



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

NEWSletter

CONFERENCE 2005

What Makes Us Human?

ART, RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN DIALOGUE

Three powerful elements in our contemporary cultural scene are Art, Religion and Science.

Each has the capacity to inspire or degrade – to lift our vision of humanity, or to stunt us, or even destroy us, as a species. We have reached a critical time in our evolutionary track on planet Earth, and as humanity takes more control over the process, it is the interplay of these three elements more than any others, that will guide our endeavours.

This year's Conference picks up this theme of what makes us human – how does our humanity set us apart from other life, and in what sense are we grafted into an inter-connected web of life and habitat? Keynote speakers will develop this theme from the perspective of Art (Jonathan Mane-Wheoki), Religion (Rachael Kohn), and Science (Richard Hall). The theme runs through many of the workshops and electives. After-dinner speaker Apirana Taylor – poet, raconteur, story teller – will reflect on the theme (and no doubt a few others) with a lighter touch. The 30 acre campus of this church school set close to the heart of a big city is itself a metaphor for the dialogue between Art, Science and Religion.

St Andrews College was founded in 1916, and in 1918 moved to the "Strowan" property it now occupies in Papanui. All the buildings are modern except for the historic Strowan house. Christchurch in September is a wonderful place with its many gardens, parks and avenues of blossom trees. St Andrew's campus has its share too. The college puts much effort into providing a hospitable venue for conferences such as ours. There is good parking, a 100% smoke free environment, a spacious common room/lounge, and all facilities are close to each other.

So get your registration forms in to Laurie Chisholm forthwith! Accommodation and other choices will be allocated on a first come basis.

We look forward to hosting you in a thoughtful, stimulating and enjoyable time together.



Ian Crumpton

Arrangements Committee Chairperson 2005

Newsletter 62

July 2005

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From the Chairperson

Two copies of the Conference Registration Form were mailed with this Newsletter. More copies are available on the website at www.sof.org.nz

The Conference

Keynote Speakers

Art: *Jonathan Mane-Wheoki, Director of Art and Visual Culture at Te Papa.*



Jonathan Mane-Wheoki was formerly Dean of Music and Fine Arts and Senior Lecturer in Art History at the University of Canterbury and Kaitiaki Maori at the Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch. He has served on the Humanities Panel of the Marsden [Science] Fund since 1997 and is the current convenor. He was appointed to the Marsden Fund Council in 2002.

Jonathan Mane-Wheoki is a graduate of the University of Canterbury in Fine Arts (with Honours in Painting) and English and of the University of London Courtauld Institute of Art (in Art History) and Trinity College of Music (in Speech and Drama). In addition to his practical experience in the visual and performing arts, he has published and lectured widely in the fields of European and New Zealand art and architectural history, and cultural heritage and museum issues. He is also held in high regard as a curator, particularly as a champion of contemporary Maori art. Of Ngapuhi descent, he has long been active in advancing the cause of Maori education.

Vice-President of the Humanities Society of New Zealand since its inception, Jonathan Mane-Wheoki has also served on the Arts Council and Te Waka Toi (the Maori Arts Board) of Creative New Zealand, and as a member of Te Papa's National Services Museums Peer Review Team, and has undertaken research for the Waitangi Tribunal.

Religion: *Rachael Kohn, Religious Affairs Presenter ABC Radio, Australia*



Dr. Rachael Kohn is heard across Australia and on the web every week on ABC Radio National in two programmes: "The Spirit of Things" -- an adventure into contemporary religion & spirituality and "The Ark" -- curious tales in religious history.

Her latest book *The New Believers* (reviewed in Newsletter 60) will be on sale at the Conference.

You can access back-number programmes of "The Spirit of Things" (as transcripts or as streaming audio) from the ABC by going to <http://abc.net.au/rn/relig/spirit/>

A recent programme featured a detailed analysis of *The da Vinci Code*

Rachael's Conference lecture at 11am on the Saturday will be open to the public.

Science: *Richard Hall*

President of the Phoenix Astronomical Society (TPAS), Richard is one of the Royal Society's Communicators, a member of the Astronomy Standing Committee of the Royal Society, and project manager of Stonehenge Aotearoa (see www.astronomynz.org.nz/stonehenge/stonehenge.htm). An adult educator for over 30 years, he was, until recently, Senior Public Programmes Officer at the Carter Observatory where he taught a range of astronomy courses to adults. He is co-author of *The Work of the Gods*, the first of a series of books to be published on Maori Astronomy. In TPAS Richard is part of the Almanac and Newsletter editorial publications team. His astronomical artistic skills are put to good use in both. Richard lectures on a wide range of astronomical subjects using his own outstanding astronomical powerpoint presentations. He also produces audio-visual and planetarium shows.



