

## CONTENTS

### Articles

1. Kelvin Grant
2. Theses on Jung
4. Jung, God and inner integration
4. Police don't prevent crime
4. More incoming waves on Dover Beach
6. Being Church in a new age



### Caption invited!

Provided by Rob Wilkinson, Wellington

9. Religion .... grounded in scientific knowledge
10. Fred Marshall detects 'a presence'
11. The New Schism: genetics and belief

### Reviews

3. Above Us Only Sky, by Don Cupitt
5. God Explained in a Taxi Ride, by Paul Arden
5. A Word in Season, by Richard Randerson
7. In Praise of The Secular, by Lloyd Geering

### Miscellaneous

4. The New Steering Committee
5. The SoF Internet Chat List
6. New Christian hymnbook and conference
10. SoF (UK) Magazine 'sofia'
11. Darwin's Big Year
11. A Parable
12. Norm Ely's View from the Chair
16. All About Us

## KELVIN GRANT

Kelvin Grant, a member of the Auckland Sea of Faith group, and Devonport resident for nearly 50 years, died suddenly after a short illness on November 3, his 73rd birthday.

Kelvin grew up in a Methodist family in Wellington and attended Wellington College. He graduated in architecture from Auckland University and spent a year's post-graduate study in France and Scandinavia. He set up practice as an architect in Devonport, Auckland.

He developed a special interest in church architecture, always encouraging an outward-looking emphasis with churches designed to serve as centres of community activity as well as worship. His work in this area reflected his awareness of changing perceptions on matters of faith within and beyond the churches. His funeral was held in the Devonport Methodist Church which he designed in the 70s. In the late 80s he supervised the rebuilding of the former dental nurses' school in Thorndon, redesigning it as Premier House for use as the prime minister's official residence.

Kelvin took an active part in the North Shore and Auckland branches of the Sea of Faith Network.

He is survived by his wife, Dr Valerie Grant, of the Auckland Medical School (also a SoF member), sons Paul and Bruce, and four grandsons. A third son, Ross, also an architect who worked with Kelvin in his Devonport office, predeceased him.

Geniality was Kelvin's trademark, along with his courtesy, thoughtfulness, generosity and kindness. He always eased the way socially.

Alert to the physical environment, he was always the architect assessing the interaction of the natural with the built environment. He was an environmentalist 40 years ahead of his time and, as a Devonport borough councillor in the 60s and 70s, played a major role in preventing the reclamation of Ngataranga Bay for development, and setting up the first recycling scheme in New Zealand.

Kelvin Grant was a good man, a decent man; one of life's contributors.

*Ian and Jill Harris*



# Theses on Jung

Bill Cooke



**At the Sea of Faith Conference in Marton in 2006, one of the keynote speakers claimed that the thought of Carl Gustav Jung is of paradigmatic significance for the twenty-first century.**

What follows is a few theses, stated as simply as possible, which might, hopefully, encourage people to consider the implications of such a claim.

1. With the possible exception of his theory of personality types, Jung has little contemporary relevance to the discipline of psychology. If he is referred to at all in psychology textbooks, it is usually in footnotes or as an historical aside.
2. In the opinion of Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, himself once a prominent psychoanalyst, Jung's pathological self-absorption allowed him to shut out the real traumas that fill people's lives and to impose his own formulae on their suffering.
3. Jung's theory of archetypes, because it is essentially ahistorical, is deeply misogynist, and imprisons notions of 'male' and 'female' in stock, unchangeable stereotypes.
4. Consistent with his view of archetypes, Jung viewed working women as intruders into the masculine domain, and recommended seduction, beating and even rape as legitimate forms of sexual control.
5. Jung's ego was of megalomaniac proportions, not revealing even to his small band of disciples, the full extent to which he considered himself to be a deification. He also thought of himself as the new Galileo, and the new Goethe.
6. Jung's own honesty has been called into question, as with his appropriation without attribution of the psychological insights of J. J. Honegger.
7. Jung's scientific reading has long been by-passed and shown to be false, in particular, his support for the Lamarckian theory of acquired characteristics, which undergirded his psychological theories.
8. Jung's mythological reading is equally dated, with, for instance his understanding of Mithraism resting on Franz Cumont, now long superseded. Jung read little on pagan religions after 1912.
9. Jung illustrated his strongly-held belief in the permanence of the self by reference to Indian writings, despite most Indian thinking opposing such a notion. Few reputable scholars of Hinduism take Jung's theories in this area seriously.
10. Another strong influence on Jung was the racist pseudo-intellectual Houston Stewart Chamberlain, who argued that Jesus was not Jewish at all but an Aryan.
11. In a *New York Times* interview in 1912, Jung recommended that ruthless brutality is the only form of control that 'savages' understand, and that the art of mastering savages involved the eradication of all 'soft and fine' features.
12. Jung collaborated with Nazis until 1939 and never took a principled stand against Nazism. In 1933 he remained vice-president of the German General Medical Society for Psychotherapy even after Ernst Kretschmer resigned in protest against Nazi laws. Jung worked with Kretschmer's successor, Matthias Heinrich Goering (Hermann's cousin).
13. Jung remained editor in chief of the *Journal for Psychotherapy and Related Disciplines* for six full years after Matthias Goering wrote: "It is expected of all members of the [German General Medical] Society who write articles that they will have read through with great scientific care the path-breaking book by Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, and will recognise it as essential [to their work]."
14. In a 1934 article in the same journal, Jung wrote: "The Jews have this peculiarity in common with women; being physically weaker, they have to aim at the chinks in the armour of their adversary."
15. Jung's estate has withheld a large amount of material, making an objective biography of him extremely difficult.

More could be said about Jung's megalomania, his racism, sexism and pseudoscience. But if his views really are paradigmatic of the twenty-first century, then we are in for a truly dreadful century.

