



Gerd Lüdemann: An Easter Creed

I can no longer relate Easter directly to the Bible and the **creed**. The resurrection of Jesus is not an historical event, and therefore he will not come again. For me, resurrection has to do with this present life, which is like a small raft afloat on a vast, dark ocean. An icy wind blows, and the people on the raft are united only by the bond of the death that will come to all of them. Nor can they expect any compassion from the impersonal universe. But by coming to terms with the reality of such terrors in humility, wisdom and love, I discover the threshold of a new life. From now on I am no longer cowed by the notion that death is a punishment for my sin, nor do I hope for a resurrection. Instead, I accept my perishability, and that gives rise to a new Easter vision. Now impervious to the undertow of panic, I join with all humanity in the daily task of living in the light of love. Together we can make life stronger than death.

Gerd Lüdemann is Professor of New Testament at the University of Göttingen, Germany, Director of the Institute of Early Christian Studies, and Founder and Director of the Archive 'