



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

NEWSletter

From The Chairperson

THE THEME our Conference this year is **Beyond Belief** and in contemplating what to write for this Newsletter the aptness of the theme struck me. It is beyond belief how people treat each other.

On the negative side during the month of June the James Whakaruru Report has highlighted how society, institutions and individuals neglect those too young to speak for themselves.

George Speight and his cohorts have shown how concerns for some can jeopardise the lives of others. It is beyond belief that a person might consider setting light to a crowded building or that religious wars can continue whilst the innocent starve. Gloomy pictures depicting a lack of respect for each other.

But it is also amazing that two young exchange students would risk their lives to save a person who would otherwise have drowned. Beyond belief too is the difference a smile makes as you walk along a street. Have you noticed how that smile becomes infectious?

With this Newsletter you will receive a registration pack for Conference. I do hope that you will be able to join us for what is sure to be a great occasion. All three of our keynote speakers are well known in their field and have published books. So whether or not you plan to be at Conference you might like to read some of their writings.

A new introduction this year at conference is **Focus Groups**. These will be running concurrently with field trips so that the more cerebral have the opportunity to spend time in discussion whilst those who learn by experiencing and seeing will have the chance to follow the cultural strand of the Conference on one of the trips.

I do hope that the winter is treating you kindly and that you are finding it an opportunity to catch up with some interesting reading.

Jane Griffith

Chairperson Sea of Faith Network (NZ) 1999-2000

Editorial

MARCEL PROUST wrote:
"We do not receive wisdom, we must discover it for ourselves, after a journey through the wilderness, which no-one else can make for us, which no one can spare us, for our wisdom is the point of view from which we come at last to regard the world".

Stephen Batchelor used this quotation on the flyleaf of his **Buddhism Without Beliefs** (see *Book Reviews*) but we can appropriate it as we move towards our Conference. Going "beyond belief" there is more to be found than the aridity of scepticism, there is more than merely "the evidence". There is the life lived, experienced and valued.

Even the business life can be (must be?) part of the religious life as explained in the item on **Triple Bottom Line Reporting and Auditing**.

But, what were we believing in the first place? How unique was **our** revelation? The item on page 6 offers a challenge.

Noel Cheer, Editor

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Faith in Cyberspace

Responsible Business

These websites support the article on page 5: **"Triple Bottom Line Reporting and Auditing"**

- Socially Responsible Investing:
www.naturalinvesting.com
- Business for Social Responsibility:
www.bsr.org
- The Body Shop:
www.bodyshop.com
- The Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economics (CERES):
www.ceres.org
- World Business Council for Sustainable Development:
www.wbcsd.org
- The above reference came from the PQ Office whose website can be found at
www.pq.godzone.net.nz

Miscellaneous

- The website for the St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society (SATRS) has been moved to satrs.wellington.net.nz (note, no "www")

The change allows the site to be updated more frequently and to hold more data. The old URL will still work for some time.

- The hypertext edition of Charles Henderson's study of religion and science, God and Science, can be found at www.crosscurrents.org/godand.htm

(Your editor can recommend the chapter on Tillich)

Vacancies on the Steering Committee

The Annual General Meeting of the Network occurs at the annual Conference and this year. Four of the existing committee will be retiring: Yvonne Chisholm, Roy Griffith and myself have all completed our four year term of office and Janet Davidson is having to step down because of work commitments. As the remaining committee members have indicated a willingness to stand for re-election at the AGM this means that there will be 4 vacancies on the Steering Committee.

Let me remind you about the constitutional matters which affect the Steering Committee and the work of the committee. The Steering Committee is elected by Network members and the constitution allows for up to 12 members on the committee, each being able to serve for no more than four years consecutively. The committee themselves appoint a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer from their number. The committee meets together twice a year as a group—at conference and then for a full day meeting in February. All other meetings of the Steering Committee are by teleconference.

This situation has been in place since the committee became a national one three years ago.

