



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

NEWSletter

From The Arrangements Committee

CONFERENCE 2001: 21-23 September

Another outstanding Conference coming up. They have been getting better and better. We plan to keep up the trend.

Kings College will again be an ideal venue. A tranquil environment with easy access to all facilities.

Keynote speakers, elective lectures, workshops and focus groups, all cover a wide spectrum of topics to satisfy your interests.

Resolve to attend. You'll enjoy it all.

While full attendance is encouraged, half-day registrations make it possible to attend only a specific lecture.

Through the Registration Pack, provision is made for you to renew your yearly subscription to The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) along with your Registration, and you can also order the UK "SoF" magazine. This 28 page, A4, six times a year magazine is very well worthwhile subscribing to.

Lecturers and workshop leaders: please remember the lunch provided at noon on Friday, and the Introductions Meeting at 1.00pm

The enclosed **Registration Pack** tells it all. Return the **blue** registration sheet quickly for early selections. We have put extra Packs in envelopes where we know there is more than one member per household. If we've short-changed you then call us on 09-413-8513 -- and leave a message if we're out.

We look forward to renewing old friendships and making new ones.

John Irwin & Barbara Miller
Arrangements Committee Chairpersons

Editorial

There's a fund of rich material in this Newsletter: the author Jonathan Miller reinforces a theme frequently found in SoF circles — that philosophy at base is about words; the New Scientist magazine suggests a physical basis for mystical experiences; a sidebar item looks at the origin of the word "symbol"; four books are reviewed; and the activities of ten of our Local Groups are summarised. "Faith In Cyberspace" gives some URLs for The Jesus Seminar and "In Brief" offers nuggets of interesting information. Two snippets of poetry round-out page 10.

We need to think quite soon of the possible composition of the Steering Committee for next year. If you know of someone (perhaps yourself?) who could make a positive contribution then please let me know. Its one of the issues that this Steering Committee will turn its attention to when next we meet in cyberspace (conference telephone, actually), on July 26.

We are greatly helped by the work of the Conference Arrangements Committee ably co-chaired by John Irwin and Barbara Miller who take the detailed work of the Conference on their shoulders.

This year's Conference is going to be great — see you there!

Noel Cheer, Chairperson of the Steering Committee and Newsletter Editor

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"Words Are All We've Got"

Jonathan Miller, physician, satirist, author, opera and theatre director, is a prize polymath. In 1962, he had graduated in medicine from Cambridge and was performing in the satirical revue *Beyond The Fringe* when he discovered the book that would shape his world view for the next four decades.

"It was J. L. Austin's *How To Do Things With Words* and it was undoubtedly the most important thing, intellectually, in my life," says Miller.

The late Austin, an Oxford philosopher, took a rigorous, philological approach to moral philosophy, analysing the way in which what we say determines how we live.

"I suddenly became dazzled and fascinated by the idea of doing things with words," says Miller. "It seemed to me to be a wonderful discovery, simply to look at one's own language, to turn one's ears inward, and realise that there was a whole class of utterance, like contracts, orders, threats and promises, where the form of words was not just a commentary on what was going on, but a way of bringing about what was going on.

If someone says 'I hereby crown you king', for example, it's not just an account of what the person is doing. It's making a king. Forty years after I first understood this, I still find it marvellous."

Austin's verbal nit-picking hardly fits the romantic view of the philosopher-king shedding light on the world's problems: "An awful lot of people think of philosophy as being terribly metaphysical and giving answers to the meaning of life

and so forth," says Miller. "When I say, 'Read Austin and see what I think philosophy should be like' they'll say: 'But it's about language!' Well, philosophy is about language.

"Then," says Miller, warming to his theme, "you'll get these wonderful New Age people who say 'But the really interesting things can't be put into words, it's a sort of vibe' and I think 'Oh f off! Words are all we've got'.

