



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

NEWSletter

Steering Committee 2006-2007



[absent: Derek Pringle]

Bob Geddes Peter Cowley Bill Cooke John Irwin
Ron Wilson Norm Ely Geoff Neilson Shirley Wood Mary Boekman Betty Manning Ralph

The Steering Committee are delighted to confirm that the 2007 Sea of Faith (NZ) Conference will be held from 28th to the 30th September in Auckland at Kings College, Otahuhu.

This venue has very good facilities including a top class Lecture Theatre, Gymnasium and Swimming Pool as well as good accommodation and plenty of space for the smaller group presentations.

The Conference Theme for 2007 is:

RETELLING THE STORY

The Familiar; The Unfamiliar

The Guest Speaker for the Conference will be John Shelby Spong who will speak on the above topic on Saturday morning.

In addition we are negotiating for two Keynote Speakers for the Conference and for Elective Speakers.

These will be advised to you in future Newsletters.

There will also be three workshops looking at [Retelling the Sea of Faith Story](#). These will consider various aspects of the life of Sea of Faith and culminate in a panel presentation for the whole Conference to deliberate on. More details in later Newsletters!

Conference 2006 was superb — Conference 2007 will be even more so — mark the date 28th to 30th September 2007 in your diary, save up your dollars and prepare for a great weekend!

Norm Ely, Chairperson 2006-2007

Details From the Arrangements Committee

Planning for the 2007 conference began in August 2005. Contact was made with Kings to determine whether we could have a conference there in 2007. The Steering Committee in September 2005 agreed to follow up the possibility and eventually paid a deposit to secure the college as a venue. Since then details have been sorted out and most aspects of the arrangements with Kings finalised.

... continued

Number 70

Conference Theme
Issue

February 2007

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10. All About Us

Kings, as many will remember from the 1997 and 2001 conferences, is a wonderful venue. Expansive, attractive grounds and upmarket facilities, although some accommodation in dormitories was not up to scratch. That has changed with the building of a new house – Selwyn – a few years ago.

Selwyn is situated just inside the gates beside Middlemore House and sleeps 80. All rooms are either single or twin. Upstairs rooms are all single with an ensuite shared between pairs of rooms, ie single room/ensuite/single room. Downstairs rooms are all twin, with two separate beds. Some twin rooms have an ensuite between them, ie twin room/ensuite/twin room. Other twin rooms have communal bathroom facilities – men and women separate.

Selwyn also has five small common rooms and a large House Room which seats 80. Registration and morning meditation will take place in Selwyn.

Middlemore Senior Lodge (beside Selwyn) has 25 single rooms with communal bathroom – all female. Middlemore House (beside Senior Lodge) has eleven twin rooms with communal bathroom – all male. Accommodation should also be available in School House if required.

Living in as an overnight attendee should prove comfortable and convenient. For those who do not wish to sleep in, there are motels in the vicinity of Kings and details will be given in the May Newsletter.

Lectures/workshops/bookroom and office are all centred in classrooms and close to the Theatre, which seats 300, has high tech push-button facilities and excellent acoustics.

The Dining Room across the Quad is where meals, morning and afternoon teas and happy hours take place. Maybe even entertainment on Saturday evening. The swimming pool and gym are also at our disposal. All in all it's a great set-up.

Otahuhu is about 20 minutes down the Southern Motorway from Auckland's CBD. From the motorway at Otahuhu Kings is a five minute drive. Shuttles serve the college from the airport, relatively close by.

An Arrangements Committee has already met in January and has begun planning the details required by the programme and drawn up by is a budget so the costs of the conference can be calculated. Work is still being done on this. The aim is to keep the cost as low as possible.

On the committee are several former Steering Committee members and three current members and some other 'sparks' to fire us up.

We are planning another memorable conference.

John Irwin, Chairman, 2007 Arrangements Committee, jonbarb@xtra.co.nz, (09) 413 8513

This Too Is Important

If the date on the envelope that this Newsletter came in says "2007" then your subscription will lapse on June 30. Standby with your cheque-book until the May Newsletter.

Ian Mckenzie

It is with a deep sense of sadness and loss that I report the death (19 Dec 2006) of Ian Mckenzie, a highly valued and much-loved member of the local and national SOFN.

Ian was the son of a Presbyterian Minister and grew up as a member of that faith community. As an active member of the Matamata farming community Ian served on a number of local borough and regional councils and other farming committees. During this time, like many of his generation, he found it increasingly difficult to accept the traditional Christian message traditionally expressed and he came to feel more at home in the SOFN.

He attended many national Conferences and will be well-known to many readers of this newsletter who responded to his warm, friendly, always good-humoured manner.