In Newsletters 53 to 59 we serialised a paper by Rev Dr Alan Webster in which he summarised themes promoted by seven contemporary radical Christian theologians. The full paper is available on our website. The paper from which the following excerpt comes is also on the website under the shortened title *Radical Vision Implications*. Its full title is:

What Might the Vision of 21st Century Church Be If We Took Radical Theology Seriously?

Alan Webster (who will be an Elective Lecturer at the 2005 Conference)

To Assign Jesus a Different Role in a This-Worldly Drama of the Now-Presence of the Domain of God. (Refer Funk "Give Jesus a demotion")

Jesus turned the tide back to God, away from dogma and religious tradition. He simply made God the centre of all that the domain of God meant. This insistence, or consciousness, is enormously powerful for all that is done now in the name of Christ. He did not, for example, make himself the source or object of all that is. He would never have demanded that the whole world bow before him. Certain implications for vision follow.

We need to recall ourselves to the centrality of God.

The whole structure of credal orthodoxy is based on classical assumptions around 'the person and work of Christ' as it used to be called. This entailed a pre-existent Christ, a divine mission of destruction of the powers of evil through a sacrificial death and a victorious resurrection and ascension, and a final vindication of believers at his return.

In this scenario, the important thing was the divinity of Jesus. As Divine Christ, he was the necessary King in the heavenly chess-game. The new image of a human Jesus as embodying the domain of God puts the classical rationale of his part in salvation to rest. Rather than a central role of a divine Christ-figure – the traditional Christocentrism of evangelical orthodoxy – we have a Jesus whose role is explainable by the new mission that is really the old mission, the oldest there is: the presence of the domain of God. He images God but does not equate with God. Certainly, as compared with the concept of God as All Being, favoured by the modern mind, Jesus did not have that concept. He was a theist. Yet his consciousness of God was of the all-pervasiveness of holy spirit, explainable only by metaphor and parable.

We need to re-define Jesus as human forerunner and promise

If, as Robert Funk insists, we must assign Jesus "a new role" it has to be one in which he is both the fore-runner of a God-movement in which the purpose and possibility of the world are central, and a promise of the realisation of that possibility. It is because of the humanity of Jesus that his embodiment of God's domain is a sign and promise of the fulfilment of religion's hope.

In this drama, the indefinability of God is fundamental. God is a pervading spirit, not an objectively existent 'it' or 'he'. Jesus is endowed with

that spirit, of the same order and thus attracts an explanatory terminology: brother, human one, child of God, truth-knower, provoker and facilitator – the list could go on. That new order makes a new being possible for those who commit to his way. But he is not to be worshipped. To be an object of worship, Jesus would have to be God. That was clearly recognised by the creed-writers. To demote him from divinity is at once to concede that he is not a proper object of worship but that he is our elder brother. God is One, and alone worthy of worship. But not as a deity which can be objectified and whose existence is arguable. As Borg points out, Being itself is not a matter of argument and is beyond all definition..

God can only be that which embraces all other beings and yet is other than it all: Being itself; the beyond that contains all contingent life and being; the explanation which cannot be argued but just is. Not being a distant deity, but part of all being, God is worshipped wherever the sacredness of the whole living world is given ultimate worth. real in a life. It is the Jesus who embodies the Godness of all things who reveals a way by which we 'can walk with God' and can live as healthy members of the family of beings that make up the world. He saves us as and only as we are healed and restored in terms of the domain of God. That is precisely what the Gospels portray.

We need to see Jesus as expressing the sacredness of all being

It is this kind of conclusion that we find in people like Holloway. He presents an ethical kingdom in which the truest radicalism appears as forgiveness, inclusiveness and life-affirmation. Armstrong's evocation of 'practical benevolence' as the new definition of 'the way' is of the same spirit. This is the nature of the domain of God. To find that, Jesus said, is the ultimate treasure.





Local Groups

Look on the website at www.sof.org.nz for the complete list

"Where two or three are gathered together in anyone's name – there is politics."

Religion and Politics

Shirley Dixon of Paraparaumu was at the One-Day Conference of the Auckland Branch of the Sea of Faith on 21 May 2005

IF RELIGION IS THE SUM OF ALL THAT is most important to human beings, and politics is the way we organize our communities, then the places where religion and politics intersect are vitally important. While this is so in any year, it is particularly so in this New Zealand election year which follows recent elections in America and Australia in which religious issues, particularly those with a fundamentalist focus, emerged as a major aspect of the campaigns. The theme of this year's one-day conference organized by the Auckland branch of SoF addressed just this issue: Religion and politics.

The day's programme began with a welcome by Noel Cheer, Chair of SoF(NZ), who introduced the two-keynote speakers: Dr Marion Maddox, Senior Lecturer in Religious Studies, Victoria University of Wellington, who addressed **The Rise of Faith-based Politics**, and Dr John Hinchcliff, CNZOM, Auckland City Councillor, formally Vice-Chancellor of Auckland University of Technology, who spoke on **Balancing Christian Idealism and Practical Politics**.

In the afternoon the one hundred attendees divided into groups and discussed a number of questions relating to the intersection of religion and politics; and the day concluded with a discussion between a panel of the keynote speakers who were joined by Gordon McLauchlan, writer, broadcaster and public affairs consultant, and Raymond Miller, Senior Lecturer in Political Studies, Auckland University, with Noel in the chair.

Throughout the day, and particularly in the discussions, significant attention was given to the defining of terms. The definition of politics was relatively straightforward: politics is immediate reality – the art of living together in communities. But politics also demands decisiveness – and this requires compromise and, however much one struggles to get

the balance right, mistakes are inevitable. And while religion might be thought to address bigger and longer-term issues, it was pointed out on several occasions that fundamentalist religion's appeal is the immediacy, clarity and assurance of its answers, and when politicians bring fundamentalist religion to their political decisions, and make claims such as President Bush did, that God told him to attack Afghanistan and Iraq – how can one counter this without appearing heretical and godless? Doing dogma is easy, in contrast to more considered religion which can only provide contingency, conundrums, paradoxes and ambiguities. Unscrupulous people can so easily feed on ignorance and gullibility – in both religion and politics.

Again this year, the Auckland one-day conference provided the opportunity to present the SoF Network and its ideas to a wider audience – a big enough audience to be able to engage top-class speakers and thus provide the opportunity for SoF members and others from the wider Auckland area to hear such speakers. The annual Auckland mini-conference furnishes an excellent supplement to the national Conference – along with providing a wonderfully stimulating and enjoyable day.

In the concluding remarks of her paper, Marion proposed that, where politics and religion intersect, then love should be the guiding principle. Similarly, John proposed hope as the necessary ingredient. So, if we follow their advice and go about our religious and political activities with love and hope in our hearts and in our deeds, then we probably won't go too far wrong.

Shirley Dixon

Auckland Group Contact: Tom Lamb (09) 410-0969

Nelson

In April they considered themes from *The Spirituality Revolution – The Emergence of Contemporary Spirituality* by Professor David Tacey, who is one of Australia's leading thinkers in religion and spirituality with a particular interest in the search for meaning in a post-modern and post-religious cultural context.

In this book, he argues that the growing popularity of alternative spirituality is a sign of a new phase in the spiritual development of the western world.

**Contacts: Lindsay Vaughan (03) 548 4778;
Elizabeth Duncan (03) 545 2003**

New Ways for Waikato

Fred Marshall reports on their Act of Faith

After a very successful Conference, a group met to discuss what the future held for the SoF in Waikato. We have in the past suffered from the lethargy syndrome where a small group of enthusiasts works to find topics and speakers for the year often with much labour and little reward. Even in the SoF the number of speakers and topics is finite. Past managers have become more and more bolshie. Now Peter [Timmins], who did such a good job on the Conference, has put the chairmanly foot down (and the boot in). If the Hamilton/Waikato group is to continue there must be people willing to lead and support it. Paul Louw offered another suggestion. If a central organisation were to collapse for want of a cadre why not develop House Groups who would meet successively in members' homes?