"Say you want to talk about free will and responsibility," offers Miller, "the best way to do this is to look at the range of verbal offers — the pleas, excuses and exculpations — we use to get ourselves off the hook when we think we are guilty. It may seem trivial, but the trivial is often where you find the answers. I've always had this great passion for looking at the overlooked, and what I love about Austin is that he directs your attention, via the commonplace, to some of the really big philosophical questions, such as, 'How do we differentiate between things which we bring about and things which merely happen to us?'

'If you tackle these questions head on, you just get brain-ache. But by asking those questions in a fairly modest, apparently philological way, just picking away at the knots in the language, Austin cracks the problem.'

This was found on the Web at <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/0,,322-114457,00.html>

From The Editor

Miller's imaginary exchange with a New Age advocate:

'But the really interesting things can't be put into words, it's a sort of vibe' and I think 'Oh f off! Words are all we've got'.

might provoke a reaction in some of our readers. He is asserting that feelings are not sufficient — that we have to be able to articulate them.

If you're sufficiently steamed up about this (or the next item, or anything else, for that matter) why not send a "Letter To The Editor" at 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay?

Hardwired For God?

This item is summarised from the article "In Search of God" in the New Scientist magazine, 21 April 2001.

More than half of people report having had some sort of mystical or religious experience. For some, the experience is so intense that it changes their life forever.

Must Involve The Brain

It is broadly agreed that all our thoughts and sensations — however unusual — must involve the brain. Experiments on the brain have led neuroscientists to suggest that the capacity for religion may somehow be hardwired into us. If so, why do people's religious experiences differ so profoundly, moving some so deeply while leaving others cold?

Oneness

One scientist is keen to study the sensations that are unique to religious experiences but shared by people of all faiths. One of these is the sense of "oneness with the Universe" that enthralled Einstein.

The goal of people involved in these mystic encounters was to feel their everyday sense of self begin to dissolve, so that they became one with the image. One meditator described the feeling as like "a loss of boundary ... as if the film

of your life broke and you were seeing the light that allowed the film to be projected."

A neurological mechanism has been suggested. During meditation, part of the **parietal lobe**, towards the top and rear of the brain, was much less active than when the volunteers were merely sitting still. This is the exact region of the brain where the distinction between self and other.

Broadly speaking, the left-hemisphere side of this region deals with the individual's sense of their own body image, while its right-hemisphere equivalent handles its context -- the space and time inhabited by the self.

Maybe, the researchers thought, as the meditators developed the feeling of oneness, they gradually cut these areas off from the usual touch and position signals that help create the body image.

Awe and Significance

Furthermore, neuroscientists generally agree that the feeling of deep awe and significance originates in a region of the brain distinct from the parietal lobe: the "emotional brain", or **limbic system**, which lies deep within the temporal lobes on the sides of the brain.

The limbic system is a part of the brain that dates from way back in our evolution. Its function nowadays is to monitor our experiences and label especially significant events, such as the sight of your child's face, with emotional tags to say "this is important". During an intense religious experience, researchers believe that the limbic system becomes unusually active,

tagging everything with special significance.

The Place of Ritual

The richness that limbic stimulation brings to experience may explain why religions rely so heavily on ritual. The deliberate, stylised motions of ceremony differentiate them from everyday actions and help the brain flag them as significant. Music, too, can affect the limbic system. Meditation has also been shown to induce both arousal and relaxation, often at the same time.

Interpretation

What people make of that presence depends on their own biases and beliefs.

The experiments show that mystical experiences consist of not only **what** we perceive, but also **how** we interpret it.

There's a third aspect, too: the reinforcement that humans, as social animals, get from

sharing religious rituals with others.

Where To Next?

So where does all this leave us? For whatever reason -- natural or supernatural -- our big, powerful brains clearly allow a novel sort of experience that we call religion. But it's difficult to say much more than that. The only way we can judge the reality of an experience is by how real it feels to us. As one researcher put it: "You can have a dream and it feels real at the time, you wake up and it no longer feels as real."

The problem is, when people have a mystical experience, they think that is **more real than baseline reality** -- even when they come back to baseline reality.