At the local level of SOFN he was instrumental in establishing a group in Matamata and was also a regular attender at both the Hamilton and Tauranga groups. He was a member of the local organising committee for the National Conference in Cambridge in 2003. As a member of this committee, he persuaded the Tauranga group to provide baskets of fruit for the hostels and twisted the arms of local farming and banking groups to supply folders and pens for all registrants. Unfortunately he became ill during the Conference and was unable to attend. His absence was much remarked on, however, and spontaneously some attendees purchased a large get well card and had it signed by his many friends. He was able to attend the Conference this year, to his great delight.

Several SOFN members from Matamata and Hamilton attended the funeral and a representative spoke about Ian's valued contribution to the network and of the affection in which he was held.

Peter Timmins



Darwin's Rottweiler

Review Comments on Richard Dawkins' book *The God Delusion*

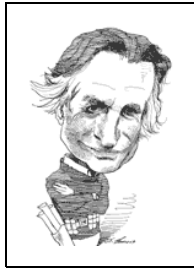
In 1995, Richard Dawkins became Oxford's Simonyi Professor for the Public Understanding of Science. The position was endowed by philanthropist Charles Simonyi (who was the first to refer to Dawkins as "Darwin's Rottweiler") with the express intention that Dawkins be its first holder. The term echoes "Darwin's Bulldog" which had been applied to T.H. Huxley.

Lloyd Geering, the Dominion Post:

"This leads [Dawkins] to regard all religion as an evil blight that has been the cause of evil, cruelty, and bloody wars, and he is anxious to see it shown up for what it is, so that humankind may be delivered from it. Yet the first chapter describes him as 'a deeply religious non-believer', and quite properly so, for paradoxical though it may appear, it is in the passion that he demonstrates for his cause that he reveals his religious zeal.

This may prove to be his 'Achilles' heel'. So gripped is Dawkins by the 'Gospel of atheism' for which he is such an eloquent evangelist, that he is in danger of developing the same malady as that of the fundamentalists he so despises — that of tunnel vision. He is completely blind to all the good that religion has promoted through the centuries, to the impressive civilisations it has created, and to the arts it has inspired."

like a man who equates socialism with the Gulag. Like the puritan and sex, Dawkins sees God everywhere, even where he is self-evidently absent.



H.Allen Orr, NY Review of Books

"Dawkins not only thinks religion is unalloyed nonsense but that it is an overwhelmingly pernicious, even "very evil," force in the world. His target is not so much organized religion as all religion. And within organized religion, he attacks not only extremist sects but moderate ones. ... Despite my admiration for much of Dawkins's work, I'm afraid that I'm among those scientists who must part company

with him here. Indeed, *The God Delusion* seems to me badly flawed. Though I once labeled Dawkins a professional atheist, I'm forced, after reading his new book, to conclude he's actually more an amateur."

Terry Eagleton, London Review of Books 19/10/06

Imagine someone holding forth on biology whose only knowledge of the subject is the *Book of British Birds*, and you have a rough idea of what it feels like to read Richard Dawkins on theology. Card-carrying rationalists like Dawkins, who is the nearest thing to a professional atheist we have had since Bertrand Russell, are in one sense the least well-equipped to understand what they castigate, since they don't believe there is anything there to be understood, or at least anything worth understanding.

This is why they invariably come up with vulgar caricatures of religious faith that would make a first-year theology student wince.

... Dawkins considers that all faith is blind faith, and that Christian and Muslim children are brought up to believe unquestioningly. ... For mainstream Christianity, reason, argument and honest doubt have always played an integral role in belief.

... Such is Dawkins' unruffled scientific impartiality that in a book of almost four hundred pages, he can scarcely bring himself to concede that a single human benefit has flowed from religious faith, a view which is as a priori improbable as it is empirically false. The countless millions who have devoted their lives selflessly to the service of others in the name of Christ or Buddha or Allah are wiped from human history — and this by a self-appointed crusader against bigotry. He is

Noel Cheer

Its mixed book. When he talks of Darwin he is spot on, but his understanding of religion seems adolescent. His chapter "**The 'Good' Book and the changing moral Zeitgeist**" is excellent, albeit an echo of Spong's *Sins of Scripture*.

His most telling point is that the majority of us who select which parts of the Bible to accept as moral guidance and which parts to reject are using a moral system external to and, *ipso facto*, superior to the Bible.

Given that there has never been a society in which religious faith is not present, it is unlikely that there ever will be. Rather than looking for a world of "no religion" we might look for one which offers "better religion".

The parallel with sex needs not be elaborated.