These theses are the product of reading Jung's own work and of four valuable criticisms. They are Robert Ellwood, *The Politics of Myth: A Study of C. G. Jung, Mircea Eliade, and Joseph Campbell*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999; Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson, *Against Therapy*, Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1994 [1988]; Don McGowan, *What is Wrong with Jung*, Buffalo: Prometheus, 1994; and Richard Noll, *The Aryan Christ: The Secret Life of Carl Jung*, New York: Random House, 1997

---

**Bill Cooke** is chairman of the Auckland Sea of Faith and author of the *Dictionary of Atheism, Skepticism and Humanism* (Prometheus, 2006). These theses are a synopsis of the workshop presentation that he gave at the 2007 Sea of Faith Conference, held at Kings' School, Otahuhu.

# Thank God, I'm Free At Last

**Above Us Only Sky, Don Cupitt, Polebridge Press, Santa Rosa, CA, 2008**

**SHERLOCK HOLMES AND DR. WATSON WENT CAMPING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE.**

One night Watson said, “Holmes, look up at that sky with its infinite reaches of distances, the innumerable celestial bodies and the measureless time to which it points. What does that overwhelming view tell you, Holmes?” The laconic reply was, “Elementary, my dear Watson, it tells me that someone has stolen our tent.”

In *Above Us Only Sky* Don Cupitt tells us that the old primeval tent crafted by our ancestors and embellished by interior decorators from Plato to neo-Creationists has indeed gone and that now we stand tall — naked to and unprotected from, Time, Chance and Death. It is in that cleared countryside that we make life — our Life — as part of Life. Cupitt rarely capitalises ‘Life’ but one feels that the context does.

Imagine there's no heaven,  
It's easy if you try,  
No hell below us,  
Above us only sky,  
Imagine all the people  
Living for today...

John Lennon too, invited us to *Imagine* that there is “above us only sky” and that a super-natural order of things is not only unnecessary to explain all that needs to be explained (or, more to the point, can be explained), but also is detrimental to our very humanness. Omar Khayyam gave this advice:

And that inverted Bowl we call The Sky,  
Wereunder crawling coop't, we live and die  
Lift not thy hands to IT for help – for It  
Rolls impotently on as Thou or I.

Cupitt agrees with the New Atheists who assert the collapse of supernaturalism and who deny the distinction between sacred and profane. Cupitt goes further and challenges the very Platonic metaphysics assumed even in Western science and philosophy — Western metaphysics is as dead as Nietzsche's God.

“Its all in the mind” was a serial catch-cry of Eccles in *The Goon Show*. Kant told us that too, and so do all his heirs right up to Cupitt. Nature (or whatever) made the earth but humans make the world — our world — our ‘work of communal folk-art’. The Buddha, too, reminds us that we infer a ‘self’ and then take it far too seriously. In earlier books Cupitt expressed interest in Buddhist ideas and, while he still honours them, Buddhism in recent years has picked up some demerit points from him on the grounds that it does not sufficiently affirm ‘life’ which is his 21st century metaphor for the “continuous streaming process of symbolic expression and exchange” which comprises the outsideless “all that there is.” Life, for Cupitt, replaces ‘God’. Life is the new religious object.

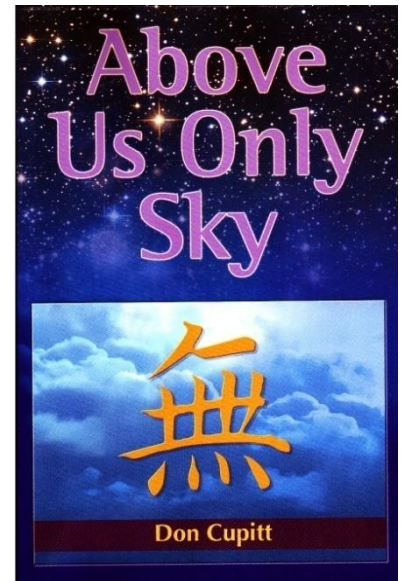
According to Cupitt, it is better that we do not take our ‘self’ too seriously — it is, after all, a sort of illusion by which we organise our affairs. Rather, we should ‘spend’ our lives as the sun ‘spends’ its. His ‘Solar Living’, a motif which we have met in earlier books, forms a core thesis in this. While agreeing with Cupitt, this reviewer prefers the metaphor of the candle which, like the sun, also gives light and burns itself away in the service of others, but in a more localised way. The candle also invokes a nostalgic echo in which

“Jesus bids us shine with a clear, pure light  
Like a little candle burning in the night”.

(And now, dear reader, you are already humming it!)

Cupitt's ‘empty radical humanism’ gathers up, sifts, organises and answers, the debris from those many scholars and philosophers who have been destructive of traditional religious expression. His replacement — ‘life’ — touches the human condition in all its non-renegotiable ‘bitter-sweetness’ (a condition to which Cupitt repeatedly returns) in ways unavailable to either science or the dogmatised, politicised, platonised Christianity of which Philip Larkin in his poem *Aubade* wrote:

That vast, moth-eaten musical brocade  
Created to pretend we never die ...



Cupitt assures us that, though life goes on, ours will surely end and — another glorious release — we'll never know that we are dead, having come to the end of knowing..

But, in life, we are to be light on our feet, artists at the easel of our existence and not square-bashing soldiers. We 'empty' ourselves of our 'selves' and live fully, purposefully, outwardly and joyfully. Turning away from cosmic concerns we, in this moment, become radically earth-focussed (for there *is* no-where else and no-when else), and we draw our values out of conscientious concern for the human condition.

We are enabled to do this because the West has liberated itself from the old oppressive supernaturalism by employing critical thinking: 'the glory of the West'. With the post-Enlightenment respect for the individual and its implementation in democratic institutions we are nearer now, as Cupitt has already written, to the Kingdom of God than we have ever been.

