on us to join in loving creativity, so becoming part of the Divine heart and mind. In a sense, continually giving birth to God"**

#### **The Bible's Ecological Dimension by Bob Eyles**

Bob Eyles gave a non-literal interpretation of old Jewish stories, such as the Creation and Noah's Flood, [in order] to uncover the sound ecological foundations revealed in these myths. Not only in stories but in certain Psalms, especially Psalm 104 which describes the Creator's

method of maintaining creation through repeated cycles of decay and renewal. Bob emphasised that we are part of this system, not separate from it, being ourselves temporary repositories of minerals which inevitably will return to the earth to provide sustenance for other forms of life.

*(Reviewer unknown)*

**More Workshop reports in the next Newsletter**

### **In Brief**

#### **Islam in Coro Street?**

The *Guardian* of Nov 12 on page 7 reports that neighbourhoods based on Islamic principles could be set up in inner city areas, Salford and Bradford being mentioned. The local mosque and church would have a role in nominating residents. "Residents will be required to absorb the religious dimension in some of their life, but they will understand that if they are doing things for the benefit of the community, that is a kind of worship." The UK government is studying the recommendations.

#### **A Different Parliament**

The 1999 Parliament of World Religions will meet in Cape Town, from December 1 to 8. The organisers are **Council for a Parliament of World's Religions**

Email: [program@cpwr.org](mailto:program@cpwr.org)

Web site: [www.cpwr.org](http://www.cpwr.org)

#### **The End Is Nigh!**

**Last reminder to those who have not renewed their membership**

Subscriptions to SoF(NZ) are due on 1 July each year. If you have not already paid (either direct to the Membership Secretary or via the 1999 Conference) your Newsletter and the envelope will have a red dot on it. This means that, unless you send your subscription forthwith to the SoF (NZ) Membership Secretary, 249 Te Moana Rd., Wai-kanae we will, **with regret**, remove your name from our mailing list and you will receive no more of these excellent newsletters.

**Subscriptions:** \$15.00 within NZ \$22.00 overseas.



## Keynote Speech —Emeritus Professor Lloyd Geering An Ecological Faith For The Global Era

*[The following are selected highlights: the full version is available from the Resource Centre]*

Soon we shall reach the year 2000. It formally marks 2000 years of the Christian era. Yet, ironically we are coming to the end of the Christian era. What was once called Christendom—the domain ruled by Christ—no longer exists. We are nearing the end of the global supremacy of the Christian west.

\*\*\*

We stand on the threshold of a new era in human history. We could call this new era **secular, global and ecological**. It is **secular** because humankind is increasingly focusing on this-world. The other-world—the spiritual world of heaven, purgatory and hell—on which mediaeval Christianity fastened its attention and to which traditional Christians still look—has been slowly disappearing.

\*\*\*

The Protestant Reformers abolished Purgatory in the 16th century. Theologians in the 19th century began to reject Hell on moral grounds. This century the reality of heaven has been fading from reality. That leaves this-world—the vast space-time continuum—as the only real world. **It leaves life in this-world as the only life we ever live.**

\*\*\*

The new era is **global** because the current process of globalization is causing humankind to move from a chiefly tribal form of existence to one which is chiefly global. Humans the world over are becoming increasingly interdependent—economically, culturally and religiously. Only the rise and spread of a new global faith and accompanying culture can save us from ourselves.

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This global culture will rest on a shared view of the universe, a common story of human origins, a shared set of values and goals, and a very basic set of behavioural patterns to be practised in

common.

The new era may be called **ecological** because during the course of this century we have come to understand, as never before, the delicate balances in the ecosphere (or envelope of life) surrounding this planet and of which we ourselves are a part.

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A common response to secularism, globalization and ecology constitutes the raw material of the spirituality of the coming global culture.

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Can there be some global form of spirituality or religion which does for the global culture what the traditional religions did for their cultures? If so, it will not be based on any one ethnic tradition, as it was in the pre-Axial age. Nor will it emerge from some new divine revelation, as in the post-Axial age. To be consistent with the current secularism of our times, I suggest the coming spirituality must be naturalistic and humanistic in origin and form.

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**As globalisation forces the human species to create a global culture or perish, it is for each of the cultures and traditions to find out how best to adapt or transform their basic concepts and symbols for use in the coming global culture.**

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The modern secular world cannot be properly understood without acknowledging all it owes to the culture of western Christendom, which, however unintentionally, was chiefly instrumental in bringing the modern world into existence.