“Dawkins’ God in now dead, too”

Don Cupitt, Guardian 3/2/07

"... since Kant, and especially through the philosophies of Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida, the old western metaphysics has now been radically destabilised, deconstructed. The old west has gone. ... The upshot of all this is very severe; so severe that from the point of view of modern philosophy even Richard Dawkins believes in God. He has abandoned popular belief in God (Derrida's "restricted theology"), but clings to what Derrida calls "general theology", a belief in one ready-made truth of things out there, waiting to be copied into our language. Unfortunately, Dawkins' God is now dead too."

What An Honour!

LLOYD GEERING TOLD A GROUP AT AN AFTERNOON GATHERING RECENTLY that “he did not know why he was made a Member of the Order of New Zealand.” He also said that at the time that he was first notified of the pending award “he was not sure that he should accept it”. What he was saying in the context of the discussion was ‘that he was not worthy of the honour’.

For once I must strongly disagree with Lloyd. He is most certainly worthy of the honour bestowed on him. Lloyd is one-of-a-kind in New Zealand’s history. A man who has grown up like most Kiwis of his era, who moved around NZ as his father moved his family on from one place to another. Lloyd is a man who has not been especially favoured in the way his life evolved; he has suffered the same trials and tribulations, good times and not so good times as most of us.

Lloyd is a man who did not seek the limelight but had it thrust upon him, especially by way of the Presbyterian Church’s so called Heresy Trial. A man for whom fate has dealt a hand that has given him the opening to grow his deep seated progressive theological thinking.

A comment that I have heard from a number of people over the last few weeks is that “Lloyd put into words or into publications what I have been thinking about but been unable to elucidate further”.

Lloyd has a unique talent in that he can take historical faith concepts that are at the very heart of people’s emotional, ethical and moral precepts and put them into rational, logical and clear concepts for the 21st century.

Although some people would not agree, I am firmly of the opinion that the wider world community owes a considerable amount to Lloyd. Whether we agree with him or not, he has opened up the closed minds and ideas of most religions to scrutiny and debate. This can only be of benefit to humankind as the issues of the continued existence or otherwise of faith and faith communities are reflected on. These topics now under intense discussion and scrutiny having been raised by Lloyd and others, are becoming more important as we look to a possible future without God(s) and with different variations on the faith stories we have relied upon in our past.

Lloyd’s award is of recognition of him as a true humanitarian and visionary.

Congratulations, Lloyd, from all your Sea of Faith friends. You really deserve the honour,

Norm

A Religious Atheist?

I invited readers to submit their thoughts on this book which was reviewed in the December Newsletter. This is the only response that I received. — ed

“A Religious Atheist?” is not as bad as the Editor suggested in December.

Its fundamental weakness is that none of the writers acknowledges that Lloyd starts from the position that, for many people today, a top-down theology, with a supernatural God as given, is simply not a possibility. For them, there is no way to speak about faith but starting from ourselves.

Several of these writers, however, take divine revelation as a given, never acknowledging that their premises are incompatible with Lloyd’s. And yet, I found value in the book. Several writers suggest difficulties or limitations in what Lloyd has said to date.

John Bishop convinces me that it does not follow from rejecting the crude popular conception of “omni-God”, that the word “God” is no more than a human symbolic construct. There may, after all, be more to “God” than that.

Gregory Dawes suggests, credibly and uncomfortably, that if we give up believing that the word “God” refers to a supernatural being, there may be no secure resting point, short of giving up the word altogether.

Neil Darragh persuaded me that Lloyd has provided a myth that is compatible with, and which illuminates, the Western world-view of our time, rather than lasting, objective truth. But I suspect that Lloyd would accept this.

Ken Booth, by uncritically using the term “Christ”, and assuming an almost mystical meaning of “Church”, sides with those who do not acknowledge where Lloyd starts from, and are talking past him. And yet, I thought his comments that Lloyd is strong on individualism, and on being rational, but has little to say about the vital place of Christian community, were fair, and do point to a gap in what Lloyd has given us.

Donald Feist, Dunedin

Heresy, UK Style

In 2004 the UK SoFN did a study on doctrinal diversity and discipline in the 20th century. You can now find it in wikipedia: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Heresy_in_the_20th_century

Until July 1 we are offering the major speeches from the 2006 Conference for sale on CD. There’s a printable order form at www.sof.org.nz



Book Reviews

Bare Bones Jesus

The Gospel of Jesus according to the Jesus Seminar
Robert W. Funk & the Jesus Seminar
Polebridge Press, Californian 1999

Recently, I read *The Gospel of Jesus, according to the Jesus Seminar* which is a compilation of those parts of the five gospels (the Synoptics + John + Thomas) that the scholars of the Jesus Seminar consider is undoubtedly or probably close to being an authentic account of the historical Jesus.

The Gospel of Jesus is a slim volume. If one discounts the Introduction and appendices, the record of the words and actions of Jesus takes up less than forty pages. In the text there is almost no detail, no emotional language, no supernatural events, and no beauty of phraseology. There are also very few details about people or places. Rather the text provides a spare record of events and the sayings of Jesus. If the traditional gospels, with their embellishments regarding places, activities and people, are characterised as the good news *about* Jesus, then the Gospel of Jesus might be characterised as the good news *brought by* Jesus. Yet, paradoxically, there is little in this gospel to inspire, to move, or to engender an affective response. Certainly there is wisdom, but it is wisdom presented in sparse, epigrammatic form. This Galilean sage of twenty centuries ago whose actions and teachings are recorded here is an austere figure – just bare bones with no hint of flesh. The text conveys nothing of the impact the teaching of Jesus made on his listeners and followers – there is no hint of the charismatic sage who transformed people's lives by proclaiming his vision of a new and better way of living.

Yet reading *The Gospel of Jesus* has had a profound effect on me.

Previously I had been rather snifty about the traditional gospel stories. I regarded their obvious inventions and embellishments, the large number of supernaturalist elements, and the contradictions between the gospel accounts, as most off-putting. But, contrariwise, I have been dismayed by the spareness, and dryness of the text of *The Gospel of Jesus*.

It is at this point that my own experience provided me with an insight. My first husband told wonderful stories about his childhood and life as a young man, and these became a precious part of our family lore. We always intended to write them down 'one day', and so preserve them for our children and grandchildren. But we never got around to it. Then, suddenly, he found that he was terminally ill and the need to preserve his stories became urgent. During the last months of his life he recorded many of them on tape, and I was able to transcribe and

edit them so that, shortly before he died, he was able to present copies of his 'Yarns' to his children and grandchildren. Without these stories having been recorded, all but the sketchiest outline of them would have been lost, and any attempt by me and our daughters to record what we remembered of them would have resulted in only the sketchiest of remembered snatches. Or, worse still, what if we hadn't been able to do this but then, many years further on, our grandchildren had tried to record what they remembered of what their parents had told them of their grandfather's stories? It would have been inevitable that, in either case, any such recording would have resulted in only the bare, dry bones of the stories, shorn of the personality and the 'voice' of the original storyteller.

And this is exactly the situation faced by the Evangelists when they began writing, at the earliest, a generation after the death of Jesus. If we accept that the text of *The Gospel of Jesus* is as near as it is possible to get to an authentic record of those actions and sayings of Jesus which were preserved by the proto-Christian community, then we may also accept that this text represents all the 'facts' that the writers of the traditional gospels had to work with. Yet they recognised that, if the teachings of Jesus were to be presented in a way that could inspire future generations, they needed to be 'fleshed out' – to have a richness of detail and importance added to the stories, and a personality created for the original storyteller.

And this is, I believe, exactly what was done, firstly within the oral tradition itself, and then by those who wrote the gospel stories. It is widely acknowledged that the writer of John's gospel departed markedly from what we can be confident are Jesus' actual words and themes, while the authors of Mark, Matthew and Luke attempted to remain closer to the tenor and the meaning of the message of Jesus. But they also needed to invent a huge amount of detail to fill in the cavernous lacunae in the stories. And when, in addition, one factors in the needs to focus the narrative towards the particular audience each of the gospel writers was addressing, it is not surprising that the gospels vary so widely in what is included, in the details ascribed to the stories, and in the overall mood of the writing.

So I now approach the traditional gospel accounts of the life of Jesus much more sympathetically. Certainly we need not accept them as literal accounts, but we can regard them as genuine attempts to preserve and pass on not only the actions and words of wisdom – particularly the parables and aphorisms – of Jesus, but also to clothe those sparse bones in narratives to create a personality appropriate to the remarkable human being who proclaimed a new vision for humanity 2000 years ago.

Shirley Dixon, Titahi Bay

“Axial” by Another Name

The Great Transformation

Karen Armstrong

Atlantic Books, London, 2006
\$39.99 from Epworth Books

COPERNICUS, MANY YEARS AGO NOW, ENABLED US TO STAND BACK AND SEE THAT EARTH IS NOT IN FACT THE CENTRE OF EVERYTHING, but a modest part of a much larger solar system. Karen Armstrong, in her recent book “The Great Transformation” has done the same thing for me where the world’s religions are concerned.

For quite a few years now, I have become more and more critical of the Church and its dogmas, both as I have known them personally, and of what I have read of them the past. The gap I have seen between Christianity and the life and teaching of Jesus has grown ever wider.

But after reading this book, I see that I continued, to a large extent, to use Jesus as the yardstick by which to evaluate such people as the Buddha or Confucius. Karen Armstrong here presents these figures, and many others from the period of roughly the thousand years before the Common Era, in a panorama of the development of human self-awareness and an understanding of our relationship to the context in which we live. So I will never again be able to assume that either Jesus or Christianity is the centre around which the whole religious universe revolves.

Her story begins with Aryan people of the steppes of Southern Russia about 3,500 years ago — people living a quiet sedentary existence who “experienced an invisible force within themselves and in everything they said, heard and touched”. Over time they came to see the immediate sensory world as a counterpart, or manifestation of, a spirit world. So they saw it as appropriate to offer sacrifices to their gods, “to replenish the energies they expended in maintaining world order”. Some such world view as this was standard throughout Europe, the Middle East and Asia at the time.

Then, between about 900 and 200 BC, a series of thinkers challenged almost

everything in this way of seeing things, and pioneered a new understanding. They saw a person’s relationship and responsibility to all living things and [especially] to other people in a new way — one that was essentially inward, personal and ethical. Usually, violence and aggression of all kinds were no longer praised, but condemned. If there was to be a place for sacrifice, it must be a self-offering. Communities did not always consistently put these ideals into practice and, across a culture, the extent of even acknowledging them often fluctuated. But over this period, and over all the cultures from Greece to China, the change Karen Armstrong describes and documents, in self-awareness and in how humans could best relate to what is beyond themselves, was remarkable — her word “transformation” is not too

consumption. Seeing Jesus portrayed in this dispassionate and even-handed way, has thrown a fascinating new light for me on things that have long been familiar.

I now see a certain irony, then, in the fact that the culture in which the development of science, technology and an aggressive capitalism has taken place, has been so dependent on Plato and St Paul, and more generally, on two cultures [Greek and Judaic], which tended to lag behind the most significant human developments in the millennium before the Common Era.

I have one or two reservations or queries. In particular, I wonder whether Karen Armstrong is too sympathetic to those, over the centuries, who have renounced marriage, family and active involvement in society, in favour of meditation in some degree of isolation.

She hasn’t dislodged me from the view that being fully human — and most richly spiritual — means being as actively involved as possible in life and in community. I’m in no position to predict how well her overall picture will

“Inward, Personal and Ethical”

stand up to inspection by other scholars, but I find it so coherent and convincing I will be surprised if it is radically altered.

Just because her scope is already so wide, I’m sorry there is no mention of the peoples of Africa and the Americas — although it may well be that there are no records to make that possible. And I find it a little frustrating that she stops in time where she does. I hope I live to read a similar overview from her that continues through the two millennia we call the Common Era.

At 400 pages, it’s a substantial book in every sense, and a mind-stretching one. But Karen Armstrong’s easy style kept me wanting to know what came next. Unavoidably, there are some technical terms, but there is an excellent glossary - in addition to the thorough references, bibliography and index. I would guess it may become a standard University text, but it is a straightforward and fascinating read for anyone who wants a better understanding of what it means to be human, and of how we, the human race, got to where we are now.

strong.

New stages in these developments often appeared first in India or China, so quite a lot of space is devoted to spiritual pioneers in India prior to Hinduism, in China before and after Confucius, and to the Buddha. Although prophets like Amos and Hosea were leaders in arguing for a moral god, the Jews are presented as in some ways late developers. Yahweh, for example, was still perceived as a markedly warlike god when leaders in India and China had been renouncing war for centuries. What developed in Greece was not so much a deeper or more personal spirituality, but rather a new capacity for thinking logically and dispassionately. Seeing Plato and Aristotle sketched in on this very large canvas cut my perception of them down to what I’m now sure is a more appropriate size.

Jesus doesn’t strictly belong in the period covered, but, along with Mohammed, is dealt with briefly at the end. Karen Armstrong sets him not only in this large landscape, but more immediately in the context of contemporary rabbis, and St Paul, who very substantially repackaged Jesus for Gentile

Donald Feist, Dunedin

Why Right-Brainers Will Rule The Future

Daniel H. Pink, *A Whole New Mind, Moving from the information age to the conceptual age.* Allen and Unwin, (2005), Australia.

WHEN I WAS GIVEN THIS BOOK I DIDN'T KNOW THE INFORMATION AGE HAD ENDED AND I WAS CLUELESS AS TO WHAT THE CONCEPTUAL AGE MIGHT BE. Once I was confident that a few PC skills and university degrees had armed me for the future, but now I was anxious about what was next and where to get the new hardware. A clue lies in the subtitle for the 2006 edition: **“Why right-brainers will rule the future”**.

Daniel Pink's bio reveals he is a contributing writer for *Wired* magazine and his previous highlights include chief speech-writer for ex-Vice President Al Gore and a latrine builder in Botswana.

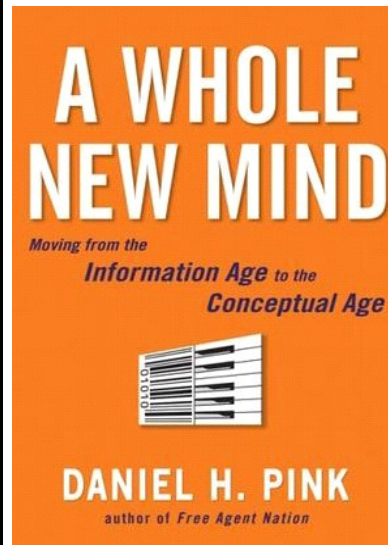
The first chapter begins interestingly with the author submitting to a MRI scan to introduce left and right brain thinking. He does simple exercises to show when the two hemispheres work to solve different problems. Put simply, **the left-brain works sequentially like reading text from left to right and focuses on a single correct answer. It works logically and analytically. The right-brain however works with intuition and apparently interprets things simultaneously and determines context like understanding facial expressions.**

Pink suggests that the passing of the information age, like the agriculture and industrial ages before it, is due to the wealth and affluence in western economies. He reasons that the information age and the knowledge worker (a term coined by Peter Drucker for those who acquire and apply analytic knowledge) is the triumph of

left-brain thinking, where the rights of passage are marked by scholastic exam passes — those tests which require analytic and computer-like thinking and zero-in on a single correct answer. Schools focus their students on good grades, and he spells business success ‘MBA’. The stereotypical jobs for knowledge workers would be law, engineering and computer programming.

Pink weaves a convincing picture with three major societal shifts that have contributed to the end of one age and entry to a new time, which he calls the Conceptual Age.

I. **Abundance.** We live in a time of material abundance. This informa-



tion economy has created a world beyond our grandparents' dreams. From my own experience I can recall the excitement of the arrival of our Philips K9 which I doubt will ever be matched by my own children with the purchase of some other appliance or gadget. Most of our history has been characterised by scarcity and so as aspirations are realised, their ability to motivate must conversely diminish and open a new era for right-brain pursuits like meaning and life balance.

II. **Asia.** The word Asia represents more than a simple analogy for globalisation. The major feature is that a large portion of knowledge work can be exported to places like India with workers fluent in English and relatively cheap. The author provides numerous examples of legal, technical drawing work and

even medical analysis can be accomplished offshore and delivered overnight via the Internet for a fraction of the cost of having the work done locally. The challenge, then, is to find work which cannot be exported and to adapt in the same way that last generations' blue collar workers have had to change with the end of the industrial era in the West.

III. **Automation.** As in the industrial age where machines replaced back-breaking physical work, technology is replacing left brain work. Tom Peters described software as a forklift for the mind. Gary Kasparov is possibly the world's best ever chess champion but was beaten by a computer in 1996 and despite a number of attempts has not managed to regain that crown since. Chess is claimed to be the quintessential left-brain activity requiring memory, rational thinking and with little room for emotion. Any job that requires routine and sets of rules can be automated. Further the monopoly of information held by knowledge workers has been ransacked by the Internet. As an example basic legal forms may be purchased online for USD14.95.

So a new Conceptual Age beckons where survivors and winners must embrace right-brain qualities which Pink describes as:

- a. **High concept** – the capacity to detect patterns and opportunities, to create beauty and craft ideas into something new.
- b. **High touch** – the capacity for empathy, understanding human interaction and finding joy pursuing purpose and meaning.

And for this shift the author proposes we need a whole new mind that uses both the left and right brain simultaneously. He claims to have spent years pondering this question and offers six high concept and high touch aptitudes to illustrate how right-brain thinking can be applied:

1. **Design.** Products, services and experiences must be more than functional: they must express beauty and be emotionally engaging.

2. **Story.** Our lives are filled with information and data and so the one way to differentiate an idea, product or service is to wrap a compelling story around it.

3. **Symphony.** As the information age begets focus and specialisation and white-collar work can be exported to Asia or reduced by software, this new age offers the opposite, namely the ability to see the big picture, create something new from disparate pieces.

4. **Empathy.** Conceptual agers require the ability to understand others, create relationships and care for others.

5. **Play.** Too much seriousness is bad for your wellbeing and your work. The ability to engage in play offers enormous opportunities to promote health and healing as well differentiate your product/service.

6. **Meaning.** In a world of material plenty, people are released from basic day-to-day struggle and therefore seek something to live for e.g. purpose and spiritual meaning. Expressions of this search might include the growth of yoga studios, self-help and spiritual bookshops and green products.

Each of the six attributes are supported with empirical studies and evidence from other authors and business leaders. I found Pink's examples engaging, convincing and found the whole book easily readable and enjoyable.

Why would SoFers read a secular book written by a technology writer?