The votes are obviously not all in yet

Summarised by Noel Cheer

Symbols and Wholeness

In *Ego and Archetype*, Edward Edinger explains that "symbol" comes from the Greek *sym* ("together, with") and *bolon* ("that which has been thrown").

"In original Greek usage, symbols referred to the two halves of an object such as a stick or a coin which two parties broke between them as a pledge and to prove later the identity of the presenter of one part to the holder of the other.

"A symbol was thus originally a tally referring to the missing piece of an object which when restored to, or thrown together with, its partner recreated the original whole object. This corresponds to our understanding of the psychological function of a symbol. The symbol leads us to the missing part of the whole person. It refers to our original totality. It heals our split, our alienation from life. And since the whole person is a great deal more than the ego, it relates us to the supra-personal forces which are the source of our being and our meaning."



Book Reviews

"Paradise on Earth"

by Lloyd Geering

This review by Janet Trisk, a priest from South Africa, is reproduced with permission from "Port-holes" a "News and Views" periodical of the Sea of Faith in the UK.

Despite its "booklet" size of 57 pages, Lloyd Geering's new work "Paradise on Earth" has the stature and depth of a full-length book. As I have come to expect (and respect) from him, "Paradise" is another example of Lloyd Geering's lucid, simple and profound writing.

In some ways "Paradise" is a sequel to "The World to Come", picking up on the idea of the inevitability of globalisation and our possible responses to it. Globalisation implies one inter-dependent world. Is this a good world, or might there be one better, the author asks. Might we hope for paradise? The author reviews the quest for Paradise from Abraham's wanderings, through Jesus' promise of the Kingdom of God, to Teilhard de Chardin's evolutionary omega point. That he is able to do so in fewer than 25 pages is quite remarkable. That he conveys a sense of the broad sweep without losing sufficient of the detail is extraordinary. In the broad sweep he identifies patterns of other-worldly versus this-worldly hopes for paradise, concluding that the vision from Mount Nebo in our own time now suggests that the view of Paradise for the twenty-first century is a view of paradise here on earth. Conceding that there are many different visions of this Paradise, the author nevertheless suggests that there are "some aspects of a desirable future world which will be reasonably common" (29). He suggests that a world in which there is clean, air water and food for all would offer the bare necessities. This, along with security of land tenure and clothing and housing for all, comprise the three elements of that common vision.

Is this paradise just a "pious hope" (31) asks the author, or can a faith in the future be awakened so as to make the vision a reality? I very much want to subscribe to the author's encouraging "hope.....against all the odds" (57). Maybe it is my inherently pessimistic nature, maybe it is

the experience borne of a life lived in South Africa, that makes me doubt this possibility. As I write this review, violent re-occupations of land in Zimbabwe are taking place and a British drug company has instituted a law suit against the South African government for attempting to develop cheaper generic substitutes to drugs used to enhance the lives of those living with HIV/AIDS. Despite promises from countries in the North and West, debt relief continues, at best, to trickle though. It seems to many of us from the South, the two-thirds world, that no number of warnings that we indeed inhabit one world, will make a difference to the consumerism, violent injustice and cynical lack of care exhibited by so many of the world's wealthy.

Lloyd Geering also concedes that there is no easy optimism regarding this earthly paradise. Restrictions on our freedom, the chaos and disruption of change, the relinquishing of cultural and religious tribalism are just some of the obstacles which face us. Furthermore, he warns, the longer we delay, the more likely we shall bring about one or more global catastrophes. There is no time to waste in bringing about this brave new global consciousness.

This is a challenging book on many levels. It challenges my pessimism, my lack of hope. I am forced to ask myself: To what extent do those of us who fail to see hope become part of our self-fulfilling prophecy of gloom? I hope the book will challenge more people in the two-thirds world to question and disrupt the global injustices (and to recognise where we perpetrate our own). I hope it will challenge many in the one-third world to think about, and respond to, the situation of our interdependence. I hope fervently that it will not only be read by the "converted".

I want so much to believe in Paradise on earth. I also wonder to what extent it is as remote as any other Paradise for which humanity has searched? This should not prevent us from the quest though. Perhaps we will even discover that the quest itself is Paradise.