*Above Us Only Sky* brings together Cupitt's developing thoughts of the last decade or so and his books are likely to be the nearest we will get to an autobiography — or so he tells us on page 320 of his *Radical Theology* (2006) .

This present book, his latest instalment, is built of his trademark short chapters: the first contains twenty-seven short 'slogans', reminiscent of those in his *Radical Theology*, by which he presents "a short systematic theology of the religion of life", while the remaining are 27 short essays which amplify the slogans, though not on the basis of strict correspondence. It is densely-written but readable. The book is for the spiritually-adventurous — for those who, unlike the New Atheists, think that the religious inclinations of humans are worth renovating. Yes, Cupitt is a destroyer, but he is also a builder.

***Above Us Only Sky* supports the thought that, rather than no religion, we deserve and should make, like the folk-artists we are, better religion.**

Noel Cheer, October 2008

## More Incoming Waves on Dover Beach

A further suggested alternative conclusion to Matthew Arnold's poem offered "in love and peace" by Nick Bagnall of Tauranga.

Ah, love, let us be true  
To one another! for the world which seems  
To lie before us like a land of dreams,  
So various, so beautiful, so new,  
Is such a dream; yet deep inside where  
Joy and love and hope and peace abound  
Dormant, 'till each by meditation found;  
Still ignorant masses do not care  
To seek the bliss residing there.

## Cupitt, Jung, Inner Integration

In the *Sea of Faith* series on the BBC Cupitt said:

"Before [Carl] Jung, those who had grasped that religion is fully human had always ended up as unbelievers — people like Freud and Marx — but Jung finds a way back. Realizing that religion is truly human, he sets aside supernaturalism and instead he brings forward the old mystical idea that, in the end, the knowledge of God is the same thing as self-knowledge. For Jung the knowledge of God means a condition of inner integration, blessedness, wisdom, harmony with one's self and all nature that our psyches are pursuing all our lives. Jung's new sort of religious naturalism has a lot to teach all of us. Indeed, I suspect that in the end we're all going to have to follow him."

## **POLICE DON'T PREVENT CRIME. COMMUNITIES DO.**

**OVERWHELMINGLY, RESEARCH TELLS US THAT  
THE SEEDS OF SERIOUS OFFENDING ARE SOWN  
VERY EARLY IN LIFE – NURTURED BY  
ILLITERACY AND ACADEMIC FAILURE,  
TRUANCY, HOPELESS PARENTING, SUBSTANCE  
ABUSE, MENTAL ILLNESS, AND POVERTY.**

*NZ Listener Editorial June 28-July 4, 2008*

## New Steering Committee

Natali Allen: Rawene, Northland  
Steve Collard: Auckland  
Peter Cowley : Wellington (Treasurer)  
Norm Ely: Wellington (Chair)  
Don Feist: Dunedin  
Bob Geddes: Rangiora  
Phillip Grimmett: Wellington  
Alan Jackson: Dunedin  
Betty Manning: Timaru  
Fred Marshall: Hamilton

In addition, Noel Cheer acts as an unelected 'back-bencher'. A Secretary has yet to be appointed.



## Try looking Out The Window Instead

### *God Explained in a Taxi Ride*

Paul Arden

Penguin Books London 2007

Is it just prejudice that suggests to me that someone who had been a creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi should come up with a product that is 90% packaging, 2% quality product and 8% worthless meanderings?

Purporting to be a book that explains “once and for all” an “understanding of God” in the duration of a taxi ride, this book is an incoherent mishmash of simplistic notions [1]; leaps of logic [2]; and downright errors [3].

His thesis, shouted at us in 72 point caps, occupies the last quarter of the book: God is the force behind creation and who makes beautiful sunsets.

His first two Persons of the Trinity on p26 would be unrecognisable to traditional believers, but his characterisation of Jesus is OK, especially the wry observation on page 48 that he might have looked like Osama bin Laden.

The suggestion on p64 that those advocating suicide bombing should lead by example is good, as is the observation on p76 that the more a church ‘charges’ the greater the commitment of its adherents. Here ended the 2%.

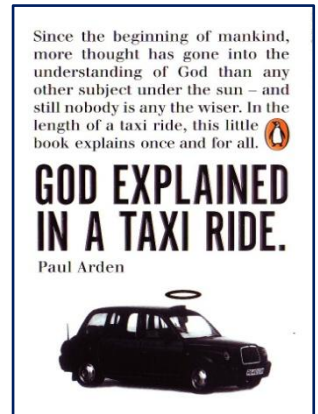
Even the illustrations are better than the text.

His is the God of the deist — who set it all ticking and then went into retirement. His bit on Anselm’s proof on p40 is as heavy as it gets, but it’s left hanging. Where to from there?

All in all, a waste of \$NZ27 and a taxi-ride. I would have learned more looking out the window.

[1] Anglicans eat cows, Hindus don’t, p50; [2] because we have different cultures we are bound to fight over religion, p60; [3] That Darwin was an atheist, p10; speculation that Jesus lived for three days after crucifixion, p34

*Noel Cheer*



## On Disembarking from the good ship Eklay Zia

### *A Word in Season:*

#### *Reflections on Spirituality, Faith and Ethics*

Richard Randerson

Matai House 2008

I first met retired Anglican Bishop Richard Randerson when I interviewed him about the 2008 Lambeth Conference. Here the worldwide Anglican Church seemed (and still seems) set to embark on schism at the very time that this NZ Bishop retired — disembarked — from the Church which he had styled ‘the good ship Eklay Zia’. (Say it a couple of times and it will come clear!)

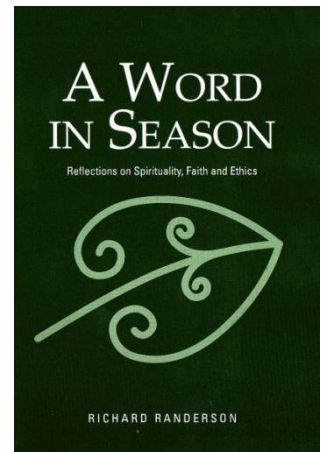
This 132 page book contains 30 sermons and articles, mostly from the last decade of his career.

Gentle, non-censorious and witty, they reflect the style of the man himself. Here is evidence perhaps that the Church has not entirely lost its marbles. But Randerson’s witty sendup of the Church as a stately ship that hasn’t been to sea for years suggests though that it may have lost the plot. “Several deckhands stand ready to raise the gang plank and let go the mooring lines, but the order never comes ...”

Who should read it? The preacher looking for ideas? God knows, they need them. The radical looking back over her shoulder with an intelligent view of the liberal landscape that she has moved on from? The conservative itching and chafing in a literalist strait-jacket?

At a mere \$20 there are ideas in abundance for a wide range of readers. Send him an email at [randersonjr@paradise.net.nz](mailto:randersonjr@paradise.net.nz) to get your copy.

*Noel Cheer*



### To subscribe to the SoF Internet Chat List

Go to <http://jiscmail.ac.uk/cgi-bin/webadmin?LIST=SOF> and follow your nose. There is no charge but you’ll need to wait until your request is accepted. It works on the basis that all submissions are sent to all subscribers. You just reply to what takes your fancy. To start a new new thread just ‘reply’ to any received message and delete its contents and revise the ‘Subject’.

# Being 'Church' in a New Age

Alan Goss of Napier wrote a paper in October 2007 with this title in the context of an invitation from The Council of Assembly of the Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand to comment on new structures for Presbyteries. Alan suggested some radical changes. What follows are excerpts from that paper slightly modified to reduce the Presbyterian — or even Christian — particularity. I have added some reflections of my own - ed.

**'Existing paradigms, or models,** of what it means to be church are no longer meeting people's needs. These models fitted the ethos and understanding of their own time but are no longer relevant in a fast-moving secular culture. New models are needed and my experience with the the Sea of Faith Network throws up some possibilities.'

**Reflection:** Let's not overlook a successful anti-thetical model — the Pentecostal multi-function worship centre with purpose-built architecture and equipment.

**'The Local Group** or congregation will be the prime unit, the nucleus from which everything flows and around which everything else is built. Each Local Group is responsible for the ordering of its own life and is financially independent. It will determine whether or not to employ full or part-time leadership (ministry) and support causes and projects of its own choosing. Local Groups will be invited to act in a network relationship with other groups up and down the country and not be constrained by rules and regulations imposed on them from above.'

**Reflection:** If it is contemplated that such groups could become quite large there may need to be some constitutional arrangement in place to protect the group from takeover by an enthusiastic charismatic fly-by-night and/or someone with an eye on the financial resources. Current SoF Groups are so small as not to need these.

**'A National Body** is elected at a National Conference. Its main function is to offer support to Local Groups via a newsletter, worship or programme resources, a written constitution and the arranging of a national conference (Assembly). Conferences will focus on inspiration rather than organisation in keeping the network's aims. Organisational matters are kept to a minimum.'

**Reflection:** This is the major departure from the status quo — what is contemplated here is a 'bottom-up' structure. It is not obvious that this could succeed in organisations that are much larger than, for instance, SoF (currently about 500 members in NZ and about 1000 members in the UK).

**'Membership** will be open to all those willing to explore religion and spirituality from the Judeo-Christian perspective. Insights from other traditions are not excluded. All views will be accepted and alternative positions welcomed. Church will be an open forum, 'a safe place to say unsafe things.' It will be more participatory and more democratic, there will be no binding vows, creeds or confessions and all [status] distinctions (e.g. communicants vis-a-vis adherents) will be abolished.'

**Reflection:** This brings into stark relief the difference between what SoF does and what a traditional church does. To put it crudely, SoF is largely (though not totally) parasitic on the sick body of the mainly Protestant Christian church. Furthermore, attempts to cut loose SoF and to give it an independent set of things to talk about would expose it to the danger of becoming a body with creeds (or similar) of its own. Similarly the rationalist/humanist/skeptic organisations are predatory on a faltering Christian theism and seem to exhibit little sense of mission outside this. By its own definition, a church tradition is not as tentative as this model would recommend. There are inescapable definitions of what counts as the principle object(s) of worship and how it (they) are to be addressed.

**'Worship** is our human response for the gift of life in a vast mysterious universe and is expressed in the coded call 'Let us worship God'. All the main elements of worship remain although the content will change in the light of different social and cultural conditions and new ways of understanding the world. Groups might construct their own liturgies and draw upon.'

**Reflection:** Amen!

Alan Goss & Noel Cheer

## Hope Is Our Song

This is the title of a new Christian hymnbook to be published in May 2009. It will include works by Shirley Erena Murray and Colin Gibson.

It is also the title of a conference to be held over Labour Weekend 2009 in Palmerston North.

You can get more details of both from [www.hymns.org.nz](http://www.hymns.org.nz) or by phoning John Thornley on (06) 356 9681

# Of Babies and Bathwater

○ A Review by Raymond D. Bradley

## ***In Praise of the Secular***

By Lloyd Geering

Wellington, St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society, 2007.

"When I use a word," said Humpty Dumpty, "it means just what I choose it to mean,  
neither more nor less."  
(Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*.)