1. SoFers are interested in the things that shape western civilisation and this book addresses changes to culture as well as business. Right-brain thinking offers evolution to a better and just society with personal purpose and meaning. These attributes are particularly useful in experiencing spiritual pursuits.

2. Many SoFers are successful knowledge workers. Left-brain thinking has brought us abundance, Asia and automation

but the scene is so different now. Can you imagine advising your children/grandchildren not to become lawyers or engineers?

This book offers a holistic view of the world, new perspectives and hope for the future. Knowledge workers, parents and educators will find value in it. Read it and buy it for someone you know!

Brendan Clegg, Wellington

* * * * *

The Ultimate Right-Brainer

How To Read Jung

David Tacey
Granta Books London 2006

IN THE EXPERIENCE OF THIS REVIEWER THERE ARE ONLY THREE AVAILABLE ATTITUDES

TOWARDS CARL JUNG: you love him, you hate him, or you have never heard of him. Indifference is not an option.

I mostly agree with the first attitude — but that does not mean that I understand Jung. I think that my attitude comes from thinking, or better, feeling that I sort of align with what he is saying.

David Tacey was a keynote speaker at the 2006 New Zealand Conference and is the author of eight books and eighty published essays on Jungian studies, spirituality, and culture. Books in press include *The Idea of the Numinous* (London: Routledge 2006). David is Associate Professor in the School of Arts and Critical Enquiry, La Trobe University, Melbourne. He teaches courses on spirituality, Jungian psychology, and literature. He is on the international faculty of the C. G. Jung Institute in Zurich, where he presents short courses on his current research.

We need this book — *How To Read Jung* — to launch into what is a complex subject and Tacey writes lucidly. He tackles Jung's big themes head-on taking us

through symbols and dreams, then on to the 'second self' which is crushed by dogma but set free by artistic creativity. Myth, the 'dark side' (to give George Lucas' rendering of *The Shadow*), Anima/Animus, Archetypes and Individuation are all there.

At barely 100 pages of text this is a first class way into to Jungian thought and is highly recommended.

I was brought up with a shock of recognition at the end of the first chapter with a quote from the poet A.D. Hope:

Yet the myths will not fit us ready made.

It is the meaning of the poet's trade
To re-create the fables and revive
In men the energies by which they live.

Noel Cheer

* * * * *

On Belief

"[Daniel] Dennett ... observes that belief, which means accepting certain doctrines as true, is different from belief in belief, which means believing [that] belief in the same doctrines ... [is] desirable. He finds evidence that large numbers of people who identify themselves as religious believers do not in fact believe the doctrines of their religions but only believe in belief as a desirable goal. The phenomenon of "belief in belief" makes religion attractive to many people who would otherwise be hard to convert. To belong to a religion, you do not have to believe. You only have to want to believe, or perhaps you only have to pretend to believe. Belief is difficult, but belief in belief is easy."

From a review of Dennett's *Breaking The Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* by Freeman Dyson in *The New York Review of Books* 22 June 2006.

Readers might like to take issue via *Letters to the Editor*.



In My View

FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

RETELLING THE STORY

Isn't that what Sea of Faith is really all about?

The parting of the Red Sea, the Virgin Birth, and The Resurrection — the Bible is made up of many stories. Each religious order over the centuries has taken these stories in the Bible and put an interpretation on them that most suits the aspirations of the leaders of the particular faith group represented by that religious order at the time. In fact, I believe in many instances this was a purely utilitarian approach rather than a truly religious one.

Many of the New Testament stories are a reinterpretation of the stories in the Old Testament. Amongst other points, this reinterpretation by the teller of the story in the New Testament achieved two objectives. The first objective was to link the New Testament story back to the Old Testament. This was a very important process if the teller wanted to take members of the Jewish Faith at that time, as well as other members of that society into a new faith group - Christianity. The second objective was to give reason to the unexplained events, both current and past, that people of the time were subjected to relative to the time the stories were written.

In Sea of Faith are we not doing the same thing two thousand years or so on in time?

Are we not trying to reinterpret the stories and events to make them relevant to us in 2007?

One can say that the authorities of Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian or whatever faith group have taken many of the stories in the Bible and interpreted them to fit their own strategic ends rather than follow a truly religious path (whatever that may be). These strategies may have been:

- Politically necessary in the organisation at the time.
- A means of persuading the wider community to follow that particular faith path.
- Of a financial or ambitious nature.
- Or any combination of these or other reasons to interpret the stories and events to fit their schema of the time.

Was it not this modus operandi by the Temple Priests and other authority figures that led to the same disquiet that Jesus had with them two thousand years ago?

Is it possible that in Sea of Faith in 2007 we have the same debate going on? One member of the Steering Committee made the point that the three speakers at the 2006 Conference in Marton each represented a particular aspect of Sea of Faith thinking;

- Don Cupitt represented the “liberal Christian/Post Theist position”.
- David Tacey represented the “Jungian/Mystic position”.

