



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

NEWSletter

Editorial

While we can't hope to match the content and the print quality of the SoFN (UK) magazine "SoF" (see page 9) we have in this Newsletter some material that will set us thinking and discussing.

Our Newsletter does double duty — as a bulletin board of activities around the Sea of Faith Network in New Zealand and as a source of stimulating articles and reviews.

When you've finished reading it, you can turn to the ever-increasing repository of material on the website at <http://sof.wellington.net.nz> (I got this wrong in the last Newsletter — sorry). Some of the papers there would provide excellent discussion material for local groups.

I have reached my "use-by" date as a member of the Steering Committee and so must step down at the AGM. I will expose myself to continued secondment as Newsletter Editor.

See you at the Conference!

*Noel Cheer, Chairperson of the Steering Committee and
Newsletter Editor*

From The Arrangements Committee

The SoFN Conference to be held in Auckland from September 21—23 is already proving popular. We are sure that it will be a great Conference of about 200 people.

There is room for all who want to hear the Key-note and the Elective speakers. However, most Workshops are already full and Focus Groups have only some spaces available.

Note that its possible to enroll for less than the full Conference (although we do recommend this). Half-day and one-day enrollments are acceptable.

To obtain a Registration Pack, contact John Irwin or Barbara Miller on 09-413-8513 or fax 09-413-8514.

Elaine Geering

We note with sadness the passing of Elaine Geering on Sunday August 19th. Elaine, along with Lloyd, gave so much to the Sea of Faith Network.

The entire membership of the Sea of Faith Network, in New Zealand and worldwide, offers its condolences to Lloyd, their children and grandchildren.

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Faith, Social Responsibility, and Transcendence

Leo Hobbis of Auckland offers readers an updated version of a Workshop Note used at the SOFN(NZ) 2000 Conference.

Out of its primordial energy our universe has brought forth a vast number of phenomena, rich in increasing diversity and complexity. We can, for example, identify atoms, molecules, stars, galaxies, planets, living organisms, including ourselves, and our own consciousness, a phenomenon which seems to belong to a different domain from the material. I want to suggest that running through all cosmic evolution there are processes of transformation which operate creatively to produce this diversity and complexity, and that by embracing this principle we can continue to participate in the evolutionary story.

The Earth and Its Life

At an early stage in the life of our universe, about 15 billion years ago, only the lightest elements, hydrogen, helium and lithium, could form. Clouds of these aggregated under gravitation to form stars, nuclear furnaces in which by a series of nuclear transformations heavier elements were produced. Some of these stars exploded (supernovae) and from the dispersed debris a second stage of stellar evolution emerged. Our own sun appeared in this way with some of the debris also collecting to form satellite planets, including Earth which is believed to be about 5 billion years old. During its first billion years the earth cooled a lot, chemical compounds formed, including minerals and water, and a gaseous atmosphere

Alison Cotes on Jesus and Sexuality...

"Christianity at least from the time when it became interested in Jesus as a human being with an identifiable biography, has always had problems with admitting that Jesus had any sexual nature at all. George Bernard Shaw (Preface to *Androcles and the Lion*) declared that "the mere thought of Jesus as a married man is felt to be blasphemous by the most conventional believers; and even those of us to whom Jesus is no supernatural personage... feel that there was something more dignified in the bachelordom of Jesus."

The church through the ages has found it convenient to forget that Jesus was a loyal Jew, and has placed him firmly in the Platonic/Docetist/Gnostic/Manichean syndrome, which insists that all things sensual are evil and all things carnal unspiritual, and that sex is equivalent to death. But there is no positive evidence to suggest that Jesus was a celibate. Modern scholarship (but not necessarily modern popular Christian thought) often posits the proposition that Jesus did have an active sexual nature: W N Pittenger, for example, in his book of 1970 called *Christology Reconsidered*, says that "It is of first importance to stress that to speak of Jesus as being truly human is also to speak of him as a sexual being."

Whatever ways he may have chosen to express or re-channel his sexuality... it is clear that when his sinlessness is mentioned we do not, or should not, take this to imply a-sexuality. Alas, however, much Christian thinking has done just this; in consequence we have the anaemic, lifeless, almost effeminate Christ of the Victorian stained-glass windows and of some popular portraits".

From Sea of Faith in Australia Bulletin June 2001

Alison will be a Keynote Speaker at this year's Conference

developed. It seems likely that amongst the compounds were certain organic molecules which provided the basis for the emergence of the simplest life forms, the single-celled organisms we call bacteria.