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The traditional ways of expressing Christian faith are suffering from a deep malaise. Since the beginning, the Christian message has been boldly presented as the Gospel—'good news'. Today it is no longer widely heard as any sort of news at all, good or bad. The Christian churches on the whole are intent on trying to

revive the past rather than looking into the future with faith.

\*\*\*

Traditional Christians view all change with caution and even with horror. **They speak of the danger of 'throwing out the baby with the bath water'. The metaphor is misleading ... There is no 'baby'; there is only the bath water**, or what I prefer to regard as the on-going Judeo-Christian cultural stream.

\*\*\*

[The] ongoing Judeo-Christian cultural stream is once again in a fluid state .... Along with all the other major cultural streams from the past it is flowing into a global sea. This new global sea of faith cannot help but be continuous with the Christian past, as it is also with the other great cultural traditions. The term 'sea of faith', apart altogether from its presence in Matthew Arnold's poem, is a particularly apt description of today's multi-cultural situation world-wide.

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Since most of us have been shaped by the Christian stream it is for us to ask how this stream can help the emerging global society create a global spirituality which will give global society an identity and cohesion. It will require a radical re-appraisal of the traditional symbols.

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If the term **God** continues to be used, it can no longer be taken as the name of an objective spiritual being. But it may remain an important religious symbol. ... It enables us to unify and order our experience of reality in the mental world we construct for ourselves. ... **All that is of lasting worth to us is, in fact, our God.**

\*\*\*

To worship God in the global era would mean, among other things:

- to stand in awe of this self-evolving universe of which we are a part;
- to marvel at the living ecosphere of this planet;
- to value life, both in our ourselves and all other creatures;

- to value what it means to be human—our capacity to feel, to love and be loved, to show compassion and selfless sacrifice, our capacity to think and to be engaged in the quest for what is true and meaningful;
- to be grateful to the successive generations of our human ancestors who have slowly created the various forms of human culture which have enabled us to become the kind of human beings we are;
- to accept in a responsible and self-sacrificing fashion the burden of responsibility now being laid upon us for the future of our species and for the protection of all planetary life.

\*\*\*

The word **Christ** is unlikely to play any role in the spirituality of the future. It has become too identified with supernatural power and exclusivity. But the man Jesus may certainly have something to offer. ... But it is not the Jesus who was elevated into a mythical heaven who is of relevance to us, but Jesus the fully human person.

\*\*\*

It was Jesus the secular sage whose long-term influence did so much, even by an indirect route, to bring the modern secular world into being. The rediscovery of this secular sage can continue to shake us out of our complacency, as he did long ago. He can challenge us to think for ourselves, spur us to act in faith, and then to take full responsibility for our actions.

\*\*\*

The real meaning of the Incarnation, Feuerbach asserted, was that, in mythological terms, it reversed the ancient myth by which our human forbears had unconsciously projected all of their highest human values into a supernatural personal being they called God.

\*\*\*

**The restriction of the incarnation to one human person, namely Jesus, was to miss its full significance. The incarnation of God applied to the whole of humankind.**

\*\*\*

The need for pure air, clean water, healthy food, adequate shelter, the regeneration of the species and the overcoming of all threats to human survival have once again become

the central issues to which we must 'devote' ourselves. They are genuinely 'religious' issues.

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Thus the spirituality of the future will draw not only from the more ideological and intellectualised faiths of the Axial Period, such as Christianity and Islam, but from the nature religions which preceded them.

\*\*\*

Our very earliest forebears stood in such awe of the forces of nature on which they depended, and on which we still depend, that they created concepts, symbols and a language by which to understand them. The concepts they created constituted the raw material not only of their religion but also of their 'science'. The basic realities they conceptualised to explain the natural phenomena they spoke of as gods and spirits. The ancients came to believe that the natural world operated with some degree of meaning and purpose because they unconsciously projected their own thoughts and feelings into the supposed gods of nature, including Mother Earth and the Sky Father.

**Our understanding of the natural world leads us to see it as completely lacking any ultimate purpose. It operates according to both change and necessity.** The chief, and perhaps the only, area of the natural world in which we find evidence of purposeful behaviour is in human activity.

\*\*\*

There are now signs that we are beginning to recover some of the awe which the ancients felt towards the natural world. But there is a difference between us and them. We are recovering some of their sense of dependence on the forces of nature. But we also recognise ourselves as a part of nature in all its complexity.

\*\*\*

A full appreciation of the whole ecosystem has led some to describe the earth itself in terms of an organism. The biosphere is living skin of the earth in the same way as bark is the living skin of the tree.