At the September 2007 Annual Conference of the Sea of Faith I delivered a paper entitled "The Semantics of Story-telling: a Secular Sermon for those 'all at sea' in The Sea of Faith". I argued that the chief gurus of the Sea of Faith--Paul Tillich, Bishop Robinson, Bishop Spong, and Don Cupitt -- are guilty of semantic misdemeanour in so far as they play Humpty Dumpty with words.

Bishop Robinson, of *Honest to God* (1963) fame, provides a classic example. He tries to make theists of us all when he writes, "God is, by definition, ultimate reality, and one cannot argue whether ultimate reality exists." (p. 29) By a simple act of linguistic legislation he would try to convert me, along with Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, and other "New Atheists" into God-believers. Yet everyone knows what my fellow atheists and I mean when we say of ourselves, and others say of us, that we don't believe in God. We certainly don't mean that we don't believe in reality.

If you fall for that sort of word play, then you'll also taken in by Lloyd Geering's latest book *In Praise of the Secular*. Geering, too, tries to cut the ground from under the feet of atheists by defining "God" as "ultimate reality -- the oneness of the universe." (p.54). But he also has a broader aim: that of reconciling or "mediating" the conflict between religion and secularism, where "secularism" (as he acknowledges) "is commonly taken to mean 'anti-religious'", i.e., rejection of religion and religious considerations.

How does one pull off a trick like that? How does one make inconsistent sets of beliefs seem consistent?

Easy. Simply give words a different meaning and count on your audience's failure to detect the change.

Geering enhances his performance by using the illusionist's technique of misdirection. He diverts attention away from the present meanings of words and directs it instead towards their past meanings. Directs it, in short, towards their etymological history.

There was a time, he tells us, when "secular" meant "this-worldly" (p. 8), or being concerned with the natural world. On this account, he points out, even the supernaturalistic doctrine of the Incarnation -- the human embodiment of a transcendent God within the physical world --counts as "a step in secularisation" (p.21). Belief in the Incarnation is to count as a secular belief because it involves reference to the natural world and the human condition! Got it?

Likewise, there was a time when "religion" (originally from the Latin *religio*, to bind) meant something like "conscientious concern for what really matters" (p. 10). So since Richard Dawkins thinks truth really matters, Dawkins, he argues, "is to be judged more religious than those nominal Christians who have at best a half-hearted commitment to the God they claim to believe in." (p. 10). I guess that, for the same reason, Geering would say that I too am religious, despite my insistence--and that of anyone who knows me--that I'm *non*-religious, indeed *anti*-religious in so far as I resist being bound by any religious beliefs or practices.

Geering's conclusion? Religion and secularism are consistent by virtue of their both thinking that the natural world really matters.

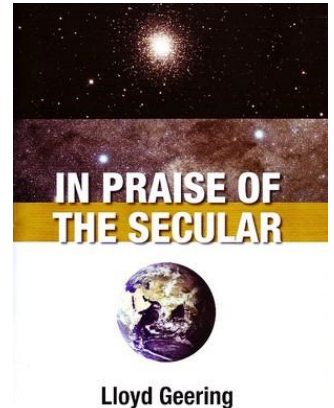
Anyone who is logically literate will recognize this as a fallacy: two world-views aren't consistent just because they have something in common. More generally, anyone who tries to do philosophy by etymology is guilty of conceptual fraud, whether it is conscious or unconscious. The Canadian philosopher of religion, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose 1962 book *The Meaning and End of Religion* Geering cites favourably, is a well-known perpetrator.

To those who are taken in by this sort of etymology-based sophistry, I can only say I weep over your victimisation. And that goes for Geering himself in so far as he, too, seems to have been a victim of the word-games of his theological tradition.

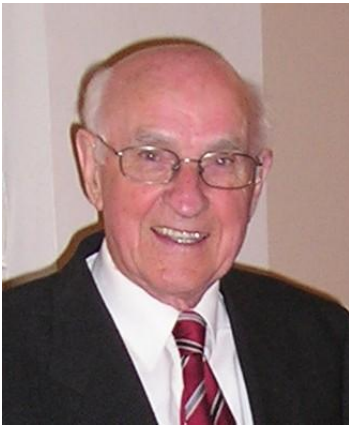
But I also feel another sentiment. Just a little resentment at Geering's insinuation that New Atheists like me are misusing language when we say that we are atheists (meaning that we don't believe in any sort of God) and secularists (meaning that we don't want to be subject to any form of religious bondage). Our failure to adopt his Tillich-inspired theological newspeak -- his redefinitions of "God", "religion", and "secular" --doesn't make us linguistic incompetents.

My irritation turns to ire, however, when I read Geering's unjust accusation, "By their blanket rejection of everything in the religions of the past, militant atheists throw out the baby with the bathwater in their disregard for the beneficial, spiritual and moral values also nurtured by these traditions." (p.7).

Is he accusing militant atheists like me of disregarding moral values: saying that we are immoral? Is he saying that we reject what he lists as spiritual values: "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (p.46)?







Does he believe that we atheists should look to the malignant history of religion, or to those who now perpetuate religious traditions most earnestly (the militant fundamentalists of Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism), in order to see these virtues "nurtured"? Surely not. Yet SoF's Noel Cheer echoed the same baby-with-the-bathwater charge when he interviewed me on his TV programme "In Conversation with Noel Cheer" in July this year.

How easily, and mindlessly, our critics -- most of whom seem never to have read for themselves what militant atheists say -- slip into these clichés!



But, I ask myself, what else should one expect from those whose sloppy use of words reflects sloppy thinking?

So far I've levelled criticisms only at the main arguments of Geering's book. There are others I could make: of his postmodernist conflation of knowledge with mere *claims* of knowledge, of his misuse of the term "theory", of his sloppy use of the term "faith", of his unquestioning faith in the historicity of Jesus, and so on.

But instead, let me turn to voicing genuine praise, both of the good professor himself and of the message he's trying to convey (albeit in misleading language).

