



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

## CONFERENCE 2007

ReTelling The Story: The Familiar, The Unfamiliar

### Newsletter Supplement

#### **“In the beginning Truth went about among the world naked.**

It was not a pretty sight. In fact, it was quite scary, and people were frightened by his nakedness, and ran away, and kept their children indoors so that Truth was forced to go about the world only under the cover of darkness.

One day, a beautiful woman appeared, a stranger, dressed in the most beautiful clothes. Her clothes were of a material no one had even seen before, iridescent, rainbow-like.

At first people were cautious of her and shied away, but they soon discovered that when they talked with her or even just touched her clothes, they dreamt the most amazing dreams.

These dreams changed them.

They became more open to learning and grew in love for themselves and for others.

One night, Truth crept up to the stranger who was creating such change. He asked her, "Who are you?"

The stranger smiled and said, "Do you not know me? We have been companions for many years, though you have not recognised me. My name is Story."

She gave Truth a gift. She gave him her cloak to wear. And from that time on people were not afraid to encounter Truth, for Truth always went about the world clothed in Story”.

Used by Noel Cheer to open the Plenary Panel Discussion.  
It was first heard at the 2006 SoF(UK) Conference

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This Supplement contains abbreviated versions of several addresses from the Conference.  
The full papers can be found on our website at [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz)

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*The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe* has been praised by some Christians as an imaginative retelling of the Passion of Christ and denounced by others as a Satanic text full of witches and magic. In this address, Colin Gibson explores a great creative writer’s retelling of a fundamental Christian myth.

### **Bishop John Shelby Spong:**

#### **“Jesus for the Non-Religious”**

Spong invites his audiences and readers to look at Jesus through the lens of both the Jewish scriptures and the liturgical life of the first-century synagogue. He proposes a new way of understanding the divinity of Christ: as the ultimate dimension of a fulfilled humanity.

### **Professor Raymond Bradley:**

#### **“The Semantics of Story-Telling: Santa Claus, Jesus Christ and God Almighty”**

His aim is to provide some semantic beacons to guide those who feel themselves "all at sea" in the Sea of Faith. He ends by asking some awkward questions about the pragmatics of stories about Jesus and God: What are the intended, and — more importantly — the unintended, consequences of telling them?

### **Jill Harris:**

#### **“Doing The Story”**

People have always explained their world through myths – stories which illuminate and enlarge human experience, guide, inspire and transform. Myth and ritual go hand in hand. In the 21st century do we want to re-tell the religious myths we have inherited? How do we shape rituals which can still illuminate, guide, inspire and transform ourselves and our world?

# When Aslan Came Bounding In: C.S Lewis and the old old story

Colin Gibson

MNZM PhD (Otago), MA, Dip Hons, Dip Teaching, LTCL.

*These are excerpts from the paper which Colin Gibson delivered at the Conference.  
The full text is available on the website.*

I will be focusing on just one work by one early modern author, C.S. Lewis, and his fantasy novel *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first book in his seven-volume Narnian Chronicles. I am sure that Matthew Arnold, the poet who wrote 'Dover Beach', that melancholic sonnet about the decline of faith and certainty in late Victorian England—and the poem from which the name of this Sea of Faith community was taken—would have approved your willingness to consider the way in which literature commonly takes familiar stories (in this case religious stories), familiar structures of thought, familiar characters, even familiar worlds, and so transforms them into something unfamiliar that we are compelled to think again, to feel again, to entertain fresh ideas—even new attitudes.

I am convinced that so-called 'fictions' (and I include a great deal of the Bible under that label) offer a significant means of examining and testing our own moral and religious notions. They do so by offering the reader not the whole of life as we experience it, in all its bewildering detail, but an abstracted, selective, manageable sample of life. And fiction, or, if you prefer the term, literature, usefully allows the reader to undertake an objective consideration of the stories it relates: stories, life-like art, not real life with its actual relationships and demand for responses to everyday responsibilities.

If the writer chooses to adopt a prophetic voice, a work of literature may openly challenge our settled attitudes, our hidden prejudices, or seek to subvert them by showing us attractive alternatives. A fictional work like Orwell's 1984 sets out to educate or warn us about trends in contemporary behaviour and attitudes by projecting a fictional world into the near future for his readers.

Historical or fantasy fiction may lay out alternative cultural or social models disguised as communities of midgets or giants or horses, or dwarves or elves or orcs for our consideration. (I'm thinking, of course of Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*, and Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*.)