At present there is representatives on the committee from Auckland, Bay of Plenty, Hawke Bay, Wairarapa, Kapiti, Wellington and Dunedin providing a voice for large and smaller centres. This arrangement has worked very well in the past three years although the Treasurer, who fully endorses the concept of a national committee, does remind us that adding

even more geographical diversity would increase the cost of teleconferences! The present committee have noted the wisdom of having more than one person from a region of the Steering Committee to provide mutual support for undertaking tasks.

What of the work of the committee? It is two-fold. Firstly to maintain the day to day running of the Network. Secondly to arrange the programme for the annual Conference.

It has been our custom to involve all members of the committee in specific tasks—either on a day-to-day running basis or arranging specifics of the Conference. Having read about the Steering Committee maybe you feel that it is a job that you would like to become involved in or you may have ideas of someone else who would provide a useful contribution. If so please send your nominations to me to arrive by **Saturday 9 September**.

Please check with the person you nominate their willingness to stand for election. The Steering Committee have recognised the importance of maintaining a reasonable gender balance on the committee. Those seeking re-election are: Bruce McMillan (Dunedin), Noel Cheer (Wellington), Barrie Allom (Wairarapa), Alan Goss (Napier), Suzi Thirlwall (Bay of Plenty), Joy and Owen Lewis (Auckland).

Hugh Gilman (Wellington) has recently filled an existing vacancy on the committee and will be taking on the role of Membership—Secretary/Treasurer. Naturally all nominations will be welcome but especially for women members of the committee.

Jane Griffith
249 Te Moana Road, Waikanae
e-mail: griffith@globe.co.nz

Year 2000 Conference Update

Alan Goss chairs the Arrangements Committee for this year's Conference. His address is 4 McDonald Street, Napier and his phone number is 06-835-9594. He writes:

Included with this Newsletter is a registration pack for Conference 2000 to be held at Woodford House, Havelock North, 6 - 8 October. Enquiries are already being received about the Conference which will be held in delightful surroundings, with a wide range of topics related to the overall theme "Beyond Belief". Numbers will be restricted to about 200, so it is important to complete and return the Elective, Workshop, Focus and Cultural Trail (i.e. Field Trip) forms along with the Registration form as early as possible.

The keynote speakers are:

- **Prof. Martin Prozesky** from Natal, South Africa
- **Dr. Ruth Smithies** of the Catholic Justice and Peace Development Committee
- **Dr. Michael King** who is well known for his books on Maori-Pakeha themes

There will be 6 Electives to choose from, 16 Workshops and, for those not going on a Cultural Trail on the Saturday afternoon, 6 Focus groups. The Focus groups are an innovation at this Conference, with the participants discussing a particular issue in depth and in whatever manner the group decides.

Field Trips—we have called them Cultural Trails—are the other Saturday afternoon option with a range of choices. Napier's famed Art Deco architecture tour is on the list, also Weleda (NZ) Ltd and Hohepa Homes which come under the Rudolf Steiner

MEMORIAL of REV Dr. IAN JOSEPH CAIRNS

Ian, while the minister of the First Presbyterian Church of Otago, was a foundation member and a very loyal staunch supporter of the Dunedin Branch of Sea of Faith.

At first, the meetings were held in the Manse and later they were held in the Stevely Room, First Church. With the very loyal support of his wife, Mae, both as a member of the Sea of Faith and as a home provider, he was always the very willing host.

He had profound insights of faith and theology and shared these openly with the group.

His wide experience in ministry in Indonesia as well as in New Zealand gave him an inclusive approach and respect for other denominations and religions. For example, he arranged discussions with some of the local churches such as Muslim, Roman Catholic, Hindu, Anglican as part of the Sea of Faith intellectual explorations.

His quiet, unassuming manner, his unobtrusive confidence and competence and dedication to the task of ministry gained the deepest respect of all the members of the Dunedin Sea of Faith.

We give thanks for Ian's service In His Name.