Ever since the 60s, when we both held university chairs here in New Zealand (he in Religious Studies, me in Philosophy), I have admired Geering's intellectual integrity, moral courage, and values. All went on public display during his infamous 1967 heresy trial when he was pitted against my own *bête noire* of the time, fundamentalist Professor of Classics, Dr. E. M. Blaiklock.

So I wasn't surprised when, immediately after listening to my SoF address last September, Lloyd introduced himself to me (sadly we'd never met before), thanked me for having delivered what he called "a much-needed cold shower", and said he'd have to rethink his own position in light of it. For a man nearing 90, who had built his reputation on defending neo-guts. I hereby pay tribute to

Obviously, however, he'd some time before the September hadn't yet heard my admonition with words. I'd dearly respond to the kinds of criticism, without reverting to the liberals are accustomed to using.

The fact is that it would be main message in words that that is, to step out of the age into which Tillich led so faith communities", and back into the mainstream of common usage where most people belong.

First, he can say in simple English that --along with me, Dawkins, Hitchens, Harris, et al -- he really is an atheist in so far as he no more believes in a supernatural God or a supernatural world than we do.

Second, he can go on to emphasize that we should therefore be turning our attention to the condition of our lives in the only world there is: the natural world.

As something of an etymologist, Geering will know that, from early Greek times, "atheist" meant disbelief in any supernatural god. As a native speaker of English he will know, too, that "atheist" still means exactly that. As a professor of Religious Studies he will know, further, that this is precisely why bishops Robinson and Spong are so often, and correctly, described as atheists: neither believes in any supernatural entities. Both have been honest enough to voice their disbelief: Spong in books too numerous to list, and Robinson still earlier in *Honest to God*.

Now Professor Geering is an honest man. He should therefore welcome an opportunity (perhaps in a forthcoming issue of this *Newsletter*) to declare his atheism.

That would clear the ground for him to emphasize that, like the good bishops before him, what matters most for him -- the object of his quasi-religious "ultimate concern" -- is the wellbeing of all that exists in the world in which we find ourselves.

After all, the main aim of *In Praise of the Secular*, as stated on its last page, is the admirable one of encouraging what he calls "the great coming together of all peoples on a global scale", a coming together that will promote "unity and harmony among individuals, unity and harmony among the nations, unity and harmony with all forms of life, unity and harmony with the planet." (p. 54).

There, you see, Lloyd: you've said it all yourself. In plain language. In one paragraph.

So for God's sake, Geering, cut out all the "God" crap. And the religious cant. Praise the secular. But stop genuflecting towards religion. Otherwise you'll continue to alienate many of us New Atheists who -- when it comes down to it --are largely in agreement with your world-view and values.

**Geering's conclusion?  
Religion and  
secularism  
are consistent by  
virtue  
of their both thinking**

liberal theology, that took a lot of his open-mindedness.

written *In Praise of the Secular* ber 2007 Annual Conference. He tions against playing Humpty like to know, therefore, how he'd cisms I made then, and am making cultic language he and his fellow ing.

very easy for him to restate his everyone would understand. Easy, backwater of anachronistic verbi-many within so-called "progressive

**Raymond D. Bradley,  
Emeritus Professor of Philosophy, Omaha Beach, Warkworth.**



## “ ... Religion grounded not in supernatural revelation but in scientific knowledge ...”

*A review by Donald Feist of Dunedin*

*Thank God for Evolution - How the marriage of science and religion will transform your life and our world.*  
Michael Dowd, Viking 2008

**I think this is an important book.** Michael Dowd proposes a form of Christianity for the 21st Century that is based not on belief, but on knowledge, that does not seek simply a *modus vivendi* with science, but enthusiastically embraces it as indispensable to who we are, and how we live. In particular, for him, self-understanding, values, morality and worship are all grounded in The Great Story – the generally accepted narrative of the evolution of the universe, and of all life forms.

Fundamental to his position is a distinction between public and private revelation.

“[T]he modern method by which we collectively access and expand our understanding of the nature of reality” he says, is that new truths “are hatched and challenged in the public arena of science. This is the realm of public revelation”. “Private revelation” on the other hand, “entails claims about reality that arise primarily from personal experiences ..... Alas, private revelations enshrined for centuries in sacred texts cannot be empirically verified today. ... Accordingly, private revelations must be either believed or not believed.” But the religion he proposes, based entirely on public revelation, has no need for belief - it has moved beyond belief and is grounded in knowledge. In saying this, Dowd seems to be unaware that many recent writers on science hold that science, just as much as any other human activity, has an inescapable grounding of belief. But I don’t think this omission invalidates his wider project of a religion grounded not in supernatural revelation but in scientific knowledge.

Dowd also makes a distinction between “day language” - the language of science and literal communication - and “night language” - the language of dreams, imagination, poetry and theology. On this basis, the term “God” in night language is totally equivalent to, and interchangeable with “the Wholeness of Reality” or “Ultimate Reality” in day language. A god that is anything less than “the Wholeness of Reality” he argues, is not worthy of being regarded as a god at all. And just as the question: “Do you believe in reality?” makes no sense, so too, he says, a god about whom it can be asked “Do you believe in God?” is not worthy of being considered God. But those who use “day language” about such things may still choose at times to think and speak in “night language”.

Grounding religion within evolutionary science is now possible, he argues, because the clock-work model of physical reality of several centuries ago, has been generally replaced by a “nested creativity” model. By this he means that wherever we look, we find entities, systems or “holons” which are more than the sum of their parts, and which have creative potential, the ability to produce or to contribute to new, more complex “holons”. He says: “A fundamental truth born of public revelation, made possible by technological advance, reworked over generations, and now widely held as accurate is this: The whole of reality is creative in a nested emergent sense, and we are part of the process. Like nested dolls, smaller realities are contained within larger ones - from the infinitely small to the infinitely vast - and every one of them is divinely creative.”