No one offered to run the show post-Peter, so it was decided to try a new pattern which incorporated each of these ideas. We will meet in plenary session four times a year, on March 4, June 3, September 2 and December 2. The venue will be St Peter's Cathedral Centre (now booked on those dates), with a meal at 6.00pm, the meeting at 7 pm, finishing at 9 according to our usual custom. The principle has now been laid down that meetings will take place only if there are people willing to organize them. In between times informal house groups will meet by arrangement in the various centres which constitute our membership, following their own agendas according to their own rules. A membership list will be circulated to all and an email list to wired up recipients. It is hoped that the membership list will assist house groups to establish themselves and the email circuit encourage the exchange of information, book reviews, choice quotes and so on on the model of the SoFnet.

It is hoped that by this precarious act of faith we will involve every one in the responsibility of organisation, and that the house groups will generate fellowship as well as fresh topics for the plenaries. The Act of Faith is reflected in the financial arrangements. Although plenary sessions have been reduced from 10 p.a. to 4, the sub remains as it was two years ago: \$15 single and \$20 for families. (If we make a bit of a profit we might be able to bring in a speaker from afar). And we take the risk that if at any time there is no sponsor for a plenary meeting there will be no meeting!

To get things going I volunteered for the first plenary which took place Friday March 4. We have sponsors for two more, Jock Crawford for June and Mairi Jay for September. For convenience it was decided to set up a minimum cadre. Peter Timmins will continue as treasurer and I will serve as Keeper of the Lists and contact person for the Page on the national website which Noel Cheer will set up for us. *Wish us luck!*

PostScript

The first plenary meeting of the year was held in St Peter's Cathedral Centre on March 4, 2005. Thirty members attended. The topic for discussion was proposed by Fred Marshall. Many, if not most of us, have travelled through the Christian Church, to the position where we now stand. This lead us to consider the aspects of religion that should be retained or rejected, post-Cupitt. Examples:

- 1 **Faith:** (grain of mustard seed) State of mind open to the direction of the divine. cf Fear.
2. **Prayer:** technique for opening the mind to the divine (meditation)
3. **Repentance/Forgiveness:** process for remedying errors, allaying of guilt. cf Sin
4. **Kingdom of God:** of living in harmony with nature and neighbours.
5. **Love:** what is it?
6. **Conversion** (Pentecost) means of transformation.
7. **Thanksgiving and Praise:** Healthy positive attitudes establishing interconnection between the person and the world
8. **Peace and Joy:** The consequences of the above. How true to our experience?
9. **Music:** SoF celebration of above.
10. **God:** Useful? how?

Ann Pringle

We note with regret the death of Ann Pringle last month. Ann has worked tirelessly on the Auckland Sea of Faith Group and was the immediate past editor of their Newsletter. Several SoF members attended Ann's funeral and both the Auckland and the national group joined in presenting her husband Derek, a member of the Steering Committee, with a Japanese Maple which will provide a living memory of Ann in their Japanese Garden.

Our sympathy and consolation go out to Derek and family.



Wallace Thomson

It is with sadness that we report the very sudden death of Wallace Thomson from acute pancreatitis on May 31.

Wallace was earlier a member of the Sea of Faith Network in Tauranga and, since 1997, in Christchurch. He had not long taken on the Treasurer's job for the upcoming national Conference.

Propping Up or Propping Down?

Don Feist of Dunedin applies carpentry to theology

JUST NEAR OUR PLACE, A NEW HOUSE is being built. It has a verandah post which, until a few days ago, was hanging from under the eaves with only empty space below it, where presumably a verandah will be eventually.

To me, this absurdity is a symbol of the old approach to explanations of life and the world. These old explanations always started from the top, from the world of spirit, or the world of ideas, or God, and used them to explain, or to put in proper context, us, our life, and the physical world around us.

For a long time now, I've known that for me, that kind of explanation cannot ultimately explain anything. An explanation that really explains, must start with things I at least partly understand, and work towards what I don't yet understand.

I read recently that, in the 1930s, some older scientists were still comfortable about mentioning God in the same sentence as atoms or stars or whatever. But the next generation of scientists could not do that. Even if they were Christian believers, top-down explanations starting from God made no sense to them.

One of my theology teachers was fond of telling us that the only teaching method that was 'pedagogically sound' was to work from the known to the unknown. He applied this, and insisted that we should apply it, to Bible in Schools. But none of those teachers of 50 years ago tried to apply this principle in teaching us theology.