Janet Trisk

Time and Tide, Sea of Faith beyond the Millennium

O Books (in association with the SoFN (UK) 2001 Reviewed by Lloyd Geering

This is a collection of essays selected and edited by several members of the UK SoF and dedicated to the memory of Pamela Donahue, who organized the annual SoF Conferences for the first 12 years.

Its purpose is to stimulate thought and discussion on where the SoF Network is heading, if anywhere. Stephen Mitchell, current Chairman of the Steering Committee, usefully selects for comment some of the salient events in the life of the SoF to date.

Don Cupitt's contribution, 'Prologue', is very short – almost a precis of what he said at our own Conference in 2000, when he suggested that the Sea of Faith offers 'a first draft of the church of the future - the first truly liberating church'.

Karen Armstrong writes on 'God and the Future' and warns us we do not need to work out our metaphysical beliefs before we begin to live in a religious way. Instead of puzzling about the reality or the non-reality of the divine we do better to practice the compassion taught by all the great religions; if we do so, we shall then glimpse the sacredness that gives meaning to our lives.

Rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok introduces us to Jewish Reconstructionism and Jewish Humanism, which have already become a part of the mainstream of Jewish life in USA and which are not perceived as a threat to faith in the way the Sea of Faith has been seen by the traditional church.

Paul Davies, a physicist of international repute, finds Don Cupitt one of the most exciting theologians but discusses where he parts company with him. He believes the SoF needs to take on board all that the scientific community can provide by way of understanding this ingeniously ordered universe.

Richard Holloway, the controversial Bishop of Edinburgh, who wrote *Godless Morality*, discusses Don Cupitt, relativism and the separation of church and state, under the title of 'Mixed Bathing in the Sea of Faith'.

Graham Shaw tells how and why he moved from being an Anglican priest to the role of Clerk of a Quaker Meeting.

These are a few of the dozen or so contributions, all of which are worth discussing by

people in the SoF, as we work our way forward. It is to be hoped that it will be followed in the future by more of such symposia.

Lloyd Geering



Reforming Christianity

By Don Cupitt,

Published by Polebridge Press, 2001

Reviewed by Lloyd Geering

When the term "Reformation" was used in the 16th century it referred to the reformation of the Church. Even then, Protestant and Catholic had no quarrel with one another concerning roughly 70% of Christian doctrine; and since that time the gap between them has been closing.

But a new and much more serious gap has been opening up, this time between the traditional forms of Christian belief and the secular world in which it lives. What is called for now, claims Don Cupitt, is the reformation of Christianity itself, if it is to continue to be a living religion.

The church is in no mood for reform. Don notes that, even after two centuries of intensive study of the New Testament, Christian preachers still go on declaring that Jesus said 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life', and scholarship has made little difference.

It is probably too late for the church to carry through the reform of Christianity for 'the churches and religion have become disconnected from one another'.

The reform will have to come from the post-Christian world outside church officialdom. For even though it is post-Christian, it nevertheless is the bearer of Christianity, having emerged out of it.

Don discusses the need to reform Christianity rather than present us with a new set of Christian doctrines to replace the old ones. The time for authoritative dogma is over.

He draws a contrast between 'Church Christianity' and the recovery of the 'kingdom religion' of the original Jewish teacher. The latter, says Cupitt, is far more interesting than 'the deferred salvation that grew up around the God incarnate of church religion'.

He sees globalized Western culture as a partial fulfilment of the 'kingdom religion'. Even though secular, it is much closer to what Jesus taught than is 'Church Christianity'. But

the church simply sees the secular world as a humanist rebellion against God and the repudiation of Christianity. In one sense, then, the reforming of Christianity has been going on for some time – up to 300 years – but it is making its appearance outside of the church and we have not been recognizing it for what it is.

"To reform Christianity, we must quietly detach ourselves from 'church' ways of thinking and living and instead develop and propagate the new 'kingdom' ways of thinking...we will have to let the church go, because we are certainly not going to replace it with anything like it. In the Kingdom there is of course no distinct religious society making exalted claims on its own behalf".

But if Christianity is thus radically reformed, will it still be Christianity? Perhaps not. Does that really matter? Labels play a useful but only secondary role, even though even Cupitt wants to 'cling on for a while yet to the old brand name'.

This book is much easier to read than some of Cupitt's earlier and more philosophical ones. It provides plenty of material for people in the Sea of Faith Network to chew over and digest.

Lloyd Geering



A Churchless Faith.

Faith Journeys beyond evangelical, Pentecostal & charismatic churches.

Alan Jamieson 2000. Published by Philip Garside Publishing Ltd, Wellington, New Zealand ISBN 0-473-07021-9 Typical retail \$NZ29-95

Reviewed by Noel Cheer

This book is a remarkable accomplishment and not just for the fact that in all its 189 pages about people who leave churches it does not mention the Sea of Faith Network! This is even more surprising perhaps because the author uses several marine analogies which SoF members would warm to. One of the most effective is that of the desire of some people who are playing ball on the beach under an instructor's supervision to "swim outside the flags". Another talks of people who desert a cruise liner in a foreign port in order to see some unapproved scenery.

This book is based on the author's PhD thesis and describes the various motivations of people who have left the "EPC" (evangelical, Pentecostal and charismatic) Christian churches. Little reference is made to mainstream churches.

Despite a sympathetic treatment of James Fowler's "Stages of Faith" the author carries two assumptions through the book: the first is that Christianity is "right" and the second is that the church is the appropriate place in which to express it, even though the church should be tolerant of, and supportive of, those who leave it. Fowler's classic *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco, Harper first published 1981) details six stages of spiritual development. Fowler looks on them as positive. Jamieson seems more ambivalent, perhaps because the loss of people with growth potential from a church organisation (and typically their spouse and children with them) can sap the church of vigour. Interestingly, too, Fowler wrote the Foreword to this book.

The author occasionally discloses his own theological vocabulary as on page 73 the word "faith" is synonymous with dogmatic orthodoxy.

Those disaffected by their church are identified in four groups: "**Disillusioned Followers**", "**Reflective Exiles**", "**Transitional Explorers**" and "**Integrated Wayfarers**". SoF people would probably fit into the last two categories. Their approach to faith (and the way that the author uses that word suggests that he means the content of what one believes to be both true and valuable) moves through the spectrum from "unexamined" to "self-examining" to "emerging self ownership" to "autonomous".

None of those interviewed would accept the criticism of the church that they left that they were "back-sliders" and even some would say that the reason why they left was that their church was becoming too liberal. But most left for reasons more familiar to SoF people: stodgy liturgy, static theology, inept leadership.

Perhaps most valuable for SoF readers is the comparison that the author develops near the end (p170) between "marginal" and "liminal" orientations to the faith structures that the leavers have quit. The marginal view depends upon the old structure as its point of reference -- in fact the person defines herself as a "leaver" or an "ex".

The liminal view takes one over the threshold (a "limen" is a threshold) and into a new way of doing things. It is not itself the new way, but it is the end of the old way. We might say that many approach SoF with a marginalised perspective but eventually see the worth of crossing the threshold into Fowler's fifth stage where we move on from polar tensions; a simplistic view of truth; the reduction of myth to the literal; and we move on to where we can appreciate other expressions of faith.

But, and again perhaps disclosing his calling as a Baptist pastor, the author quotes with approval Paul Ricoeur "beyond the desert of criticism, where we wished to be called again". The implication being that even the Integrated Wayfarer might return to happily playing ball on the beach under the watchful eye of the instructor.

Noel Cheer

A Miscellany

Jenny Chisholm writes of some of her recent reading:

Thomas Cahill's *Desire of the Everlasting Hills* -- the world before and after Jesus. Its treatment is in some ways similar to Verme's - *The Jesus the Apostles Knew*, Paul's Jesus, Luke's Jesus etc -- at less depth, but with an Irish touch of poetry.

I haven't read his *How the Irish Saved Civilization*, but *The Gifts of the Jews* does for the Old Testament what the present volume does for the new, and the three of them are the first part of a projected seven-part "Hinges of History" series.

In a backgrounder On the Doubleday website to *Gifts of the Jews* he says: "I always attempt to base myself on the broad middle consensus of contemporary scholarship (Brown, Collins, Meier, Sanders, et al.), avoiding the sensational and fashionable extremes (Crosson, Funk, Levenson, Thiering, et al.) that pass so quickly into oblivion. I'd like each reader to close these books and be able to say: Now I know what it would have been like to have been a slave in pagan Ireland, to have felt the passion, exaltation, and remorse of David when he played his lyre and wept hot tears, to have been his friend, to have been touched by him."

From a group called CANA (Christians Awakening to a New Awareness) comes a little discussion book called *A New Framework for Christian Belief*, which in sections headed The Bible and Revelation, God, Jesus the Christ, Human Beings, and The Church, lists contrasting statements for consideration, the first "a familiar, traditional understanding" and the second "a contemporary understanding. So we have such pairs as:

- The Bible is the sole source of God's revelation -- The Universe constitutes our primary source of revelation.
- Jesus' actions and words are accurately recorded in the Gospels -- Jesus is the person of whom the Gospels speak: a product of memory, reflection, revision and community experience.
- "We believe in one God, the Father Almighty, Creator of Heaven and Earth" -- We experience the Ground of Being as the creative, loving and wise Reality that underlies our ultimate concerns. This we name God.
- Jesus was omniscient and omnipotent from his conception -- Jesus was limited by his humanity. His understanding of himself, of his mission and of God, developed during his lifetime.
- We human beings were granted dominion over the Earth to use the natural world for our benefit -- We human beings are not above the natural world but embedded within it. As evolved creatures with intelligence, we have a duty to care for it.
- Theology is the prerogative of the teaching authority of the Church. -- Theology is everyone's concern. It is the formulation of our deepest spiritual experience, our exploration into God.
- And much more.

I think some of this is stuff that our group's already visited and dealt with; there will be some in the SoF to whom it will speak. It was £6 (six pounds) from CANA, 102 Church Road, Steep, Petersfield, Hampshire GU32 2DD, England. I sent extra for overseas postage (UK cheque made out for "Not more than £8") but they were happy to cover it -- don't know whether they'd go on doing this if they get a number of NZ requests.

Jenny Chisholm

Local Groups

Dunedin

In April they looked at "Ethics and the Individual". In May Professor Gerald Pillay's topic was "The nexus between individual faith and social solidarity." A good backgrounder topic for this year's Conference.

Contact: Marjorie Spittle, 03-481-1418

Kapiti (Ephesus)

So far this year they have had a visit from a former vicar who now works as a senior manager, they have had a presentation on Celtic Christianity, they have discussed Easter, the ethics of genetic engineering and grappled with how to pray while believing in a non-theist God.

Yet to come is John Robert's *Thinking Theologically in Aotearoa New Zealand*; "Painting in the Spirit" and a repeat of their last year's workshops by Jane Griffith and Jill Harris.

Contact: Maureen Roxburgh 04-297-2037

Wairarapa

They rotate their place of meeting, moving between members' houses. They have either dealt with, or plan to deal with: the cultural roots of the West found in Iran; Buddhism; Jeremy Rifkin's *The End of Work*; "Space and Time; The Jesus Seminar; and Oberammergau.

Contact: Jennifer Bradshaw 06-304-9565

Auckland Central

John Thornley addressed them on Music in Worship -- it was a wide-ranging talk and began with a quotation from Joseph Campbell: **"What we're seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experience on the purely physical plane will have a resonance with our own innermost being and reality, so that we actually feel the rapture of being alive."**

Kelvin Grant, on "Architecture and Worship", asked: "What exactly

is worship? And how do spaces help us to worship?" He noted that worship can include our response to our awareness of mystery; awareness of ourselves as a community; being taken out of ourselves and the creation of awe.

David Clark has presented the last in his series on worship.