Life is believed to have existed on earth for some 4 billion years, for about three quarters of that time in microbial form. Microbes "learned" to do for themselves all the kinds of things we do to meet our needs, modifying themselves in response to environmental pressures, and modifying their environments in turn. Bacteria developed great diversity, adapting to widely ranging

conditions of such factors as the temperature, moisture, the atmosphere and the availability of food sources. Bacterial activity has contributed to significant modification of the earth's crust and of the composition of the atmosphere. Bacteria formed symbiotic relationships with other bacteria in many ways, living interdependently in vast societies, sometimes inside their hosts. New bacterial forms developed by the trade and exchange of their DNA, rather than having to wait for a random mutation. Increasingly, biologists tend to see evolution less in terms of "survival of the fittest" or the "the selfish gene", and

more in terms of a balance between competition and cooperation.

Complex multi-celled organisms, including plants and animals, are believed to have evolved from bacteria. The higher organisms contain semi-independent, inter-related units, such as organs, which have their own integrity and serve the whole organism at the same time. Instead of thinking in terms of hierarchies it is better to describe the relationship in terms of "holons" within holons forming a holarchy. A balance is held between autonomy and holonomy. The same principle extends to the way we now see biological species and their environment forming a complete ecological system. It is impossible to separate the biology of the planet from the earth, its waters and its atmosphere.

Everything is connected and interdependent. The biological diversity of an ecological system is proving to be a reliable measure of its quality.

Transcendent Relationship : A Creative Principle

Running through this whole evolutionary story are processes of what I am calling transcendent relationship. When two hydrogen atoms come together to form a hydrogen molecule, when hydrogen and oxygen form water, when three helium nuclei form carbon in a star's interior, when many atoms of different elements form a complex protein, or two species of bacteria form a colony recycling each other's waste, we see something transcendent emerge. Two or more components enter into

relationship to produce a new form having quite different properties which often we could not possibly predict. By linking transcendent relationship with social responsibility I am suggesting that this principle can also serve as a sound guide for human wellbeing. It is, in essence, at the heart of the teaching of Jesus and much other wisdom. We see not only pragmatically that caring and sharing promote harmony, but also that such behaviour is simply a continuation of the evolutionary way.

We cannot say what biological form further human evolution, if any, will take. We can speculate that we might develop individually, perhaps by having a natural awareness of multi-dimensional space-time, or that like our bacterial forebears we will realise a transition to global social harmony. We are already familiar with the way our minds work in creative thought and action when we allow new experience to interact with our existing store of understanding. I AM but I am continually BECOMING. It can be the same in our social exchanges which continually offer potentially enriching relationships.

Human beings are distinguished from other species by the way we use linguistic coordination in our social existence. Language is a particular manner of living together. In conversations we discover symbols, self, intentionality and meaning. And because language and humanness both arise out of consensual coordination within a biology of cooperation, the essential emotional state which allows language to emerge and develop is that of love

(agape). Love is thus the fundamental emotion, or domain of behaviour, by which human beings have been able to develop. In this domain of behaviour I accept that the other's existence is as legitimate as my own and am not blind to his/her/its condition of being. Nobody has yet been able to explain the phenomenon of mind, what consciousness, feelings etc actually are, in terms of conventional science, but it does seem that our feelings point to something as fundamental in our living as the laws of physics. I think this provides a clear rebuttal to post-modernism's "Anything Goes".

Readers are invited to consider how the principle of transcendent relationship might be applied in our personal, community, national and international affairs. There would appear to be many areas which would benefit. For example: relationships in a multicultural society/world, interfaith relationships, territorial disputes, the justice system, politics.

Leo Hobbs, 24 June 2001

Footnote:

In preparing this note I have drawn particularly on the thought of Darryl Reaney, Danah Zohar, Henryk Skolimowski, Humberto Maturana and Elisabet Sahtouris. My attention was drawn to the significance of the emotional state of love in the development of language by Roger Booth in his Auckland University Continuing Education Course, "Being Human: The Inside Story".





Book Reviews

One of our most prolific book reviewers is Alan Goss from Napier. Here he contributes two reviews.