The book traces The Great Story through the formation of the earliest stars and galaxies, the creation of heavier elements in supernova explosions, and the evolution of planets, to the simplest forms of life, and then increasingly complex forms. Understanding the tensions within our human nature, he argues, requires a knowledge of the evolution of our brain. Control of our breathing, heart-beat and instinctual drives is based in the part of the brain we have in common with reptiles. Our emotions are located in the limbic system we share with the brain of all other mammals. The “chatter” that often makes it hard to focus or concentrate, comes from the neocortex which we share with other higher mammals. Only the human brain has, in addition to these three, the frontal lobes which make possible purposefulness and complex decision making. It is consistently the way of evolution, that earlier forms are not replaced, but added to.

“day language” — the language of science and literal communication.

“night language” — the language of dreams, imagination, poetry and theology.

So our human brain has these four parts, which do not always keep in step. Today we may understand that the tensions and inconsistencies we experience are grounded, not in original sin, but in the nature of our evolution. This part of the book is one of the clearest and most important outworkings of his position that a version of Christianity which should be acceptable to all Christians can be grounded in the “public revelation” of science in general and evolution in particular, rather than the “private revelation” contained in ancient scriptures.

The book has faults. I was put off at the outset by six pages of extravagant testimonials for the book, followed by three pages of “Author’s Promises” that reading the book would change my life for ever. Michael Dowd is not strong on what the Bible is or how it was written, or on the teaching of Jesus, or ethics. The longish final section on “A God-glorifying future” to my mind added little of value. A more serious weakness is his assumption that there is a direction to evolution. Evolution undoubtedly produces greater and greater complexity. But this does not imply any purpose or any goal. I imagine that for many people, the acceptability of identifying God with the sum total of reality will depend on the assumption that evolution is heading somewhere. So at this point, I think Dowd’s reconciliation of Christianity with evolution is not as complete as he claims.

But, granted that the book has flaws, the enthusiasm of a born-again Pentecostal preacher, informed and tempered by the down-to-earth-ness and broad knowledge of his science-writer wife, and honed through many presentations and discussions as he has travelled the US as an “evolutionary evangelist”, have produced a very readable book that deserves to be taken seriously.

I opened the book as one who has increasingly found even the most liberal Christianity on offer in the churches inadequate and unconvincing for someone who finds the scientific world-view of the modern Western world inescapable. As I have searched for something that would not only command my intellectual respect, but also move me – even hopefully inspire me – Marcus Borg has always ended up too traditional, John Spong has been good on pointing out what is wrong, but has not delivered as much constructively as he promised, and Don Cupitt’s philosophical explorations have provoked me to argue, but have never engaged or moved me. Now, from a new direction, someone a generation younger and with fewer academic credentials has offered me the prospect of an integration of the scientist in me with the person who would like to be both excited by and embraced by the reality of which I am part. I’m sure Michael Dowd hasn’t said the last word, but for me it is a promising and substantial start.

Epworth Books, Box 17255, Karori, Wellington 6147 have copies at \$46.00

*Donald Feist*

## And Yet.....

As Dawkins has amply demonstrated (in *The God Delusion*) it is easy to criticize Christian doctrine negatively. It is, and has been, the source of a lot of harm both in the past and now. The doctrine of sin, associated with the medieval hypothesis of Heaven and Hell, engenders guilt, fear and self-righteousness; Paul’s doctrine of propitiation makes a mockery of a loving God; the exclusive divinisation of Jesus separates off Christianity from other equally legitimate searches for the divine, creating rivalry, tension, persecution and ultimately bloodshed; the Trinity is a silly obfuscation parading under the guise of a mystery; the high priesthood of Jesus, with the presumption of his mediation between us and God, cuts directly across the lesson that he taught and died for, that God is as immediate to us as a father. One could go on. Of the traditional doctrines of the Church there are very few that withstand the tests of credibility, utility and modern biblical scholarship. **And yet for nearly eighty years I have kept the unshakeable conviction of a presence just beyond thought with which I can align my life in harmony.**

*Fred Marshall, Hamilton*

This is abbreviated from one of the Conference papers on the website

### **‘sofia’** That’s the name of the quarterly

magazine published by the UK version of the Sea of Faith Network. If you want to subscribe it will cost you about \$60 per year and you’ll get four editions.

#### ***This is how to subscribe:***

1. Go to [www.charitychoice.co.uk](http://www.charitychoice.co.uk)
2. Select "charity search" and search for Sea of Faith.
3. Select "Donate now" (you're not sending a donation, but that doesn't matter).
4. Select the "Other" box and enter £21 (for overseas subscription). Your credit card (see below) will be debited with the \$NZ equivalent which is about \$60).
5. Click on "Donate Now".
6. You may then see a page with "Gift Aid" at the top that doesn't apply to you as a non-UK resident, so scroll to the bottom and click on "Donate Now".
7. You will come to the Payment Form which you must fill in with your credit card details.
8. When you are confident that the details are correct, click on "Confirm".
9. email the new SoF(NZ) Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Peter Cowley at [pcowley@paradise.net.nz](mailto:pcowley@paradise.net.nz) to notify him that you have paid by Charity Choice. He can then remind you when your sub is running out.

## ***The New Schism***

*Chris Bloore of Dunedin provided these notes for a forthcoming talk.*

There is a growing body of scientific evidence that personality traits are significantly influenced by genes. In recent years political scientists have linked personality traits with political views, and there has been some work linking religious beliefs with personality traits.