And the great thing about 'fiction' (or literature) is the opportunity it provides to escape from received rules or stereotypes. Fiction offers the grateful reader an arena characterized by imaginative freedom; even when in its make-believe worlds it is actually projecting — in disguise as it were — real-life experiences and the hard questions which go with them. So, literary works can escape from the straitjacket of God-thought, doctrines and

dogmas couched in the sort of religious language which characterizes religious texts.

Finally, I would argue that literature provides 'truths' about ourselves and our lives of at least equal validity with so-called scientific 'facts' (which themselves are often imaginative metaphors expressing otherwise inaccessible and incomprehensible information).

[.....]

For Richard Wagner, author of C.S. Lewis and *Narnia for Dummies* (and *Christianity for Dummies*), Lewis is the great Christian apologist. 'The Narnian Chronicles are packed with Christian truth that's just waiting to be discovered', he says. For Wagner, Aslan is a simple incarnation of Christ: his return to Narnia symbolizes the Second Coming, his death at the hands of the White Witch symbolizes Christ's sacrificial death to redeem the sin of the world. Unsurprisingly, Wagner spends several pages arguing that the central plot of all the Narnian stories deals with temptation and sin, the effects and consequences of sin and the portrayal of Satanic evil. (Sin, of course is an obsession with some Christians.)

However, for even stricter fundamentalists, Lewis is no apologist for Christianity, his fiction is itself an act of satanic evil. While they can cheerfully accept a literal biblical world of singing angels and raging demons, divine wonders and miracles in nature, they utterly reject the Narnian world with its talking beavers and wolves, its centaurs, satyrs, ogres and fauns, its death-dealing magic wands, and especially the witches, as manifest signs of Lewis's collaboration with the Devil.

Lewis himself labels his writing a 'fairytale' (not a word to endear himself to the religious elect), though he hints that there is more in it than such a word might suggest, when he tells his goddaughter Lucy Barfield (to whom he dedicated *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*) 'You are already too old for fairy tales, and by the time it is printed and bound you will be older still. But some day you will be old enough to start reading fairy tales again.' In using the term 'fairy tale' Lewis is reflecting the kind of deep discussions he and Tolkien and their group of Oxford academics, the Inklings, were having about the profound nature and value of story and myth. And I'd like to quote a passage from a letter Lewis wrote to his friend Father Peter Milward about the imaginative freedom and the serious pursuit of ultimate

truth made possible for any writer by the choice of story (imaginative fictions) as his or her medium of expression.

*My view would be that a good myth (that is, a story out of which every-varying meanings will grow for different readers and in different ages), is a higher thing than an allegory (into which one meaning has been put). Into an allegory a man can only put what he already knows; into a myth he puts what he does not yet know, and could not come by in any other way. (Letter, 22 September 1956)*  
[.....]

In another passage Lewis dismisses the idea that the Narnia books were ever deliberately written as a tract on Christianity and the life of Christ:

After describing how ‘in the Author’s mind there bubbles up every now and then the material for a story—which for himself invariably began with mental pictures—followed by a longing to see that bubbling stuff poured into a form (verse or prose, short story, play or what not) as the housewife longs to see new jam poured into a new clean jam jar’; he goes on

Some people think that I began by asking myself how I could say something about Christianity to children; then fixed on the fairy tale as an instrument; then collected information about child psychology and decided what age-group I’d write for; then drew up a list of basic Christian truths and hammered out ‘allegories’ to embody them. This is all pure moonshine. I couldn’t write in that way at all. Everything began with images; a faun carrying an umbrella, a queen on a sledge, a magnificent lion. At first there wasn’t even anything Christian about them; that element pushed itself in of its own accord. It was part of the bubbling  
[.....]

What had brought him to this?

We now know that Lewis’s mind and imagination, not to speak of his Christian faith, had been frozen over since childhood by his experience of the language and dogma of organized religion. In his case, that means fundamentalist Northern Irish Protestant religion.  
[.....]

Lewis had lost his faith like so many others in his early teens. Like so many others, he had been overwhelmed by the conflict between an imagination that gloried in nature, myth and romance, and a severe, Puritanical ‘grown-up’ intellect that dismissed such things as a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing. He had read Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*, a massive study of comparative religion that discovers the existence of the myth of a dying god in many cultures and in many cultures more ancient than Christendom. As a teenager, Lewis had concluded that there was therefore nothing unique about Christian narratives of a God who came to earth, lived, died and rose again.  
[...]