***Paradise on Earth,* by Lloyd Geering (St. Andrew's Trust)**

This booklet, a series of lectures given by the author at St. Andrew's, Wellington, in September 2000, explores a grand – and some will say impossible – ideal: the uniting of the whole human race. It is therefore in the tradition of some of the Old Testament prophets and of Jesus who looked forward to a new and better age.

Our inner urge to hope for a better world is in large part due to the Bible which has shaped our western way of life.

Yet paradise is very elusive and, if it does come, will be by the collective efforts of the whole human race. Attempts to look into the future (Futurology) are fairly recent development and we are reminded of the contribution of the great pioneering visionary Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955) who envisaged the evolution of a supersociety, a kind of corporate or, in our terms, global consciousness. Professor Geering then looks at the sort of world we want in the future, "it would be a global society where the necessities of life can be shared by all, where justice reigns, and where personal violence and war have been banished forever." He then sets out how we might reach this goal including the probability that the road to a global paradise is going to be very rough.

Many of our present freedoms will have to be restricted – and accepted – otherwise we shall have to face some major global catastrophes.

Nevertheless, in evolutionary terms the kairos, the decisive moment of change, has come. The birth of a new planetary civilization is emerging which will involve the uniting of the whole human race. Professor Geering spells out four basic structures (which will be strongly resisted) which will enable this to happen: the formation of a global economy, the establishment of a global democracy, the evolution of a global culture, and the spread of a global faith. The latter will not come from some supernatural force, it will be naturalistic and humanistic and will draw on past cultures, particularly from the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Professor Geering, as previously indicated, is not starry-eyed about our chances of building a better and fairer society.

The last chapter deals with some of the obstacles that stand in our way, including fundamentalism. On this he writes:

"While the mainline churches usually hold themselves aloof from fundamentalism, they are now in

the process of being drawn into the fundamentalist mindset." Vision is lacking and secular thinkers are leading the way.

This is a bold, prophetic booklet whose importance far out-weighs its size. In spite of the great struggle ahead and the odds against us there is still hope that the new future will be realized. If the churches, and our political parties, are looking for a mission and a manifesto, here is one place for them to go.

Alan Goss, Napier

[This book was reviewed previously in Newsletter 42. To obtain St Andrew's Trust books, see page 10 - ed]

$e = mc^2$

by David Bodanis (MacMillan) 2000

This bestselling book, a biography of Einstein's famous equation, was inspired by an interview with the actress Cameron Diaz in a popular movie magazine. Diaz wanted to know what $e = mc^2$ really means, a query shared with many others who are often mystified by the many books that try to explain it. David Bodanis took up the challenge and in 219 pages (excluding a detailed appendix and notes for those who want to know more) and has done a first rate job.

The book is more than a popular account of cool scientific discovery which on its own is a fascinating story. A brief account of $e = mc^2$ gives the context. "e" is for energy, a word not used in its modern sense until about the 1850's. Einstein found a vast source of energy where no-one had thought to look. The equals symbol ("=") in his 1905 equation was like a telescope, or a tunnel, pointing or leading to mass containing other sources of energy – right here on earth. The "m" is for mass.

Einstein found that there was a link between energy and mass and began to focus on what then looked like a complete red-herring, the speed of light. "c" (Latin *celeritas*) is simply the speed of light, about 670 million m.p.h., which is the fundamental speed limit in our universe. Nothing can go faster. Einstein saw, therefore, that there could be a natural transfer between energy and mass and that "c" is the conversion factor linking the two. " c^2 " is crucial in explain-

ing how this link operates. The 670 million m.p.h., when squared, becomes 448,900,000,000,000,000 which when multiplied by, say, a pound of mass, gives off a phenomenal amount of energy. If this page could be converted into pure energy there would be a massive eruption! Accessing that power in uranium is a much easier process. So Einstein's equation takes the great speed of light, squares it, and multiplies that huge figure by the amount of mass you're dealing with. That represents how much energy the mass will pour out.

We learn how $e = mc^2$ is constantly at work in our everyday life and in the universe. Its application is at the heart of the formation of mountain ranges like the Himalayas, to exploding volcanoes, the creation of electricity generating stations, and its effects are seen in smoke detectors, televisions, CAT scanners, glowing exit signs at your local theatre, and of course the sun. The sun uses the immense power of c^2 to warm our planet which, when it was formed, was a comparative newcomer in the heavens.