Don Pearce, Dunedin.

umbrella, the Kidnappers Art Trail, and a tour of some Hawke's Bay vineyards. A brief outline of what each offers is included in the package. Transport will be provided at a cost of \$20 per person, to be remitted along with your Registration fee.

In his latest book Don Cupitt remarks that what some see as religious decline, we see as religious fulfilment. Conference 2000 may well be an opportunity to explore and celebrate that.

Alan Goss
Local Arrangements Committee

Book Reviews

Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up!

Suzi Thirwall manages our Resource Centre. Here, she reviews the SoF (UK) publication ***Will The Real Jesus Please Stand Up?***

This A4 user-friendly magazine with large type and interesting, challenging and thought provoking black and white pictures — maddeningly unattributed — offers a historical review by "scholars, would-be scholars, poets, essayists, journalists and even theologians" on the "real Jesus".

The coloured words of David Boulton [editor of the UK "SoF" Magazine] introduce the base of the document: extracts from a public reading in Manchester Cathedral (on the undoubted co-incidental date of 1 April 2000) at a one day conference entitled "Honest to Jesus" whose principal speaker was the US Biblical scholar, Robert Funk.

Via the various quotes Jesus emerges as the embodiment of thought, a reflection of the source as much as a substantial indisputable figure. He is described variously as a "penniless teacher" a "sugar-coated

figure" "a scholarly bad joke". Sources range from known figures such as Albert Schweitzer, HG Wells, John Masefield—to lesser known individuals such as Havelock Ellis, intriguingly described as "radical and sexologist".

I found it entertaining, readable, amusing. Whether it is worth the purchase price depends on what you perceive as dollar value for 25 pages of type.

Epworth books are bringing it in [see below - ed] and I will be ordering a personal copy if for nothing else but the delight of having it on the coffee table when the Jehovah Witnesses call. And a favourite quote?

"How many other peoples have produced wonders like this? ... Do you think all the other stories are legends but that your story of Jesus alone is noble and convincing? Christians usually flee headlong from cultured people, who are not prepared to be deceived; but they trap illiterate folk ... 'Do not ask questions; only believe and thy faith will save thee'"

It was written in the 2nd century—a quote from Celsus.

Suzi Thirwall

[You can get your own copy of this book from Epworth Books, Freepost No. 14013, P.O. Box 6133, Wellington. (no stamp needed).

The cost is \$19.95 (incl.GST).

Alternatively you can email them at

sales@epworthbooks.org.nz or fax them on (04) 385-6114.

If you're squeemish about submitting your credit card number by email, then fax is for you. - ed]

"One of the most dangerous aspects of the fundamentalist phenomenon is that it seems incomprehensible to the liberal or secular world"

Fundamentalism

*This is not exactly a book review but rather a interview with Karen Armstrong about her latest book **The Battle for God***

The militant religiosity that we call fundamentalism has surfaced in all the major faiths in the twentieth century. It constitutes a reaction against and a rejection of modern Western society, but it is not a monolithic movement.

Each fundamentalist movement has emerged independently and is a law unto itself, sometimes differing from (or in violent opposition to) other fundamentalist movements within a single faith tradition.

The fact that fundamentalism has erupted in almost all cultures indicates a widespread and worrying disenchantment with modern society, which so many of us experience as liberating, exciting and empowering. Countries such as the United States, Egypt and Israel are deeply polarized, split into two camps, one which feels positive about secular modernity; the other passionately hostile to it.

[These] two camps appear to be in an incipient state of war, as witnessed in such incidents as the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma; terrorist attacks on foreign tourists in Egypt, designed to bring down Mubarak's government; and the assassination of President Yitzak Rabin in Israel.

One of the most dangerous aspects of the fundamentalist phenomenon is that it seems incomprehensible to the liberal or secular world.

The two camps within the same society scarcely speak the same language and have few values in common. Projects that can seem self-evidently good to a liberal — such as democracy, peace-making, concern for the environment, the liberation of women, or freedom of speech—can seem evil or even Satanic to a fundamentalist.