Although today there is a vigorous rearguard action from conservative Christians, I'm sure more and more people are discovering that top-down explanations are, for them, simply and literally, incredible. Using the roof to prop down the verandah, doesn't make sense. The only sort of account of the world, or reality, that has any chance of making sense, must start from where we are, from ourselves and the physical reality revealed to us by our senses, and work 'upward' or 'outward' from there.

Do you agree? Are there some exceptions? Must we still rely on, for example, revelation by God for some things? Comment welcomed.



New Wine, Old Wineskins

Alan Goss of Napier shows us the shape of the future

1. The traditional Christian story or epic is fading, especially in the West. Christianity is changing shape, largely due to the explosion of human knowledge and the effects of globalisation.
2. The Christian story is the story of mankind's early development. The purpose and meaning of life was formerly located 'out there' in the idea of a personal God with supernatural powers. With our growth into adolescence the purpose and meaning of life is located 'down here', within the life process itself. We are on our own, there are no external powers or authorities to support us. See *Looking in the Distance* by Richard Holloway, former Bishop of Edinburgh (Canongate 2004)
3. In a pluralistic society, denominational loyalties are an anachronism. They are confusing religious ghettos to be replaced by smaller groups ranging from house groups to a variety of more intimate social settings.
4. There is now no one great religious story which is final and absolute. There are many stories, many spiritualities, many 'channels' to choose from. Religious groups will be open and inclusive, making room for diversity but sharing a common set of goals and values, e.g. living responsibly, caring for the environment. Religious groups will be creed-less without set standards or belief or classes of membership, e.g. 'communicants' and 'adherents'.
5. Institutional arrangements at national, regional and local levels will be kept to a minimum. Priority is given to developing human relationships and building a sustainable future for ourselves, for all other living creatures, and for the generations to come. Leadership (ministry) at all levels, including training, will be directed toward this end.



We welcome Letters to the Editor on any matters of interest to SoF members. Address on page 10.

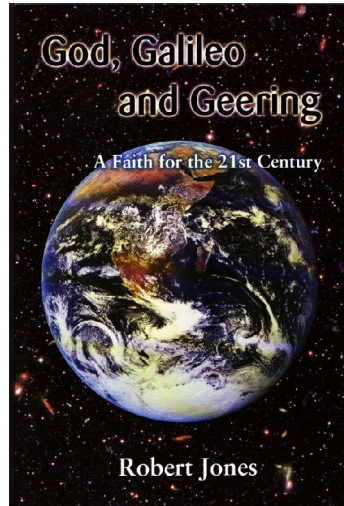


Books

God, Galileo and Geering

A FAITH FOR THE
21ST
CENTURY

by Robert Jones
Polebridge Press
Paperback, 174 pages
2005 ISBN
0-944344-51-8



THIS BOOK IS A COURSE OF STUDY based on three pivotal books by Lloyd Geering. It is designed for groups and individuals who are troubled by the gap between Christian teachings and the realities of life in the universe we now recognize. Robert Jones guides readers through *Christian Faith at the Crossroads*, (an updated *Faith's New Age*), *Tomorrow's God*, and *The World to Come*, and explores the relationship of Christianity to the cosmos, culture, and human life.

Robert Jones has been a pastor, a seminary teacher, and is now a chaplain at a retirement centre. The book is divided into 15 "lessons" (5 for each book) which include summaries of each book, reviews of the main points of each lesson and questions.

This arrangement reflects the origin of the book in lessons for the "Thursday afternoon religion class at Spring Lake Village Retirement Community, Santa Rosa, California."

This book would be a useful study tool for an Sea of Faith Group as well as for adult study groups in churches promoting Progressive Christianity.

Its shortcomings are small: it has neither bibliography nor index.

God, Galileo and Geering is known to be available from Epworth Books in Wellington (free call 0800-755-355) and possible Unity Books in Wellington and Auckland.

Noel Cheer

Promotional Material

The Sins of Scripture

EXPOSING THE BIBLE'S TEXTS OF HATE TO
REVEAL THE GOD OF LOVE

JOHN SHELBY SPONG was the Episcopal Bishop of Newark, NJ, for more than twenty years and is one of the world's leading spokespersons for an open, scholarly, and progressive Christianity. Bishop Spong has taught at Harvard, and at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkely, California. He has also lectured at universities, conference centres, and churches in North America, Europe, Asia, and the South Pacific. He is the author of 15 books including the bestselling *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism*, *Living in Sin*, *Liberating the Gospels*, *Why Christianity Must Change or Die*, and his latest book *The Sins of Scripture*. History will recognize him as one of the major change agents in modern Christianity.