As a Christian, Lewis refused to be pinned down by a single formulaic reading of the life and (importantly) the

death of Christ. He wrote in *Mere Christianity* (1952), his handbook of the faith for unbelievers like his former self,

*Of course, you can express this in all sorts of different ways. You can say that Christ died for our sins. You may say that the Father has forgiven us because Christ has done for us what we ought to have done. You may say that we are washed in the blood of the Lamb. You may say that Christ has defeated death. They are all true. If any of them do not appeal to you, leave it alone and get on with the formula that does. And, whatever you do, do not start quarrelling with other people because they use a different formula from yours.*  
[.....]

What is Lewis’s vision of evil? No, I’m not talking about his theology but about his sense of spirituality, of the spirituality of evil. The novel offers the best, indeed the only evidence. (I am happy to report that there is no suggestion whatever of a Satanic figure trawling for human souls.)

Evil masks its own nature.

[...]

This aspect of evil as Lewis imagines it is best seen in Chapter 13 as the Witch prepares to kill Edmund, her arms again bared and ‘terribly white’. And let’s have a look at the passage where as the rescue party saves Edmund from the Witch and her Dwarf they rematerialize from the natural forms they have assumed to escape the rescuers  
[.....]

Evil is the reduction of all the world to silence, hardness, stillness, cold and uniform whiteness.

*What a powerful concatenation of awfulness; and Edmund again first senses its nature when he reaches Narnia on his own. ‘Everything was perfectly still, as if he were the only living creature in that land... There was not even a robin or a squirrel among the trees, and the woods stretched as far as he could see in every direction. He shivered...he did not much like being alone in this strange, cold, quiet place.’ (3: 36)*

These states have symbolic and religious resonances. Snow suggests its transience (evil cannot rule forever), but stone suggests hardness of heart and inhumanity. Evil is the winter of the human heart; as Aslan is the Spring of the world; the restoration of life, movement, colour, warmth and sound.



# Jesus for The Non-Religious

## Recovering the Divine at the Heart of the Human

### John Shelby Spong

Retired Episcopalian Bishop of Newark, New Jersey.

There was no handout for Bishop Spong's address which drew heavily on his recent book of the same title. As with the addresses of Colin Gibson and Raymond Bradley, his address is available on CD.

On page xiv of his book *Jesus for the Non-Religious*, Bishop John Shelby Spong identifies his target audience as:

"People who are no longer committed to traditional Christian patterns, but who, nonetheless, still seek the 'transcendent' and the 'holy', and who just might be willing to look anew at a reformulated Christianity ... who know themselves to be living with the emptiness of .. a 'God-shaped hole' that nothing else quite fills."

While John Spong may be positioned at the conservative end of Sea of Faith sympathies ("I insist that there must be a way to be both a believer and a citizen of the 21st century." [p54]), he does not back away from criticism (in both senses) of Christian orthodoxy and practice. He has been writing in this vein now for some time — see especially *Rescuing The Bible from Fundamentalism*, *Liberating The Gospels* and *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* — and throughout this book he forcefully argues for a deconstruction of much of what is familiar in the Christian story. See especially:

- p15: Birth Narratives
- p25: Fictional parents for Jesus
- p37: Historicity of Disciples
- p44: Was Judas a manufactured character?
- p49: Miracles are unnecessary
- p65: Nature miracles as signs
- p75: Healing miracles as preview of Kingdom
- p87: Raising the dead
- p97: Crucifixion
- p107: Theology of the Cross
- p117: Resurrection/Ascension

His is not an attempt to eradicate Christianity (though many will feel that this would be the effect of such deconstruction) but rather to "reform the way [in which we] understand the Christ story." (p134)

In common with all of the "SoF-friendly" authors quoted in our literature, Spong takes the

view (p150) that "it was not ... to *record* the details of the life of Jesus that the gospels were written, but to *interpret* the Jesus experience." [emphasis added].

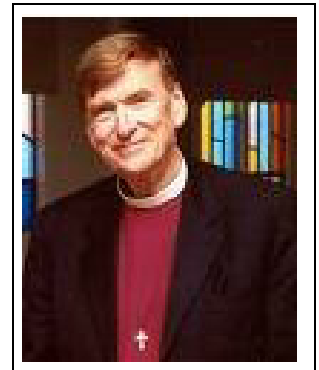
One such interpretive scheme that has come into prominence in recent years and which is set out in Spong's book is that the Gospel writers consciously or unconsciously used the events of the Jewish liturgical year to frame narratives about Jesus. Such analyses appear in both this book and on the CD.