Fundamentalism often expresses itself violently, but it springs from deep fear.

Every single fundamentalist movement that I have studied in this book is inspired by a dread of annihilation. Fundamentalists are convinced that the secularist establishment is determined to wipe them out, even in the United States. Hence, it is an embattled form of faith; fundamentalists believe that they are fighting for their own survival, the survival of the religion, and the survival of civilized society. They feel that their backs are to the wall and that they must fight their way out of the impasse in which they find themselves.

Source is
<http://www.ivybooks.com/knopf/aak/qna/armstrong.html>

Buddhism: A Fragment

Patti Whaley, of the UK SoFN Steering Committee, reviewed Stephen Batchelor's **Buddhism Without Beliefs** in the May issue of the UK SoFN publication which was recently renamed "SoF".

A quotation:

"It's useful ... to see the furor raised among Buddhist circles by Stephen Batchelor's book. Batchelor's aim is to set aside the aspects of Buddhism that have

turned it into a religion — the development of a complex body of metaphysical ideas, the elite priesthood of monks and gurus, the insistence on rebirth, the political conservatism — and extract the core characteristics of Dharma practice: compassion, awareness, emptiness, freedom."

"Central to Batchelor's approach is a proper understanding of agnosticism ... [which] ... keeps us on our spiritual toes; the absence of any final answers acts, not as a discouragement, but as an opportunity to continually reimagine and recreate the parameters of our existence."

"[His] vision of Buddhism is secular, agnostic, decentralised, and democratic; small wonder that some Buddhists regard Batchelor with the same sort of alarm that some Anglicans [and not just Anglicans! - ed] express towards Don Cupitt."

[**Buddhism Without Beliefs**, Stephen Batchelor, Bloomsbury 1997/1998, paperback, \$27.95 in NZ]

"Instead of presenting himself as a saviour, the Buddha saw himself as a healer. He presented his truths in the form of a medical diagnosis, prognosis and treatment."

(page 6)

Triple Bottom Line Reporting and Auditing

by Robert Howell, The Religious Society of Friends

This item is reprinted, with permission, from PQ Broadsheet, the Newsletter of The Public Questions Committee of Methodists,

Presbyterians, Churches of Christ and Quakers (New Zealand). It suggests some ways in which we might go "Beyond Belief".

Triple bottom line reporting and auditing refers to a method of accounting which independently audits and publicly reports social and environmental outcomes, as well as the usual financial outcomes, of an organisation's activities.

The phrase 'triple bottom line reporting and auditing' has only been coined during the last few years, but has arisen out of developments during the last few decades. There are three main historical streams contributing to the development of triple bottom line reporting and auditing. They are distinct, but not necessarily separate. They are: ethical investing; international principles and codes; reporting and auditing.

I will describe these three streams, consider implications for central and local government, and then suggest possible actions which Friends could adopt consistent with their historical testimonies.

Ethical Investing

Ethical investing is not new to Quakers, but during the last few decades there has been a general growth in the number of funds established with moral, environmental and local community development purposes. These include funds to avoid investment in apartheid in South Africa, funds to promote environmentally responsible practices and funds to promote local community investments.

Out of these initiatives arose the need to identify ways of screening out unacceptable opportunities, and selecting relevant investments.

An example is the **Domini 400 Social Index** which was the first

On Revelation

PEOPLE who vacation or live near an ocean or a lake, now and then have occasion to witness the sun shining across the water, either at dusk or dawn. When the sun is right at the horizon its rays seem to concentrate in a single pathway across the water, moving directly to the point where the observer stands. As you watch, for a time, the intense solar light appears to shine across the water on you alone. Everywhere else, it seems, all over the water and along the shore, the grey pall of the twilight is hovering.