Copies will be available in July at \$36 plus p&p. You may email your order now to robinson.howard@xtra.co.nz

or phone or write to Liz Robinson at

Whirlwind Distribution,

10 Westhill Road, Point Howard, Eastbourne, Wellington. Phone (04) 568-2794

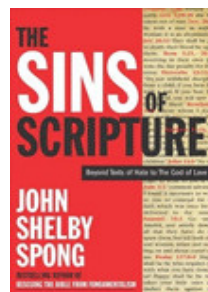
(an invoice will accompany your copy)

From a review in the NY Times:

"This book is long overdue, because one of the biggest mistakes liberals have made has been to forfeit battles in which faith plays a crucial role. Religion has always been a central current of American life, and it is becoming more important in politics because of the new Great Awakening unfolding across the United States.

Yet liberals have tended to stay apart from the fray rather than engaging in it. In fact, when conservatives quote from the Bible to make moral points, they tend to quote very selectively. After all, while Leviticus

bans gay sex, it also forbids touching anything made of pigskin (is playing football banned?) - and some biblical passages seem not so much morally uplifting as genocidal."



Faith in Cyberspace



Virtual Church of the Blind Chihuahua
www.dogchurch.org/index.shtml

"This is a sacred place in cyberspace named after a little old dog with cataracts, who barked sideways at strangers, because he couldn't see where they were. We humans relate to God in the same way, and expecting a reward for doing so. Hence our creed: We can't be right about everything we believe. Thank God, we don't have to be! We maintain this site because there is more to Religion than pleasing your imaginary friend."

found in SoF In Australia "Bulletin" May 2005

What Would Jesus Drive?

TO some, the question might seem amusing. But we take it seriously. As our Savior and Lord Jesus Christ teaches us, "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mt 22:39-40). Of all the choices we make as consumers, the cars we drive have the single biggest impact on all of God's creation.

Car pollution causes illness and death, and most afflicts the elderly, poor, sick and young. It also contributes to global warming, putting millions at risk from drought, flood, hunger and homelessness.

Transportation is now a moral choice and an issue for Christian reflection. It's about more than engineering—it's about ethics, about obedience, about loving our neighbor. So what would Jesus drive?

We call upon America's automobile industry to manufacture more fuel-efficient vehicles. And we call upon Christians to drive them. Because it's about more than vehicles—it's about values.

<p>Rev. Glen Calves, Ph.D. President, World Relief</p> <p>Rev. Richard Clark Vice President for Governmental Affairs, National Association of Evangelicals</p> <p>Leslie Cunningham President, World with a Mission President, University of the Nations</p>	<p>Rev. David H. Englehard, Ph.D. General Secretary, Christian Reformed Church in North America</p> <p>Michael Fuller Founder & President, Habitat for Humanity International</p> <p>Rev. Vernon Gramlich, Ph.D. Chancellor, Geneva Seminary</p>	<p>Rev. Steve Haynes, Ph.D. Past President, InterVarsity Christian Fellowship</p> <p>Rev. Richard Heintzen, Ph.D. International Minister, World Union</p> <p>Rev. Richard Moore, Ph.D. President, Fuller Theological Seminary</p> <p>Rev. Ben Sider, Ph.D. President, Evangelicals for Social Action</p>
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Sponsored by THE EVANGELICAL ENVIRONMENTAL NETWORK
10 East Lancaster Ave., Wyomissing, PA 19086 www.WhatWouldJesusDrive.org
Partial list of signatories; affiliations listed for identification only.

read the fine print at www.WhatWouldJesusDrive.org for a plea to America's automobile industry to make more fuel-efficient cars "because its more than about vehicles -- its about values".

Mystery Worshippers

On April 24 the first Mystery Worshipper Sunday was organised in London by the informal network Ship of Fools:

ship-of-fools.com

The UK Guardian reports that 100 'spies' were sent to assess churches all over the city. A calling card with a picture of the Lone Ranger in the collection plate revealed that a church had been on the hit list. Co-founder of Ship of Fools, Simon Jenkins, told the Guardian, "we are Christians engaging in self-criticism, keeping the churches on their toes by criticising a tradition which we love. We... hope that we... make them sharper and better and less fundamentalist. We're only really hard on those churches which take the view that they are right and everyone else is wrong."

Mystery Worshipper reports will be available at ship-of-fools.com in a couple of weeks.

found in SoF In Australia "Bulletin" May 2005

Don Cupitt

There is a website devoted to Don at

www.doncupitt.com

On it there is a very good article on non-realism. Here is an excerpt:

"Today, a realist is the sort of person who, when his ship crosses the Equator, looks overboard, expecting to see a big black line across the ocean. Realism tries to turn cultural fictions into objective facts.

A non-realist sees the whole system of lines of latitude and longitude as a valuable fiction, imposed upon the Earth by us, that helps us to fix locations and to find our way around.

In brief, we don't know and we cannot know THE world, absolutely. We know only OUR world, a world shaped by our ideas, seen from our perspective, and built by us with our needs in view."

Such is Cupitt's non-realist philosophy. It implies, by the way, that we have no privileged knowledge of ourselves either, hence Cupitt's phrase "Empty radical humanism".

In religion, the move to non-realism implies the recognition that all religious and ethical ideas are human, with a human history. "



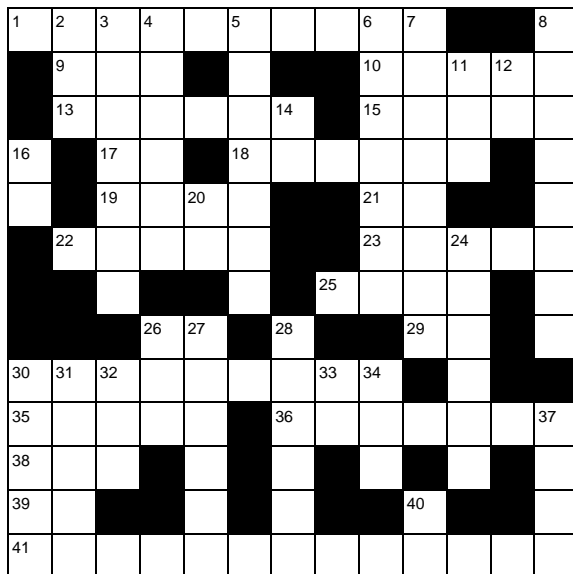
SofWord N° 3

Across

1. All will be revealed
9. Nothing
10. Usually called "brazen".
13. Oz's good witch
15. A kind of takeaway
17. Half of the news
18. Goes with "or"
19. Helpful
21. A decorative muscle
22. Revived witchcraft
23. Used for numbering
25. Debussy celebrated its p.m. hours
26. Home Secretary, in this sense
29. "_ and so"
30. Diabolical letter writer
35. 10 million, especially of years
36. More salary
38. "Aye, there's the _"
39. Your own number
41. Too much explanation for a post-Modernist

Down

2. Papua New Guinea
3. Heavy-duty raincoat
4. Specialist medical department
5. Just too posh
6. Muslim confession of faith
7. 4th C court bishop
8. Seen as similar
11. Title
12. South America
14. Intelligence, or insemination: neither natural
16. Lowest level of Freud's psyche
20. North Carolina
24. Revealed knowledge
26. Female possessive
27. Nordic country
28. Cartographer
30. Open weave fabric
31. Not sophisticated
32. Deprive of property
33. Personal assistant
34. What I spy with
37. Alternative option
40. not LT



Answers to SofWord No.2

- ACROSS:** 1:LINGUISTICS 10:AGREE 11:HART 13:RLS
 14:IMELDA 16:BUNGY 18:ALE 19:IO 20:SHALLOW
 22:ROPY 24:FIAT 25:RA 26:ED 27:OAR 28:GR 29:NICEA
 31:DOGMAS 33:EN 35:ROGER 38:EXAMINE 41:LIFELIFE
 43:BA 44:OF 45:TT 46:MAIN
- DOWN:** 1:LAMBARENE 2:GARGOYLE 3:UGLY 4:IRS 5:SE
 6:TEILHARD 7:CHE 8:SAL 9:STARWARS 12:RD 15:MEAT
 17:NIP 18:ASIA 21:ORGAN 23:ODIN 24:FO 30:ANGEL
 32:OMNI 34:CRAFT 35:RIFF 36:EXIT 37:KOAN 39:ME
 40:NAM 42:IO 43:BI

In Brief

Newsletter by Email

The Steering Committee has agreed to offer the Newsletter to members by email (as an attached PDF file) *as an option to receiving it in hard copy*. To accept this offer, a member whose subscription is up to date should send an email to

member@sof.org.nz

with the subject line reading "PDF Newsletter" and her/his/their name(s) and address in the body of the email.