Despite the non-literalness of the NT record, Spong follows his mentor John A. T. Robinson in seeing Jesus as "the human face of God" and he commends this Jesus to the non-religious.

This helps us in our journey to become human:

*"It is an act of enormous courage to embrace what it means to be a self-conscious human being. It is not easy to live with the awareness of the unrelieved anxiety that is the mark of a human life. That is why human beings are almost inevitably religious creatures. Religion meets a desperate and chronic need in the human psyche and has, therefore, a tenacious hold on human life itself. Self-created security is, however, never real.*

*The fact is that religion as it has been traditionally practiced has never provided genuine security, but only its illusion. Most religion has, in fact, served as an opiate for the people."* [p266]



***Jesus for The Non-Religious: Recovering the Divine at the Heart of The Human***  
HarperCollins 2007

# The Semantics of Story-Telling

A Secular Sermon for those “all at sea” in the Sea of Faith

Emeritus Professor of Philosophy Raymond D. Bradley

This is the “overview” of paper which Raymond Bradley delivered at the Conference.  
The full text is available on the website.

*"some having swerved, have turned aside unto vain jangling . . . understanding neither what they say,  
nor whereof they affirm."*

*(First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, 1:7)*

## The bad old story of God and his son

The immorality of the Old Testament God and the New Testament Jesus.

My conclusion: Christian doctrine is morally abhorrent. And intellectually pernicious (because, as Hume put it "Faith subverts all the principles of understanding.")

## Retelling the old story, liberal style

Aim: to demythologise and bring Christianity into C21st.

Spong says the doctrines of orthodox Christianity are "not only literal nonsense but little more than theological gobbledygook."

My criticism: the doctrines of the new theology are virtually incomprehensible and no more than *philosophical mumbo jumbo*.

## Examining some main themes as stated in representative quotes:

### Paul Tillich

"The name of this infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being is God."

### Bishop John A. T. Robinson

God is "our ultimate concern", "what we take seriously without reservation."

"God is, by definition, ultimate reality, and one cannot argue whether ultimate reality *exists*."

"Being itself ultimately has [the character of love]."

[Compare Don Cupitt: "To say that God is love is in effect to say simply that love is God."]

### Bishop John Shelby Spong

"There is no God external to life. God, rather, is the inescapable depth and centre of all that is. God is not a being superior to all other beings. God is the ground of Being itself."

"One of my shaping theological teachers, Paul Tillich, referred to this God as 'Being itself' which meant to me that my search for God would be identical with my search for my own identity."

"Human words do not describe reality outside human experience. The word 'God' does not exist outside the human use of that word."

### Don Cupitt

"Being cannot be made a subject of objective enquiry; it is revealed to the individual by reflection on his own concrete existence in time and space."

"The invisible world is the world of words and other symbols."

## Philosophical malaise number 1: Reification.

Tillich: his philosophy centres around talk of Being and Non-Being; his philosophy centres around talk of Being and Non-Being.

Heidegger: reification carried to the absurd in "The Nothing nothings."

Lewis Carroll: The King says "To be able to see Nobody, And at that distance too!"

Peter Heath: "in such a way does the language of abstraction .. beget bad philosophy."

## Philosophical malaise number 2: Conflating "is"s.

Aristotle: "It is the business of language to distinguish." Example: 3 senses of "is":

"Cicero is." = the "is" of existence.

"Cicero is eloquent." = the "is" of predication.

"Cicero is Tully." = the "is" of identity.

If X = Y, then Y = X. [symmetrical]

[Cupitt's claim "Love is God" conflates the "is" of predication with the "is" of identity.]



Law of transitivity of identity:

If two things are identical with a third, they are identical with each other."

Identity problems for Spong:

(a) If Spong's search for God is identical with Spong's search for Spong's identity, then Spong is identical with God! [Law of identity]

(b) If Robinson's search for God is identical with Robinson's search for Robinson's identity, then Robinson is identical with God! [Law of identity]

(c) If Spong is identical with God and Robinson is identical with God, then Spong is identical with Robinson. [From (a) and (b) by transitivity of identity]

(d) If God is identical with Being, i.e., with ultimate reality, then both Spong and Robinson are identical with all that exists. [From (c) by Robinson's definition of "God"]

Problems regarding Jesus-talk:

(a) Further problems are generated by Spong's claim "Jesus is what God is". Try adding this to the list of identities already asserted. Have to conclude, e.g., Jesus = all that exists.