- Bill Cooke represented the “Secular/Naturalist or Heathen Position”.

It seems clear to me that Sea of Faith has at least these three theological or philosophical offshoots (I am reluctant to say factions). Each of these offshoots has its own interpretation and agenda that it is pursuing and each of these offshoots have their own “Advocates” who are followed.

Is this a bad thing?

No, I think it is a good thing provided it does not cause factionalism and splits and, by so doing, harm the overall group.

It has generally been accepted that the Sea of Faith is an all embracing community that enables membership from all faith communities. In fact if you go to the web site it states in its Mission Statement:

“The Sea of Faith Network is an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint.”

It then goes on to say in other parts of the document:

“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.”

And,

“The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) therefore ...

- **AFFIRMS** the continuing importance of religious thought and practice as a vehicle for awe and wonder and for the celebration of key social and spiritual values;
- **DRAWS** freely upon our spiritual heritage without being bound by it;
- **PROMOTES** the quest for meaning and fulfilment as a human activity;
- **PROVIDES** encouragement, stimulation and support in fellowship with others engaged in the quest.

If the above is also part of the wider New Zealand Sea of Faith Mission Statement why do we regularly espouse somewhat dogmatic views and criticisms of others in the Sea of Faith and/or the Sea of Faith itself?

Can some members of an offshoot simply not tolerate the differing views of others? Are some members simply not able to read or listen to commentary and say “this is interesting but not for me” and then reply with their own view for consideration? Are we not able to read or listen to commentary and critique it logically?

Or are we, from our particular perspective, simply trying to establish our own views and agendas with the overarching thought that, “This is my (our) opinion. I (we) am right and there is no other acceptable standpoint”.

Recently one of the Steering Committee, in a discussion with the rest of the Steering Committee, had reason to compare the New Zealand Sea of Faith Mission Statement with the Mission Statements of the other three main groups around the world with this result:

New Zealand.

“The Sea of Faith Network is an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint.”

United Kingdom.

“The Network explores the implications of accepting religious faith as a human creation; promotes this view of religion, and affirms the continuing validity of religious thought and practice as celebrations of spiritual and social values. The Network has no creed. It welcomes people from all faith and non-faith traditions.”

Canada.

“The SnowStar Institute of Religion offers an open and honest atmosphere where radical religious questioning can be pursued freely and without fear. SnowStar promotes religious literacy and tolerance, helps individuals and communities find solidarity, and provides access to liberal educational materials and events.”

Australia.

“Sea of Faith in Australia (SoFiA) is a network of Australians who are seeking a radical reappraisal of past religious traditions in order to meet today’s spiritual challenges. The network affirms the continuing importance of religious thought and practice, but sees religion as a field of creative human endeavour which must be ever-changing to remain relevant. Sea of Faith feels free to draw on the rich spiritual heritage of the past (including the Christian tradition) but is not bound by it. It provides stimulation and fellowship in the common quest for meaning and fulfilment.”

The point the Committee Member made was ‘there is a big difference between SOFNZ and SOFUK for instance. NZ seems to imply that we are just an association of people who want to discuss religious thought, whereas UK clearly states that they see religious faith as a human creation. Australia seems to also go with the UK statement and Canada seems to be more closely related to the NZ statement.’

Is it time for us to consider “Retelling the Story” for Sea of Faith New Zealand? Is it time for Sea of Faith NZ to re-evaluate the who, what, where, when, and why of Sea of Faith NZ?

The Theme for Conference 2007 covers a much wider and somewhat different aspect of Retelling the Story. However, the theme certainly gives me food for thought in respect of where Sea of Faith NZ is heading. Is the direction where you want it to go? Are you satisfied with the direction? Is the Mission Statement itself and the wider Mission Statement as set out in the Sea of Faith NZ publications right for you as we move forward?

Food for thought as we move on into 2007!

Norm

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 three **Life Members**: Lloyd Geering, Don Cupitt and Noel Cheer.

The **Chairperson** is Norm Ely, 7 Bay Drive, Titahi Bay,
(04) 236-5749

The **Secretary** is Mary Boekman, 138 Rata St, Inglewood,
(06) 756-7644

Membership of the national organisation costs \$20 per household per year (\$27 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 There is a catalogue on the website,

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 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 ...

"**sofia**" is 28 page A4, 6-times-a-year magazine produced by the UK SoF' Network. For instructions on how to subscribe, send an email to noel@cheer.org.nz

SATRS Booklets: Many of the study booklets referred to from time to time in this Newsletter are available from The St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society. A catalogue and ordering instructions appear on their website at www.standrews.org.nz/satrs