Advantages to the member include: receiving the Newsletter earlier, being able to enjoy the better resolution illustrations (including colour) and in receiving the Local Groups Bulletin as a non-charge bonus.

Note: the paper version will continue to be available as an option. If you prefer paper, then do nothing.

The Paradoxical Commandment

This is the title of a small (90 page) book which bears the subtitle "Finding Personal Meaning in a Crazy World". Its written by Kent M. Keith and was published by Hodder in 2001.

His refreshing thesis seems to be something like this: "yes, the world is crazy and many people are unlovely, but we should nevertheless live a creative, loving and helpful life."

His fifth of ten commandments is this:

"Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway."

After all, someone has to keep this show on the road and it might as well be us!

Noel Cheer

**"Look how he abused me and beat me,
 How he threw me down and robbed me."**

Live with such thoughts and you live in hate...
 Abandon such thoughts and live in love.
 In this world
 Hate never yet dispelled hate.
 Only love dispels hate.

This is the law,
 Ancient and inexhaustible.

The Dhammapada (early Buddhist scripture)

All About Us

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.

We draw our members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions.

Our national Steering Committee publishes a regular Newsletter, maintains a website, assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference.

We have two **Life Members**: Lloyd Geering (since 2001) and Don Cupitt (since 2002).

The current **Chairperson** is Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper St, Titahi Bay, phone 04-236-7533

The current **Secretary** is Marion Dodd, 64 Wairiki Road, Mt Eden Auckland.

Membership of the national organisation costs \$15 per household per year (\$22 if outside NZ). Write your cheque to "SoF (NZ)" and mail to **The Membership Secretary**, P.O. Box 35651, Browns Bay, Auckland. (Phone 09-478-2490).

Members may borrow tapes, books etc from the **SoF Resource Centre** at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga. It is maintained by Suzi Thirlwall (07)578-2775

Further details can be found on our website at www.sof.org.nz

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.org.nz

The only copy appearing in this Newsletter that may be construed as reflecting SoF policy is that which is accompanied by a by-line of a member of the Steering Committee.

Optional Extras ...

"SoF" is 28 page A4, 6-times-a-year magazine produced by the UK SoF Network. To start your subscription, send \$53 to the SoF(NZ) Membership Secretary (address above). Renewal rates will be advised from the UK. Note that this is additional to membership of Sea of Faith (NZ).

Many of the study booklets referred to in this Newsletter are available from The St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society www.standrews.org.nz/satrs/

Last Word

FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

THE LINEUP OF KEYNOTE SPEAKERS FOR this year's Conference promises a diversity of views that will mirror the three-stranded approach that your Steering Committee felt best accounted for our humanity — that we take part in dialogues with Art, Religion and Science.

Dialogues, as distinct from proclamations of unanimity, allow for respectful dissent. That is certainly found within our Sea of Faith Network and also in the wider world of post-Christian, post-Modern, radical religious thought.

As George Steiner wrote, "We live in an age of speculative largesse."

There is a mood among SoF members that, to a large degree, the traditional church has lost the plot even while the plot remains important. But, while our members may have major reservations about loyalty to church institutions, they still point in the direction of human spirituality. Although we are humanists and although we value the secular, we are not secular humanists. We are religious humanists.

Unlike the Rationalist or the capital 'H' Humanist, most of us take the view that the religious (or 'spiritual' — your choice!) dimension of the human person is our highest aspect. Tillich invites us to think of our "ultimate concern, of what you take seriously without any reservation".

Our religious faith is above even our critical or rational faculties. It informs our aesthetic life. It gives conscience to our law-making. It lifts us from being clever, cooperative simians into 'humanness'.

So we keep the dialogue going, in our Local Groups, in our Newsletter, on our website and at our Conference. See you there !

*Noel Cheer,
Steering Committee Chairperson, 2004-2005*

Is this (sob!) goodbye?

Was this your last Newsletter? Membership subscriptions are renewable each June 30.