(b) Spong strips the miracles and myths, plus most of the personages, events, and sayings from the "historical" Jesus. Yet there is no evidence any residual figure existed.

**Philosophical malaise number 3:  
Playing Humpty Dumpty with words.**

"But 'glory' doesn't mean 'a nice knock-down argument,'" Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master — that's all."

Substitute "God" for "glory", substitute their "definitions", and substitute names. Then we get:

"But 'God' doesn't mean 'infinite and inexhaustible depth and ground of all being'," Alice objected.

"When I use a word," Tillich said, in a rather scornful tone, "it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less."

"The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean so many different things."

"The question is," said Tillich, "which is to be master — that's all."

**Morals of the story:**

Having mastery over words does not mean having the power to make them mean what you want them to mean.

Having mastery over words means not having to explain what you mean by them.

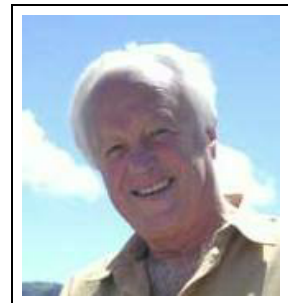
**A predicament for those enamored of the new liberal theology:**

You don't want to tell the old theistic story because it won't go down with educated people in the twenty-first century and, if told honestly, would scare the b'Jesus out of the kids. And, for the reasons I've just given, if you retell it in the gobbledygook language of the new theology you'll be charged with philosophical fraud.

What to do? Heed your mother's advice and don't tell stories at all unless they are true.

**Advice re Faith:**

If you want to have Faith in something, place it in the power of evidence-based reason to relegate the Christian God to the graveyard of forgetfulness and his son Jesus to the same status as all those other God-men that graced the myths of pagan religions.



**Conference CDs**

**We are offering CD recordings  
of the Conference.  
Refer to the website  
for details and an order form.**

[www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz)

# Doing The Story

Jill Harris

Jill's presentation was one of three 'short' addresses which together were provided as a plenary session. We did not receive transcripts of the other two. The full version of this address appears on the website.

**"Once upon a time when men and animals talked together and gods walked the earth ..."**

**"In a certain kingdom there lived a poor miller who had a beautiful daughter."**

**"A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers."**

**"In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit."**

Oh, the compelling magic of the opening words of a story! We're hooked immediately. Every storyteller knows how vital they are — whole manuscripts are turned inside out to get them right.

And once we're hooked, we're avid to know what happens next. We weigh the character and behaviour of the protagonists — what would we have done? We critique the plausibility of the plot — could that really have happened? And the credibility of the insights on life — is that actually how things are?

Our lives are dense with story. Think of novels, gossip, newspapers, histories, memoirs. Think also of the narratives that run in our heads as we play and replay bits of the absorbing story of our own lives. We see ourselves caught up in the drama of life, endlessly analysing, revisiting, fantasising. And what about dreams, that alternative version of our lives?

As Prospero says in *The Tempest*: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on ..."

The world is brimming over with stories, ancient and modern. Stories have always been used to entertain, inform, guide, illuminate, control, inspire, warn, transform. The trappings change with time and place, but the truths, the learnings, the insights are carried across the centuries. Think of:

- **Icarus who flies too close to the sun**
- **The tortoise who wins the race through dogged perseverance**
- **The man who overcomes his prejudice to help the victim of an attack**
- **The God who comes to earth and dies so that we have to take over his work ourselves.**

Story is compelling because it tells us who we are and how we live. It is the raw material of all the creative arts from literature to dance to painting. In almost every artistic endeavour there is a story or the fragment of a story somewhere in the background.

All of these imaginative endeavours shape the interpreting and living of our lives.

And that is also true of ritual — another of the performing arts which uses words, actions, stage props, architecture, music, dance and visual display to tell a story; a story so important to the survival of a particular group that its telling and retelling are not left to chance.

- **This is how we hunt and kill a bison**
- **This is what happens when the world goes to war**
- **This is how vulnerable love can transform relationships.**

This is the stuff of religion — defined by Della Casa as "a total mode of the interpreting and living of life". Howard Brenton is the British author of a powerful, new play called *Paul*, about Paul of Tarsus, St Paul of the New Testament. In the programme notes for the Sydney production this year Brenton says: "God talks to us in stories. Stories are religion."