OBVIOUSLY, a person positioned a mile down the shoreline perceives the sun in exactly the same way. How foolish it would be, then, for either one of the observers to deny that the sun was shining directly on the other. How foolish it would be for one of the observers to maintain that he alone, not the other, sees the pathway of light.

WHAT is obvious about the sun shining across the waters has not always been considered obvious in the sphere of religion. Sometimes, when a religious tradition is young, or when it is isolated for a long time, the question about what the other [person] sees does not even arise. But usually, sooner or later it does: Do not other [people] also have a direct revelation of God? Has God chosen to disclose himself only at the point where *we* are standing?

[WHILE the Hindu religion, for example, is *inclusivistic*] Judaism, Christianity and Islam, in their classical forms and in various ways, have been self-consciously *exclusivistic*. They have generally affirmed that the light of Divine truth and reality has shined on them alone, and that other religions live either in the twilight or altogether in darkness.

*H. Paul Santmire in Critical Issues in Modern Religion,
Prentice-Hall, New Jersey 1973 pp365-366*

index for socially responsible investors in the USA, and has been used since 1990 to monitor the performance of 400 US corporations that pass multiple, broad based social screens.

By 1997 the amount of USA investment undergoing some form of social screening had reached \$1.185 trillion. This represents 9 percent of all USA investment assets.

International Principles and Codes

In order to develop measures that could be used to identify acceptable investment options, it became clear that there was a need to develop principles and codes.

One such code has been developed by **The Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility**. ICCR is a North American association of 275 Protestant, Roman Catholic and Jewish institutional investors including denominations, religious communities, pension funds, health care corporations, dioceses, publishing companies and foundations worth an estimated \$US90 billion. Joining with their counterparts in Britain, Ireland and Canada, they have published Principles for Global Corporate Responsibility.

Public Reporting and Independent Auditing

There have been many initiatives by companies and organisations to develop methods of social and environmental reporting. **The Body Shop** is an example of [such] a company. It has a publicly available Values Report consisting of independently verified statements of the company's policies and performance on social, environmental and animal protection issues. These include sustainability, managing growth,

energy and waste, controlling pollution, human and civil rights, and operating safely and responsibly. This report contains performance targets regarding its employees, franchises, suppliers, and community involvement activities. It records where targets have been met or otherwise, and commitments to new targets for the year 2000 and beyond. An example of a target is "A timetable will be agreed by the end of 1997 for planting trees in Littlehampton and elsewhere, to eliminate or compensate for all CO₂ emissions from the UK company car fleet by the year 2010".

An example of an organisation is the **Global Reporting Initiative**, an alliance of international organisations headed by the U.S.-based organisation CERES (Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Economies). It was established in 1998 to "help bring together and harmonize the numerous initiatives on corporate environmental reporting that have developed independently around the world, shaping them into one set of coherent, consistent global standards."

Another example is the **World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD)**, which is a coalition of 125 international companies, formed in January 1995. Its members are drawn from 30 countries and more than 20 major industrial sectors. The NZBCSD is a partner of the world body. Its members include Fletcher Challenge, NZ Dairy Board, The Warehouse Group, Watercare Services.

Implications for New Zealand Central and Local Government

The majority of triple bottom line reporting and auditing initiatives have been in the private sector,

but government's responsibilities should not be overlooked, as they have a significant stake in the economy.

Annual reports of government departments, SOEs and Crown Entities have a heavy focus on financial matters. Some aspects of socially responsible practice in the management of human resources, including equal employment opportunities and safety factors are reported. However, there is little reporting on environmentally sustainable practices and their effects, and reporting on governance practices is generally inadequate. There is no independent auditing of social and environmental practices.

For government departments, SOEs and Crown Entities, there should be a requirement to

- adopt a code of principles for both social and environmental matters that is based on best international practice. (These should then be the measure against which their social and environmental practices are audited);
- separate the responsibilities of the Government as an owner or governor from those as a regulator;
- commission independent audits and publicly report.