Atomic bombs are an early direct application of $e = mc^2$, and the book covers physicists like New Zealand's "booming, rugby-playing Ernest Rutherford" who with others helped show the potential power within the atom. The furious race between German and American based scientists to build the first death-laden bomb reads like a modern day thriller, with horrific consequences.

Sodanis reminds us that ancestors of $e = mc^2$ like Isaac

Newton, Michael Faraday and James Chadwick, were deeply religious men. Einstein in his younger years was a biblical literalist, the scientist Arthur Eddington was a quiet Quaker and pacifist.

We are also reminded that in the 17th and 18th centuries science and religion were not separate entities but were one.

The underlying message of the book is that, with such massive sources of energy at our disposal, we humans are constantly being called upon to decide how best to use it. Unless we resolve to combat the nuclear mischief now being perpetrated in high places, an uninhabitable earth is an unthinkable yet very real prospect. $e = mc^2$ directs us to the words of Moses:

"I have set before you this day life and good, death and evil Therefore choose life."

Clearly the buck stops with us.

Alan Goss, Napier

Culture and Nature

This piece was contributed by Judith Dale and comes from pages 97 and 98 of The Idea of Culture by Terry Eagleton (Oxford, Blackwell 2000)

It belongs to the human situation to be "out of joint" with any specific situation. ... Human beings move at the juncture of the concrete and the universal, body and symbolic medium; but this is not a place where anyone can feel blissfully at home.

Nature, on the other hand, is exactly such at-homeness. It is just that it is not for us, but for those other animals whose bodies are such that they have only a limited power to sit loose to their determining contexts. Which is to say, those animals which do not work

primarily by culture. Because they move within a symbolic medium, and because they are of a certain material kind, our own bodies have the capacity to extend themselves far beyond their sensuous limits, in what we know as culture, society, or technology. It is because our entry into the symbolic order — language and all it brings in its wake — puts some free play between ourselves and our determinants that we are those internally dislocated, non-self-identical creatures known as historical beings. History is what happens to an animal so constituted as to be able, within limits, to determine its own determinations. What is peculiar about a symbol-making creature is that it is of its nature to transcend itself. ... Language helps to release us from the prison-house of our senses, at the same time as it damagingly abstracts us from them.

Like Marx's capitalism, then, language opens up at a stroke new possibilities of communication and new modes of exploitation. The move from the tedious happy garden of sensuous existence to the exhilarating, precarious plane of semiotic life was a *felix culpa*, a Fall up rather than down. ... We are not so much splendid syntheses of nature and culture, materiality and meaning, as amphibious animals caught on the hop between angel and beast.

Perhaps this lurks somewhere at the root of our attraction to the aesthetic — to that peculiar form of matter which is magically pliant to meaning, that unity of the sensuous and the spiritual which we fail to achieve in our daily, dualistic lives.

**"We are ...
amphibious animals
caught on the hop
between angel and
beast".**



SnowStar

<http://snowstarinstitute.org/>

A Sea-of-Faith-like Network in Canada

SnowStar has organised itself through three Symposia or Communities of Dialogue.

The Historical Jesus Symposium seeks to promote the entire spectrum of progressive and radical scholarship of the historical tradition. It asks such questions as:

- Who is Jesus?
- Are the followers of the historical Jesus now on the outside of the church and something different from Christianity?
- For the sake of the world, must Christianity lose Christ and re-discover Jesus, the flesh and blood man, and his Higher Good (the Kingdom of God)?

The Inter-Religious Symposium is committed to frank, respectful and tolerant dialogue among the world's great religious traditions. It focuses on the relationship religion holds with culture, history and philosophy and asks such questions as:

- what is the proper relationship among the world's great religions?
- How ought respectful dialogue among world religions be carried out?
- What role can religion play in Canada's multi-cultural, pluralistic society?

The Global Theology Symposium is dedicated to the question of what constitutes a believable faith in a global era. Among other questions, this Community of Dialogue asks,

- In a global era, what are the elements of a credible expression of faith?
- What issues can religion address in the face of technology and capitalism?
- Where is fundamentalism leading us?

OAKURA BEACH

The sea was calm last night
But in the raw dawn we hear
The incessant roar of a distant storm
The spike of backwash and the crash of
rollers

Half-hidden in the sand
Lies a silver brine-soaked tree-trunk
Further away the carcase of a beast
Here and there remains of seabirds slicked
with oil,
A tangle of fishing tackle, plastic bags and
bottles
And on a rocky ledge the flotsam of a
shattered container

Shining girdles are out of fashion
But at Noosa or Manila Bay, Phuket or
Valdez Sound
The secret places are pierced by sharp
debris
Around the bare midriff of the world;

The stranger on the shore each sees his
place
As worth the envy of less happier lands
Yet at Omaha Beach, Pearl Harbour or
Honiara
The rusting memories remain of the
Ignorant armies clashing day or night.