[.....]

Stories are expressed in the manner of their times, of course. When we re-tell old stories peopled with magicians, dragons and goblins, we happily suspend our disbelief — or we re-interpret them. Each of us, I'm sure, could bring to mind a film or book or poem or dance or play which has taken an old story and an old truth and brought it into the 21st century: same message, new trappings; the familiar in unfamiliar garb.

The retelling of stories in which the familiar is refreshed by the unfamiliar, an old truth contexted in a contemporary setting, has been going on forever. Shakespeare was a master at this; so were the writers of the gospels whose accounts of the life of Jesus were drawn as much from their own convictions and the needs of their communities as from the historical realities. And Paul of Tarsus who reinterpreted the life and death of Jesus to build a theological structure that went global — now there was a re-telling of a story!

This retelling of faith stories is an ongoing theological process.

My address today is predicated on the fact that many people who still see value in the Christian way,

are caught up in this process every day as the old stories bump up against a vastly changed world view. Although I have long rejected the literalism of the traditional Christian stories, I find life-anchoring importance in the truths they convey about life. So I am committed to re-telling those stories in a way which can be heard in our own time. 'A religious myth loses its vitality when the world-view underlying it undergoes a sea-change,' wrote Ian Harris in his **Honest to God** newspaper column earlier this year. We have to '... break the myth open and recover its meaning for our own time.'

Sermons in church also re-tell the stories — but then what happens? After this nod in the direction of the contemporary, the ritual — the liturgy — the church service — slips back into the old assumptions about God as conveyed in the prayers, the hymns, and the Bible readings.

Some of us here are thoroughly familiar with the telling of stories through rituals. Once we participated in such rituals in church throughout the year. Think of Palm Sunday, Easter, Pentecost and Christmas. But we are also here because those rituals gradually fell out of step with our lives. We may feel acute nostalgia for them but they don't meet our needs any longer.

Is it the stories or the rituals which are the problem? I think it's the rituals. We can and do constantly re-context old stories but ritual, that more formal, communal story-telling, no longer has a regular place in our public life, and is not seen as valuable.

Is that what we think?

Margaret Somerville, world-renowned ethicist from McGill University, asserts that through collective participation in ritual people experience respect, reverence and transcendence. It is only through revitalising ritual, she says, that we can find the connections we need to experience and nurture the human spirit collectively.

I belong to a group in Wellington called the Ephesus Group, most of us former church members, some still currently so, who create rituals — liturgies we call them — which attempt to express a contemporary understanding of Christianity. Even though liturgy is one of those words which are a turn-off to some people because of past associations, we use it because its Greek meaning is 'the work of the people' and we place a lot of emphasis on participation in the creating and enacting of a liturgy.

The Ephesus Group says:

- **Yes to those ancient truths about human life; but no to the pre-modern world view through which they were originally expressed.**

- **Yes, to the sublime words, music and other works of art which have come out of Christianity; no to stopping there and not seeking contemporary liturgical expression of the truths we live by.**
- **We say yes to new ways of ritualising the telling of important faith stories; but no to liturgies which do not express the realities of our time.**

And no, especially, to abandoning altogether participation in rituals which can give form and focus to what we believe and how we live. Who would want to turn their backs on what Professor Tom Driver calls "transformative ritual — the opening of a window, the casting of a net, the hurling of a cry into the night!"

Doesn't that make you just tingle with excitement! He's saying that ritual is the place where we push back our horizons, let in new ideas, speculate about life and meaning, explore new possibilities, look into our hearts, face up to pain and uncertainty, and feel release and joy; the place where we say 'sorry' and 'thank-you' and 'help me' and 'yippee!'.

This is how the Ephesus Group defines ritual:

Ritual is a way of meeting religious needs, in company with others, by:

- **Making sense of our experience**
- **Expressing what is of ultimate worth to us**
- **Reaching out beyond where we are**
- **Strengthening community**
- **Tapping into a particular faith tradition**
- **Defining our framework for living**
- **Invoking transforming power(s)**
- **Envisioning the re-ordering of the world**

The Ephesus Group tries, through ritual, to re-frame for our own times the stories from the Christian tradition which have helped to shape western civilisation, and which still influence our lives 2000 years later.