\*\*\*

In the spirituality of the coming global society the forces of nature, the process of evolution, the existence of life itself and the ecosphere

which sustains it in all its diversity, will be the objects of respect and veneration.

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**The loving care of Mother Earth, and all which that involves, is to a large extent replacing the former sense of obedience to the Heavenly Father.**

\*\*\*

The universe itself is so vast and mysterious that it is more than enough to induce in us that sense of awe and joyful gratitude which played such a role in past religious experience. The religious rituals of the future will celebrate the wonder of the universe and the mystery of life. They will revolve around the natural processes which have brought life into being and which continue to sustain it.

\*\*\*

The new religious rituals will be based not only on our relationship to the natural world. They will also celebrate everything we have come to value in human existence, such as the importance of healthy human relationships, and the rich inheritance of human culture.

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The spirituality of the global era will motivate us:

- to celebrate the fact and mystery of life;
- to devote ourselves to maximising the future for all living creatures whose destiny is increasingly in our hands;
- to place the needs of the coming global society before those of our own immediate family, tribe or nation;
- to develop a lifestyle which is consistent with preserving the balance of the planetary eco-system on which all living creatures depend;
- to refrain from all activities which endanger the future of any species;
- to set a high value on the total cultural legacy we have received from the past and which enables us to develop our potential to become human;
- to value the importance of the human relationships which bind us together into social groups and which enable us to become fully human;
- to promote the virtues of love, goodwill and peacefulness.

\*\*\*

- to value what it means to be human—our capacity to feel, to love and be loved, to show compassion and selfless sacrifice, our capacity to think and to be engaged in the quest for what is true and meaningful;
- to be grateful to the successive generations of our human ancestors who have slowly created the various forms of human culture which have enabled us to become the kind of human beings we are;
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- to develop a lifestyle which is consistent with preserving the balance of the planetary eco-system on which all living creatures depend;
- to refrain from all activities which endanger the future of any species;
- to set a high value on the total cultural legacy we have received from the past and which enables us to develop our potential to become human;
- to value the importance of the human relationships which bind us together into social groups and which enable us to become fully human;
- to promote the virtues of love, goodwill and peacefulness.

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In the past couple of years there have been signs that New Zealanders may be moving beyond the phase of grumbling acquiescence to demand something different. This possibility has have been resisted by those in business, politics, the public service, academia and the media who have an economic interest in, and/or an ideological commitment to, the free market agenda. They reassert the inherent validity of their economic model, and blame the failures on a refusal to 'finish the business'. But their voices no longer have the traction they once did.

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The New Zealand model of a self-regulating economy and society has become politically untenable.

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So how do we move forward differently? New Zealand cannot simply go back to what existed prior to 1984, even if people want to. Society has changed; the new generation of 'children of the market' has known nothing else.

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### 'free' markets can thrive without these relationships.

The emergence of New Zealand Businesses for Social Responsibility reflects this shift in economic thinking.

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In sum, the new regime will survive if it enjoys the active support of major political parties, the bureaucracy and private elites; if it appears to respond to popular concerns; and if the likely sources of opposition are co-opted, pacified or diffused.

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To accompany these political dimensions, the policies and laws through which change has been implemented were designed to provide a bulwark against a hostile future government. The 'fundamentals' of the New Zealand experiment—a deregulated labour market, a minimalist government, a strict monetarist policy, the liberalisation of trade, investment and markets, and fiscal restraint—were an ideologically coherent package premised on unfettered market

In the past couple of years we have seen the beginnings of a backlash against New Zealand's free market revolution. New Zealanders are moving beyond a grumbling acquiescence and saying no.

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Even strong free market supporters, such as Michael Barnett from the Auckland Chamber of Commerce urged the government in June 1999 to adopt a more middle-of-the-road approach.

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Regulation that was deemed unthinkable two years ago became government policy. Commercial and public criticism succeeded in forcing the government to concede the need for price regulation of the electricity industry and more rigorous constraints on the abuse of market power and natural monopolies.

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These challenges [many are cited -- ed] from such diverse groups of New Zealanders were mostly ad hoc attempts to defend the status quo—the belated drawing of a line in the

## "... the value of the 'social capital', the empathy and sympathy found in relationships between people ..."

For me, the starting point is to rebuild our economy to serve our social and communal needs. Our primary goal should be to reconnect New Zealand business to New Zealanders' lives, reflecting concern for jobs, local communities and social well-being. It is important to remember that in this country, as most others, the mass of economic activity still centres on small businesses that are locally based and serve the local market.