Many psychologists believe personality can be categorized into five classes, relating to conscientiousness, openness, extroversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. In a 2003 meta study led by John Jost, a psychologist at New York University, found that conscientiousness was associated more with conservative political views and openness and to a lesser extent, extroversion were associated with liberal views.

Interestingly, people who scored highly on a scale measuring fear of death were almost four times more likely to hold conservative views. Dogmatic types were also more conservative, while those who expressed interest in new experiences tended to be liberals. There are obvious parallels with religious views ranging from fundamentalist to liberal within the Christian, Islamic and Jewish faiths.

The biochemical mechanisms which link genes to the levels of the various neurotransmitters responsible in part for personality traits are slowly being unraveled. The effect of these brain chemicals on neural activity within various parts of the brain are being elucidated using brain scanning techniques. We are therefore seeing the emergence of a pathway linking our genetic inheritance to the nature of our religious "beliefs". Obviously, genes do not completely determine the issue, but it is increasingly becoming apparent that they do play a significant role.

**It is my contention that the polarization of religious believers into fundamentalist and liberal camps may be an inevitable consequence of our evolution as a species.**

If so, attempts to persuade, cajole or threaten everyone into a single position within the spectrum of belief is doomed to failure. It is probable that genes which are conserved within a population have long term survival value. Breeding, genetically manipulating or culling them out of the gene pool may be counter-productive in the long term. Liberals and conservatives are therefore faced with the prospect of having to co-exist. Efforts to find middle ground may be futile, and the energy expended on this task might be better used to accept that diversity of opinion has genetic as well as logical and emotional roots.

This might take the blame out of the discussion, and free us to allow people at all positions along the spectrum to play to their strengths for the good of all.

## ***Darwin's Big Year***

Next year marks the 150th anniversary of Darwin's "Origin of Species".

If you have the right gear and skills you can download a 6-part series about it from Radio New Zealand at [http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/the\\_darwin\\_lectures](http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/the_darwin_lectures)

## ***A Parable***

It was a chilly, overcast day when the horseman spied the little sparrow lying on its back in the middle of the road. Reining in his mount he looked down and enquired of the fragile creature, 'Why are you lying upside down like that?' 'I heard the heavens are going to fall today,' replied the bird. The horseman laughed. 'And I suppose your spindly legs can hold up the heavens?' 'One does what one can,' replied the sparrow.

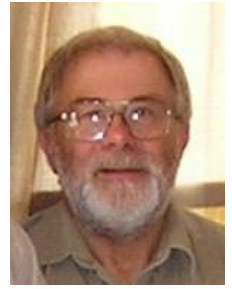
*Submitted by Jenny Chisholm, Wellington*

## ***If You Fancy Central Otago ...***

Their Local Group is on the lookout for visiting speakers. Contact Bruce McMillan whose email address is [brucemcm@slingshot.co.nz](mailto:brucemcm@slingshot.co.nz) or phone (03) 445 4124. He offers to share some Central Otago hospitality in return for a talk on any suitable subject.

## My View

### From the Chair, Norm Ely



**This is being written on Sunday the 9<sup>th</sup> of November and what a week we have just seen.**

In the last week we have seen an Afro American (Black as they call him in US) elected to be the next President of the United States and a change of power base here in New Zealand. In the case of the United States they have voted to move the Government to a less politically conservative and very much less conservative faith base. In the case of New Zealand we have voted to move the Government to a more politically conservative position and I would suggest with little or no change to our secular faith base.

Helen Clark claims she is agnostic and followed a morally liberal policy. John Key states he is atheist and the party he led largely supported these morally liberal policies.

In both countries people seem to want less Government intrusion in their private lives and less Government liberal influence (however much this has been unspoken) in their personal faith stance.

In New Zealand we saw all candidates and parties with a strong conservative family viewpoint suffer in last night's election. In most cases both candidates and parties of this viewpoint polled very low in the electorate vote. In most cases, other than the Family and Religious Parties, the candidates of this viewpoint were not high on the party list of the other parties.

What caused this change? After all we saw the upsurge of Destiny Church three years ago. In this election there were three parties promoting Family/Religious ideologies, The Family Party; Kiwi Party; United Future. These three parties put up 69 candidates for yesterday's election. This was enough candidates to have a formidable presence in Parliament if they had been able to form one party with strong Family/Religious policies and garner support from the conservative religious right.

Why were these groups so fractionated that they were in fact working against each other? What has caused a rapid decline over the last two years in support from the general populous?

Was this part of the reason that the incumbent party was overturned? After all, a lot has been said by members of the public about "interference in Families"; "the nanny State"; "Government interference in our freedoms"; "ultra liberal moral policies" and similar topics.

I find it very interesting that as the Conservative Religious Right gains strength within New Zealand and cause further fallout in mainstream Spiritual Orders, so the populace at large pursues a stronger secular stance in the way it determines New Zealand should be run.

Which way is New Zealand really heading? To the Religious Right, to the Religious Left or simply are we a secular State with enough of a Secular power base to reject both options? Where are we likely to head in future years as other Religious Faiths establish themselves more strongly in our communities?

Perhaps interesting questions. What do you think, not about the politics, but about the Faith/Spiritual future of New Zealand and its inhabitants? Any ideas/comments from you, the members of Sea of Faith NZ?

**Norm Ely, Chairperson, 2008-2009**

## 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 ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK) and Noel Cheer.

The **Chairperson** is Norm Ely, 16B Mawhare Street, Titahi Bay, (04) 236-6026 The **Secretary** is yet to be appointed.

**Membership** of the national organisation costs \$20 per household per year (\$30 if outside NZ). If you elect to receive your Newsletter by email, the subscription is \$15. Write your cheque to "SoF (NZ)" and mail to: **The Membership Secretary**, PO Box 15-324, Miramar, Wellington 6243

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](http://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](mailto:noel@cheer.org.nz)