This group plans to run a series of studies on ethics, working from Bishop Richard Holloway's *Godless Morality -- Keeping Religion Out Of Ethics*.

Contact Jim Feist 09-630-7473

South Auckland

They meet every second Sunday at 2:30pm in Friendship House, Manakau -- everyone is welcome. At present they're studying Ian Harris' *Creating God, Recreating Christ*. Earlier subject matter for discussion included Religious Education as well as some selections on the writings of Don Cupitt.

Contact: Elsie Montgomery 09-278-5517

Tauranga

The Tauranga Sea of Faith group meets each 3rd Wednesday of the month in the Wesley Church lounge, 13th Ave. Tauranga. They are a group of over 20 and started the year with a picnic tea in Yatton Park. They have discussed Euthanasia, led by Suzi Thirlwall. At present they are taking 2 months to look at Lloyd Geering's *"Paradise on Earth"*

Sylvia Holiday, an industrial pastor, gave a "riveting" talk about counselling, which was especially well received.

They plan a midwinter dinner, and a talk by one of our members who attended the "Visse amore, Visse d'Arte" workshop at the last Conference and they note that Tauranga will be the first town to host a lecture by Bishop John Spong.

Contact: Marion Bennett 07-578-8382

Christchurch

On June the 8th they will have concluded Ian Crumpton's series "An Evolving Faith for a New Millennium" and on June 22 they will discuss the recent TV series **Son of God**. [Did anyone actually like it? Send me a Letter - ed]

The visit of Spong will generate some discussion and in August they move on to Lloyd Geering's *The World To Come*.

Contact: Laurie Chisholm 03-325-21414

Palmerston North

Lloyd Geering will be speaking on behalf of Sea of Faith at a public meeting in Palmerston North arranged by the newly-formed Local Group. His theme will be **"How must Christianity change in the 21st century?"**

Date: Saturday July 14

Time: 1:30pm to 4:30pm

Venue: St David's Church, cnr Main and Rainforth Sts, Terrace End, Palmerston North.

Contact: Larry Haist 06-354-2626

Nelson

They meet on the third Thursday of each month from 8pm to 9:30pm.

An earlier meeting was addressed by Peter Donovan (Professor, ex-Massey) on a book that he and his wife are writing about talking to children about religion.

Their most recent meeting discussed "The Changing Nature of God"

A dinner will be held on June 21st, to celebrate the winter solstice.

Contact: Garry Frater 03-545-0269

Hawkes Bay

Lloyd Geering was their guest speaker for their mid-winter dinner. Lloyd spoke on "If The Church Were To Close Would Anybody Notice?"

Contact: Alan Goss 06-835-9594

In Brief

An Apology To The Apologetics

In a review that I wrote for Newsletter 42, I referred to the "Wellington Christian Apologist Society." This was an error on my part -- its should have read "The Wellington Christian Apologetics Society (Inc.)"

Noel Cheer

The Sea of Faith In Australia

Their website is at
<http://www.sof-in-australia.org>

Perpetuation of Stereotypes

How many church people does it take to change a light bulb?

- Charismatics - Only one. Hands already in the air.
- Roman Catholics - None. They use candles.
- Pentecostals - Ten. One to change the bulb, and nine to pray against the spirit of darkness.
- Presbyterians - None. God has predestined when the lights will be on and off.
- Anglicans - Eight. One to call the electrician, and seven to say how much they liked the old one better.
- Mormons - Five. One man to change the bulb, and four wives to tell him how to do it.
- Unitarians - We choose not to make a statement either in favour of or against the need for a light bulb. However, if in your own journey you have found that light bulbs work for you, that is fine. You are invited to write a poem or compose a modern dance about your personal relationship with your light bulb, and present it next month at our annual light bulb Sunday service, in which we will explore a number of light bulb traditions, including incandescent, fluorescent, three-way, long-life and tinted, all of which are equally valid paths to luminescence.
- Baptists or Methodists- At least 15. One to change the light bulb, and two or three committees to approve the change. Oh, and also a casserole.
- Lutherans - None. Lutherans don't believe in change

Prophetic Principle v. Pragmatic Power

David Boulton, editor of the UK "SOF" magazine wrote:

"SOF" magazine and "Political Theology" journal are joining forces to run a one-day conference in Westminster (London) on Saturday October 27 under the title "I'm Talking About Jerusalem". It will focus on the tension between the "prophetic" voice of principle and the necessary pragmatism of power, and among the principal speakers will be Tony Benn, doyen of the British Left, and Leslie Griffiths, former President of the Methodist Conference. Alison Webster and I will be chairing.