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Economist Tim Hazledine comments on the economic value of cultural and social cohesion:

**Belatedly economists are coming to appreciate the value of the 'social capital', the empathy and sympathy found in relationships between people ... Neither democratic government nor**

forces and a limited state. Each 'fundamental' was backed by legislation to implement and maintain that policy. Yet none of this legislation is entrenched; it can all still be changed by a simple majority of Parliament.

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The other barrier to changing the rules, at home or internationally, is the threat to investor confidence. The fear of how foreign investors or local vested interests might respond to changes in domestic law or policy has become a major impediment to change, even when a government has a strong popular mandate to do so. The deep penetration of international capital into New Zealand's economy and the economy's exposure to international markets have heightened this 'fear factor'.

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sand—although some proposed positive alternatives. They drew together pragmatic and shifting coalitions of business people, unions, farmers, local communities, the elderly and Maori—reflecting a residue of the historic compromises of the Keynesian welfare state, combined with Maori aspirations for economic survival and self-determination. Such a backlash is not unique to New Zealand.

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What the country desperately needs is a well-grounded debate on how to restore a link between economic policy and New Zealanders' economic needs, social values and cultural identities. There will be no consensus on what these are; but some understanding can be reached through a vigorously contested debate.



## Keynote Speech — John Peet, University of Canterbury A Guiding Ethic For The Socio-Economic System

[The following are selected highlights: the full version is available from the Resource Centre, see p10]  
The theme for this conference is "Mother Earth v Father God?". We will all have noted both the stereotypical images—apparently in opposition—and the question mark. I reacted to it by noting that I'm a father married to a mother—but we're not in opposition, at least not often! For us, it's a "both-and", rather than an "either-or", relationship, and that idea lies behind what I'm going to say today. My position is that Sustainability is a bit like Salvation—not an individual but a total concept.

The situation in which we find ourselves was summarised a few months ago by former Director of the Environment Division of the World Bank, Ken Piddington—*"People are still walking, talking and even winning votes on the assumption that in the globalized economy of perpetual growth there are no limits, no resources which are depletable, no hazards which hold the seeds of future economic collapse, a totally stable climatic pattern and a nicely behaved bunch of citizens who do not want to undermine the enormous power of those who control state and corporate interests."*

Martin O'Connor ... comment[s] that: *"Economic analysis, as it developed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, has tended to portray a human economy as a self-equilibrating mechanism, amenable to prediction and mechanical control."* In the closing weeks of the ... 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of us see an instrumental or mechanical vision of the economic system as hopelessly inadequate as we come to deal with large-scale ecological-economic problems.

O'Connor et al also point out: *"We no longer have a simple equation between Science, Progress, and Growth"* *"The science of emergent complexity (post-normal science) is inseparable from considerations of ethics and politics"*

The way our society  
is run nowadays  
largely reflects the  
utilitarian ethical  
approach, which is  
implicit in our  
Government's  
adherence to  
neoclassical  
economics and,  
implicitly, to its  
parent, neoliberal  
moral philosophy.  
The approach is, in  
my opinion,  
inherently damaging  
to the fabric of  
Society and the  
Environment, but  
alternatives are very  
difficult to introduce  
into policy  
discussions.

In what follows, I first look briefly at utilitarianism, then suggest alternative approaches, to clarify what I see as an appropriate moral position and an ethical framework that can put it into practice.

I want to make the point that Sustainability—or Sustainable Development—is what is driving me in what I have to say today. I am not going to **define** the term, but I am going to **declare** it as a basic moral principle.

Amartya Sen, winner of the 1998 Nobel Prize in economics [wrote] *"Utilitarianism has been the dominant ethical theory—and, inter alia, the most influential theory of justice—for much over a century. The traditional economics of welfare and public policy was for a very long time dominated by this approach, initiated in its modern form by Jeremy Bentham."*

Utilitarianism ... is one important, and arguably necessary, component of an ethical framework, but is not sufficient of itself. That is because, as currently practised in the dominant economics ... it:

- places humans in a privileged position such that other species are of no more than instrumental importance;
- places a low value on the welfare and interests of future generations;
- ignores the fact that markets do a poor job of measuring full costs and benefits, and
- ignores the fact that markets alone cannot handle issues of scale and distribution.