Generally speaking, local government reporting does include more aspects of environmental and social practices than central government reporting, but its governance reporting is similarly inadequate. Local government should adopt similar requirements to central government.

Implications for the Society of Friends

Possible actions which Friends could consider include:

- supporting the Principles for Global Corporate Responsibility

and encouraging other New Zealand Churches to do so;

- supporting and encouraging New Zealand companies to do triple bottom line reporting and auditing;
- with other New Zealand Churches, promoting triple bottom line reporting and auditing for all investment funds generally, and for religious investment funds in particular;
- encouraging government to adopt triple bottom line reporting and auditing for its activities;
- walking the talk with Quaker Investments Ethical Trust, by developing governance policies in dialogue with its stakeholders, reporting on the social and environmental impacts of its activities, and having these independently audited.

See "Faith In Cyberspace" on page 2 for the URLs of many organisations cited.

Local Groups

Dunedin

In a multi-month Newsletter they report that in June they will be addressed by John Shallcrass on "Thinking About The Bible Today" and "Thinking About The Gospels".

In July there will be a series on "Honest To Jesus" led by Albert Moore.

On July 27th Arthur Templeton will address them on "Theology, Geology and Cosmology: They Are Sisters".

Contact: Marjorie Spittle 03-476-4322

Auckland

In April they were addressed by Dr Pat Alley on "Hazards of the Medical Life". After covering the hazards (e.g. unsociable hours, alcohol and drug abuse, student debt, information overload, cadaver dissection ...) he went on to describe possible fixes and

made a distinction between "normal" and "client-professional" relationships.

In May they had small-group discussions of Don Cupitt's "Democratic Christian Humanism".

They planned a talk by Rev, Darryl Milner on "Stages of Religious Development" for their June meeting.

Contact: Beverley Smith 09-630-7473

South Auckland

Elsie Montgomerie reports that they "pick the eyes out of" the Newsletters for discussion material at their meetings.

Contact: Bernard Moore phone (09) 267-6924

Bay of Islands

Mary Johnson writes:

The Bay of Islands SoF group meets according to the commitments off its members. We do not have a regular meeting night or venue. **Contact telephone numbers are (09) 401 0412 or (09) 405 9617.**

Members traveling through this area can be assured of a warm welcome at our meetings.

The closet astronomers of the district made themselves known to us in March when we invited Frank Andrews of the Carter Observatory to present an illustrated lecture on our galaxy and beyond, using pictures from the Hubble telescope. The audience of 200 people were treated to an unforgettable evening. With a huge wall for a screen and using his magnificent highly powered projector, Frank took us on a journey that was in every sense "out of this world".

Marketing the exercise was an interesting project. The negative response that the largely unknown name "Sea of Faith Network" received, meant that we had to work hard on

publicity. Ticket prices were modest and the venue was a school hall. Perhaps the package was too good to be taken at face value and people were suspicious that yet another "religious group" was after them. Our advertising carried names and contact telephone numbers which brought in a few inquiries about our group identity. Speaking personally I always have difficulty trying to describe the function of our organization to others, and spend more time explaining what our organization is not than what it is. Group members suggest that changing the title to "The Sea of Faiths" might help. As a heretic with a reputation to protect, I would like to see a more radical change.

Genetic Engineering

Capital City Forum, an initiative of the Public Questions Committee, the JPD Commission of the Wellington Catholic Archdiocese and the Anglican Social Justice Commissioner, is having a one-day forum on the subject of genetic engineering on 25 August 2000 in Wellington.

The forum will be considering a Christian ethical framework with which to view developments in this field, as well as considering the benefits and risks of these new technologies.

For more details either write to Capital City Forum P.O. Box 1937, Wellington or check their website at

<http://www.pq.godzone.net.nz/ccf/>

Subscriptions Now Due For 2000/2001

The financial year for SoFN (NZ) ends on 30th June. This means that the subscriptions for the new year are now due.