Who Owns The Holy Land?

Lloyd Geering will present a lecture series at St Andrews on The Terrace, Wellington in October on the Middle East under the title "Who Owns The Holy Land?". The lectures will run from 12:15pm to 1pm.

- October 2: "The Jewish Claim"
- October 9: "The Palestinian Claim"
- October 16: "The British Responsibility"
- October 23: "Who Resolves The Conflict?"

New Audio Tape In the Resource Centre:

A.63: Lloyd Geering interviewed on RNZ about his book ***The World To Come*** and Noel Cheer interviewed on RNZ's ***A Question of Religion*** regarding SoF in New Zealand.

The e-of Faith

In my role as Chairperson of the Steering Committee I have sent out my first "occasional letter" to Group Contacts. It contained odds-and-ends of "interesting things" which can be passed on to Group members.

Thank you those who responded with Group news -- you will notice that I have imbedded some of it in this Newsletter.

If you are a Group Contact but didn't get the email then let me know -- my mailing details are on page 10.

Noel Cheer

For Reli-nauts

I have added a new item --a Quick Tour -- to the main menu of the SoF (NZ) website which is found at <http://sofn.wellington.net.nz>. It provides a structured way in to the growing repository of papers and reviews that make up the bulk of the website.

Noel Cheer, Webmaster

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

<http://sofn.wellington.net.nz>

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 at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga.

For membership details and for the address of your nearest local group, contact the Membership Secretary, 133 Orangi Kau-papa Road, Northland, Wellington.

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

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.

"SoF" is 28 page A4, six-times-a-year magazine produced by the UK Sea of Faith Network. They offer it to New Zealand Sea Faith members currently at \$NZ59 for a year's subscription.

To subscribe for a year, send \$59 to "The Membership Secretary, SoF, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Wellington". Write your cheque to "SoF (NZ)".

Many of the study booklets referred to throughout this Newsletter are available from The St for the Study of Religion and Society:

<http://satrs.wellington.net.nz>

Leave That Brain Outside

At the end of a long and informative article about the recent Westar Institute Conference ("Once and Future Faith") held recently in California, the editor of the UK magazine "SoF", David Boulton, quoted some words from Gilbert and Sullivan's *Iolanthe*:

"When people pack the church inside,
If they've a brain and cerebellum too,
They've got to leave that brain outside
And think just as their leaders tell 'em to.
But then the prospect of a lot
Of honest folk in close proximity
All thinking for themselves, is what
Few priests can face with equanimity ..."

David concluded:

"That's what we're up against. The revolution that is the reformation will begin when people start thinking for themselves: when, to give the last word to Don Cupitt, people come to faith questions "with their brains switched on". Westar's conference, brilliantly organised by Funk and his team, and deftly managed by Char Matejovsky and her helpers, gave the process a great kick-start."

More information about "SoF" magazine appears in the panel to the left.

Faith in Cyberspace

Various aspects of The Jesus Seminar

Westar Institute: <http://www.westarinstitute.org>

Jesus Seminar Forum: <http://rutgers.edu.jseminar>

Westar - for subscribers to The 4th R:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/westar/>

ReVision - the journal of the Jesus Seminar in NZ:

<http://www.revision.org.nz>

The Community of St. Luke (Auckland):

<http://stlukes.org.nz>

Outwitted

**They drew a circle that shut me out
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout
But love and I had the wit to win
We drew a circle that took them in.**

Edwin Markham, Epigrams, 1901