The Sea of Faith shone with reflected
brilliance;
Under its surface lay mountains of wrecks
Now left open to the hard light
As the last rivulets from rock pools
Seep away to hide from the watcher's eye.

This sea has neither beauty, nor joy, nor
comfort;
If we turn our backs on the still dark plain
There is only your hand for me to cling to
And mine to be the truth for you.

Frank Gaze, after Matthew Arnold

Contribution

Voltaire's Bastards

Donald Feist has offered us these two excerpts from John Ralston Saul's book *Voltaire's Bastards*.

"When the eighteenth century philosophers killed God, they thought they were engaged in house-keeping -- the evils of corrupt religion would be swept away, the decent aspects of Christian morality would be dusted off and neatly repackaged inside reason. Inadvertently they rendered that morality nonessential to their new society. Or rather they rendered it optional." [p. 72]

"In the West, of course, God has been dead for some time. What remains is religion as social belief, which is at best a moral code and at worst social etiquette. A real belief feels to the believer to be a natural state and does not respond to questioning. That is one of the reasons we have so much difficulty dealing with the Islamic world. They don't want to discuss fundamentals. They are not interested in a rational analysis. They believe the way we once believed. Not only do we find this incomprehensible and frustrating, we also find it troubling, because their certainty is a reflection of our own past.

We and our leaders have been surviving for a while now in societies which do not have any escape routes through belief from anxiety. This may be one of the explanations for the childish hysteria of the last few decades over economic management theories such as nationalization, privatization and free markets. The death of God was supposed to release mankind from absolute obsessions, so that we could give ourselves to rational analysis. Instead the new structures have simply taken the old absolute obsessions which were tied to the soul and applied them to our economic lives. For example, the free market may be a good, bad or insufficient idea, but, in any case, it is just a crude commercial code. Now it is regularly equated with or given credit for or even precedence over the freedom of man. But the freedom of man is a moral statement on the human condition, both in the practical and in the humanist sense. To equate it with a school of business is to betray a certain confusion. An unconscious unease." [p 348]

Faith in Cyberspace

FaithFutures Foundation, Inc. is a new Australian-American venture
<http://www.faithfutures.org>

SnowStar
<http://snowstarinstitute.org/>

Sea of Faith Network (NZ)
<http://sof.wellington.net.nz>



"They said, 'You'll never succeed in that parish.' They said 'You'll never make an impression on that tight-lipped bunch of Puritans,' They said, 'You'll never find the key to the wine cupboard.' Well, two out of three ain't bad."

Letter To The Editor

I realise that words are very important but don't agree that language is all in all [see Newsletter 42 - ed]. As the great mystic Swami Vivikananda states "there is a level of consciousness above the Relativity level of consciousness (i.e. "Nirvikalpa Samadhi") that can be experienced but is beyond language."

This level of consciousness is called "Mystic Union" by the Christian tradition. "Seedless" Samadhi by Patanjali, Nirvanda Buddhists, etc. It seems to me that we can get stuck in "left brain mode" and entangled in the verbal dualism of intellectualisation as the great Zen Master, Dr. Suzuki, aptly puts it.

Frank Eaddy

Local Groups

Nelson

At a recent meeting they discussed "The Changing Nature of God." Don Grant and Alec Brown provided a thought-provoking introduction. Some points from the evening include:

- definitions of God as being:
 - the goodness in us
 - the ground of our being
 - the whole earth
 - the representation of life
 - the universe
- Lloyd Geering provided an alternative to literal belief and encourages re-thinking about God
- Doctorow indicates his sense of awe and reverence – an increasing commitment to protecting the various forms of life
- over the history of mankind, most religions have moved away from having many Gods to a single God
- having a sense of awe and majesty – an acceptance of the mystery of God
- experiences of God involved stripping away the baggage, but always finding yet another layer of mystery
- some quotable quotes;
 - "Once we find God is no longer a mystery, we become God ourselves."
 - "God is God of the gaps" (Coulson) – science is slowly filling in our understanding of the many natural phenomena, while God is held to be responsible for the other phenomena in the gaps.
 - "I am therefore I am."