The subscription is \$15 per household (or \$22 per

household for members residing out of New Zealand)

A few members have already "paid up" for the coming year. It will be possible for those coming to Conference to pay at the same time as paying the Conference fee—otherwise please send your subscription to:

**SoFN (NZ) Membership Secretary,
133 Orangi Kaupapa Road,
Northland.
WELLINGTON.**

In Brief

UK SoFN Conference 2000

Your editor will be attending the 13th Annual UK Conference at the University of Leicester from July 25 to 27. The theme will be **Faith in the Future?**

Look for a report on the next Newsletter.

Know Your Rites!

The third London Open Conference will be held on Saturday April 28, 2001. The title is **Human Rites: Sacred and Secular?**

Know Anybody Like This? You, Maybe?

"[The late William D. Hamilton, widely regarded as the most important evolutionary thinker since Darwin] likened his resistance to Christianity to "the Irishman who was asked whether he liked oysters and he replied, no, he didn't like oysters and he was glad he didn't like them because if he did he'd be eating them all the time when he hated the damned things."

~~~~~  
"as a heretic  
with a reputation  
to protect ..."

*Mary Johnson*



## Spong: Retired but not Retiring

**Here I Stand: My Struggle for a Christianity of Integrity, Love and Equality.** By John Shelby Spong. Harper. 464 pp.

John Spong's autobiography was published to coincide with his retirement as Bishop of Newark at the end of January this year. He began a lectureship at Harvard University on Feb. 1. Below are excerpts from three reviews found on the Internet. No comprehensive or conclusive view is attempted but your editor would welcome review comments on this book, or any other book likely to be of interest to our membership.

### From Kirkus Reviews

This engaging, fluid memoir from [John Shelby] Spong, Episcopal Bishop of Newark, of his theological odyssey is five parts theoretical, ten parts intramural, and perhaps one part personal and spiritual.

Spong's controversial positions regarding racism, sexism, and homophobia in the Episcopal Church have won him responses from "I believe you are a prophet" to "if all else fails, I will try to rid the world of your evil presence personally."

Questions of moral credibility moved him to defend the rights of African-Americans, women, and homosexuals within his church, and the need to make his church relevant to this day and age prompted a reconsideration of biblical narratives in the light of Einstein and Darwin and the Big Bang.

Though Spong is clearly a man of the mind, he has spent much of his time dueling, when not actually duking it out, [*"to engage in a fight and esp. a fistfight"*, Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary] with a reactionary church hierarchy, calling them on their professed convictions, straightening his words when they have twisted them, taking heat for tinkering with entrenched and, he feels, outmoded and potentially lethal to his faith theological concepts that nonetheless have dispensed much religious security over the years.

Ultimately, this is a professional memoir, with little personal material: Spong's [first] wife's long mental illness is treated here with the same distance he suggests he handled it with at home and [with] scant spiritual probings.

While Spong makes both church politics and his theological celebrations fascinating, readers may feel dismayed that a man who has so much to say about biblical exegesis consigns the transcendental and the divine to the back seat.

### Mark Silk, *The Wilson Quarterly*

Spong has devoted himself to fighting the good fight within his church. **Here I Stand** gives an inside account of various political struggles in Spong's early parishes, his diocese, and the Episcopal House of Bishops; he does not hesitate to blast his reactionary opponents and scold his pusillanimous allies by name. There is material here for a latter-day Trollope, but Spong possesses neither the literary gift nor the sense of humor to pull it off. St. Peter may read him a lesson on humility before letting him through the Pearly Gates.

*continued...*

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Look for our website at <http://www.futuresgroup.org.nz/sof.html>

## Just Browsing?

You could *join* us ...

.... by paying an annual subscription of \$15 per household if within New Zealand or \$22 if out of New Zealand.

*You will receive five informative and stimulating Newsletters each year and be eligible to borrow material from the Resource Centre, join our international Internet discussion list and attend the Annual Conference*

If you wish to become a member then please complete the form below and post it with your subscription to:

The Membership Secretary  
SoF Network (NZ)  
133 Orangi Kaupapa Road  
Northland  
Wellington  
(New Zealand)