O'Connor et al comment that because of scientific uncertainties and political choice requirements, it is impossible to estimate with any reliability, the incidence across societies, present and future, of ecological costs and benefits of different resource management actions. Decisionmaking cannot be based on even exhaustive calculation of the outcomes of resource allocation choices, because we can never know the future—it is indeterminate, not just uncertain.

Instead, we need to move towards a form of "procedural rationality", where the concept of rational behaviour relates to the decision-making process itself, and hence to the ethical base position adopted by those participating in it.

A theological response to the problems listed above could encourage us to look to the God of the Mountains rather than to the Almighty Dollar. But if we limit ourselves to that aim, we may not get very far. For example, how would we address questions such as:

- How large should the population of a region grow?
- What is an appropriate level of resource consumption or greenhouse gas emissions?
- How much of the habitat of other species should we take over for human use?

These questions have legitimate utilitarian connotations and cannot be ignored, no matter how distasteful we may find the task. So what is the proper place for utilitarianism?

In response, I want to assert that these questions are in fact secondary, and that **the primary need is for humanity to adopt an overarching moral commitment to sustaining the full complexity and beauty of Life on Earth**—in other words, of Creation.

This implies consideration of the interests of future generations and of other systems and species.

It is thus more than simple "enlightened self-interest", because we cannot know the future, let alone our own likely place in it.

For a systematic expression of a moral position on Sustainability, however, I believe an explicit ethic is needed to rationalise our actions.

There are a number of ways in

which one may approach this issue. A common distinction is between the deontological (e.g. Kantian "categorical imperative") and the consequentialist or utilitarian (e.g. Benthamite "greatest good for the greatest number") viewpoints ... As I understand it, ... deontology addresses the significance of individual agency, albeit in a holistic way. Consequentialism or utilitarianism reduce the issue of right action to one about the sum of the piecemeal good or harm that there would be in all the various elements of the vast complex of potential consequences of the action. This good or harm is taken to be itself elementary or given. Deontology, by contrast, has a whole-before-parts, holistic orientation.

### I assert my regard for the moral integrity of the total system, not just for some of its parts

I am drawn towards the deontological position, as a means of acknowledging the integrity of the total system of life, and of humanity as parts of that system. However, I also recognise that my interpretation goes substantially beyond the conventional deontological position, in that I assert that moral regard must be had for systems (assemblages) comprising many persons and the natural systems on which they impinge. Indeed, I assert my regard for the moral integrity of the total system, not just for some of its parts.

In practice, my approach (in concert with other colleagues) has been to adopt an ethic that makes most sense to me, in the context of addressing the sustainability of society, economy and environment,

jointly seen as a complex evolving supersystem. This, in my opinion, is closely analogous to a deontological position.

Our small group has, in effect, chosen to develop a concise statement from Aldo Leopold's Land Ethic, namely that ... *"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."*

Bossel's Ethic of Partnership ... is a more generic, *a priori* statement that relates to all living or non-living systems, present and future: *"All systems that are sufficiently unique and irreplaceable have an equal right to present and future existence and development"*.

Once it is acknowledged that people in community have a viewpoint, and that their viewpoint is relevant to policy-making and decision-making outside the bureaucratic or corporate groups that currently dominate policy discussions, it could be possible for a process to be put in place to "guide society" in a direction that is actually chosen via participatory, deliberative processes involving citizens.

Pruzan ... points out that: *"An action is not necessarily ethical just because I can accept it. It is ethical if all parties involved can accept it. Ethics refers both to a conversation process and to the action which is the product of the conversation."*

I think we should first declare as our moral imperative, nurture of and avoidance of further damage to Mother Earth, because She is the embodiment of Creation. Having made that commitment, we could perhaps look to the Father for tools that will enable us to serve Her more creatively.

## The Sea of Faith Network (NZ)

The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) is an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint. The Sea of Faith Network itself has no creed. It draws its members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions. It publishes a regular Newsletter, assists in setting up of local discussion groups, and holds an annual Conference. Its home page is at [www.futuresgroup.org.nz/sof.html](http://www.futuresgroup.org.nz/sof.html) For membership details and for the address of your nearest local group, contact the Membership Secretary, Roy Griffith, 249 Te Moana Rd, Waikanae, Phone 04-293-1954. Members may obtain tapes, books etc from the Resource Centre managed by Suzi Thirlwall, 34 Briarley St, Tauranga, phone 07-578-2775. **The only copy appearing in this Newsletter that may be construed as reflecting Sea of Faith policy is that which is accompanied by a by-line of a member of the Steering Committee.**

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