Like many other Local Groups, they discussed the implications of John Spong's recent lecture tour. After one discussion they formulated these questions:

- Was it possible to be fully human in an over-populated world?
- Is there a role for the Church in helping people to become fully human?
- Is it possible to develop one's spiritual thinking without having to serve some sort of

apprenticeship?

- How does one pass on Christian values to the new generation.

Contact Garry Frater
(03) 545 0269

Auckland Central

In June, David Clark talked about liturgy.

He covered the historical: **"With the 'Constantinian captivity', worship became more formal, hierarchical [and] with an authority figure leading passive spectators ..."**

He summarised the purpose of worship as

1) evoking a world apart from the present

2) provoking other ways of seeing other people and ourselves

3) subverting the ideology of our society with one that is communal, egalitarian and inclusive.

In July Bob Cooper talked about Restorative Justice and its capacity to achieve reconciliation.

Contact Jim Feist 09-579-3225

Warkworth

In March two members of the Bahai's (Mary Anne and Bil White) who had just returned from Israel talked about their faith and answered questions. Mary Anne conducts Bahai seminars.

In April they discussed the *Lis-tener* article "Is God Dead?" and in May and June they watched the *Son of God* TV series on video.

Contact Ann Todd 09-425-9746

Dunedin

In July Don Lawson addressed them on "Kaikorai Valley College: whose values, whose vision?"

For August they plan that Prof. Gerald Pillay will introduce the topic: "The nexus between individual faith and social solidarity: perspectives from the South African quest for social justice."

Contact Marjorie Spittle
03-481-1418

In Brief

Male Bonding

In May, Pope John Paul II opened the largest meeting of cardinals in history, a meeting which would set priorities for the Catholic Church and its 1 billion members in the third millennium. In his opening address, the Pope averred:

"The composition of this venerated assembly, which gathers cardinals coming from every part of the Earth and belonging to various cultures, well represents the unity, the universality and missionary nature of the church projected toward new apostolic aims."

Perhaps he missed the fact that they're all blokes.

Sea of Faith in Australia "Bulletin"
June 2001

Voices Against Violence



YWCA has designated November 5 to 11, 2001 as **"YWCA Week Against Violence"**. Their objectives include:

- Achieve a more honest and inclusive dialogue that acknowledges everyone's responsibility to act against the epidemic of violence.
- Heighten awareness of practical and sustainable alternatives to violence that are accessible to people from all communities.
- Generate increased political and financial support for alternatives to violence in our homes, schools, workplaces, and on our streets

You can find out more from YWCA of Aotearoa-New Zealand
PO Box 9315, Wellington Phone (04) 384-8117 Fax: (04) 384-3301
email voices@ywca.org.nz

From "SoF"

"SoF" is the bi-monthly magazine of the Sea of Faith Network (UK). It is available to members of Sea of Faith (NZ) by paying an annual subscription — details on page 10. This a brief summary of articles which appeared in the July 2001 issue:

Bad Tidings from Zion

"Over the past few weeks we have seen ... the devastating outworkings of one of the Bible's most powerful stories: the origin-myth of the "Children of Israel" as a "chosen people", awarded by divine fiat a "Promised Land".

[Wellington Softies will be able to hear Lloyd Geering's series "Who Owns The Holy Land?" at St Andrews on October 2, 9, 16 and 23.]

Is This A Creed I See Before Me?

Duncan Park in his inimitable style confronts David Boulton's "10 Hypotheses". Its too much like an old-fashioned Humanist creed, Duncan says.

Seeking a Credible Faith

Del Stewart, director of "Snowstar", a Canadian institute for radical religion which is informally linked to The Jesus Seminar and the SoF Network in the UK. For details, see page 6.

Taking Leave of Our Senses

A review by editor David Boulton of song lyrics regarded as poetry. Lyrics by the Beatles and Nick Cave are cited.

The Poetry of Human Rites

Richard Holloway, former Bishop of Edinburgh, wrote: "For me, poetry is a road to transcendence, to that level of experience that opens us to the wonder of Being and the beauty and tragedy of life."

At a recent London SoF Conference he used the works of some modern poets to amplify some biblical passages — "an imaginative reworking of scriptural texts to make them alive in the present."

Alpha

Under the by-line of "Beachcomber", Alison Webster wrote a piece for "Bridget Jones' Alpha Diary" which sends up the Alpha course.