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Phone:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Please tick if applicable:**

- ☐ I am/We are also interested in joining a Local Group
- ☐ I am/We are willing for my name/our names to be given to other Sea of Faith Network members in my/our area.

I/We first heard of the Network from:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## **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.

Its WWW home page is at  
[www.futuresgroup.org.nz/sof.html](http://www.futuresgroup.org.nz/sof.html)

It publishes a regular Newsletter, assists in setting up of local discussion groups, and holds an annual Conference. Members may obtain tapes, books etc from the SoF Resource Centre.

For membership details and for the address of your nearest local group, contact the Membership Secretary, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Northland, Wellington. You may fill in and detach the form on the reverse of this.

**To offer a comment on any material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact the Editor:**

Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street,  
Titahi Bay, Phone 04-236-7533  
Fax 04-236-7534, email:  
[noel.cheer@attglobal.net](mailto:noel.cheer@attglobal.net)

*The only copy appearing in this  
Newsletter that may be con-  
sidered as reflecting Sea of Faith  
policy is that which is accompa-  
nied by a by-line of a member of  
the Steering Committee.*

*Spong, continued ...*

### **Dr Mark Thompson,**

*Mark Thompson, lecturer at Moore Theological College, Sydney.*

[This autobiography] is dominated by Spong's conviction that his leadership has provided the direction which will allow the Christian church to survive into the next millennium.

Those of us who have become acquainted with Spong only through his controversial writings will be surprised to discover another side to the man as he tells his own story. The tenderness of his references to his first wife Joan and his obvious devotion to her throughout her long mental and physical illness is immensely attractive. His courage in the face of the racial segregation rampant throughout America in the 1950s and 1960s, his willingness to take a stand, face the consequences head on, and the intense personal loyalty he displayed to those who shaped his life and thinking (e.g. Bishop John Hines and Bishop John A. T. Robinson), are all admirable qualities. Readers of this book will not be able to escape the conclusion that Jack Spong is a man who feels things deeply and attempts to live out his convictions with integrity.

Nevertheless, the book also parades the flaws that have become all too obvious in his previous writing. There is an arrogant tone to the book. Spong repeatedly casts himself in the role of a rare and genuine leader, one of very few who sees things clearly and accurately. All those who disagree with his ideas or oppose his initiatives are portrayed as fearful, ignorant, and often rude and dishonest as well.

In debate, Spong repeatedly plays the man rather than the ball. There is no evidence of serious engagement with the ideas of his opponents. He is remarkably inconsistent at this point, for this is precisely what he accuses his opponents of doing. Evangelicals in particular are often the targets of his most intemperate remarks. ... His conclusion about evangelical religion is that it "appears to breed dishonesty and that the more overtly pious people attempt to be, the more they must hide their anger and their lack of character, not just from others, but from themselves".

The issue of homosexuality and in particular homosexual clergy is the dominant theme of the latter part of the book. Spong will not accept "the evangelical party line about the Bible condemning homosexuality". Instead he repeatedly appeals to the now quite discredited notion that sexual orientation is determined by the level of testosterone in the pregnant female. He claims that this indisputable medical evidence requires us to advance beyond the position that regards homosexuality as "a sin that cannot be accepted" to one which recognises it as "an aspect of our humanity that needs to be affirmed".

**Jack Spong clearly believes he has been involved in an honest search for the truth of God. He insists that throughout his entire career he has sought "to give a credible voice to Christianity that was in dialogue with the real world". He belittles "those who act as if there is something called 'the faith once delivered to the Saints'".**

Yet the sad truth is that he has so immersed himself in the world broken and distorted by sin that he has become a part of it, unable to see the answer any longer and unable to bring anything other than the chimera of false comfort. Our world does not need to be confirmed in its rebellion but rather called to faith and repentance in the light of the incredible mercy of the living God.