QuoteUnquote

A column-filler piece contains a quote from Dostoyevski's *The Brothers Karamazov*:

"What is strange, what is marvellous, is not whether God really exists. The marvel is that such an idea, the idea of the necessity of God, could have entered the head of such a savage and vicious beast as man; so holy is it, so moving, so wise, and such a great honour it does to man."

Wicca's World

Frederic Lamond described an early event in his sex-life in terms which invoke Tibetan bodhisattvas, Aphrodite and Earth Mother religion.

Book Reviews:

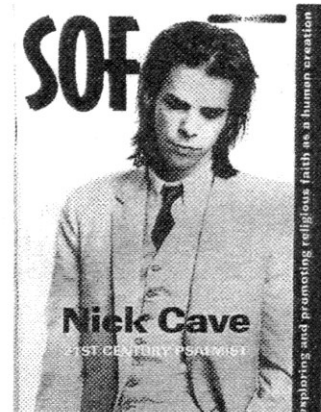
Jeni Parsons reviewed *The Poetry of the Earth* by Dinah Livingston and found it to be "an entrancing book with a big heart" though "uneven" and sometimes "disappointing".

Ian Stubbs reviewed the novel *English Passengers* by Matthew Kneale which deals with the 30 year period in the 19th century in which Tasmanian aborigines were almost wiped out.

Chris Athorne in reviewing *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World* by Roy Porter finds the 18th century to be more optimistic than our own even though their intelligensia moved "from idealism to radicalism tinged with cynicism".

Miscellaneous

A miscellany of Letters to the Editor and "Postscript" snippets rounds out a fine magazine.



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://sof.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 Kaupapa 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.

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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 Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society: <http://satrs.wellington.net.nz>

Talking It Over

This is the second of Don Cupitt's columns which we re-publish, with permission, from the UK SoF "Portholes" newsheet. The intention of "Talking it Over" is to introduce possible discussion themes for local groups.

Can you help me with my current project? I'm thinking and writing about how in a nihilistic age we can rework the traditional ideas of the good life and the religious life.

Before the rise of science people saw knowledge as something that human beings received from above, by illumination of the mind. They believed that they lived in a ready-made Cosmos specially designed to be a home for humans, and with a built-in moral order. One also had a God-given conscience to act as a moral compass.

But science completely separated ethics from Nature. It finds only mathematical patterns in the world, and not a moral order. We've come to see ourselves as the only makers of the moralities we live by. So what is the good life in a Universe that can no longer be seen as a family home for humans? How can we frame and justify, any account of the good life, now?

The religious life has become equally problematic. Hitherto it has always been the concern for a higher 'spiritual' world, beyond this world. The religious life was from Plato onwards the contemplative life. One found happiness in contemplating eternal verities. In the Christian version of Platonism one lived in community, under a common Rule, and concentrated one's attention upon the heavenly world. Worship was the most fulfilling of all human activities.

But today we've lost that distinction between two worlds, one sacred and the other secular, one eternal and spiritual and the other changing and material. Instead we know only one world, and it is the human life-world. What is 'the religious life' in a time when there is only the world of life, our everyday human life?

I have already put forward some ideas in answer to these conundrums. I have argued (in *The New Christian Ethics*) that we don't live in a value-free zone: on the contrary, we always inherit a lot of moral ideas and a comprehensive valuation of life from our forebears. Each generation's task is to criticise and revalue the received morality, and then hand it on to the next generation. I have also argued for humanitarian social ethics, which bases morality on nothing more than our bare common humanity: and I have argued for 'solar' personal ethics and for a whole-hearted commitment to 'life' — which means, just this life.

That is about as far as I have as yet managed to get. How can these ideas be taken further? How do we imagine the religious life for people in the future?

If your local group does take up these questions, ask if your membership includes someone who knows about one or other of the following: Simone Weil, Iris Murdoch, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Miguel de Unamuno, Thomas Merton, Jack Kerouac. They all battled with the question of the religious life today, and they all tend to see the religious life as a solitary life. One slips away from the crowd and seeks out a lonely place. Is that right? Or should we see the religious life as being like Van Gogh's painting, energetically and recklessly affirmative, all guns blazing?

Don Cupitt

If you're looking for the key to the universe, I have some bad news and some good news. The bad news is there is no key. The good news is it has been left unlocked.

author unknown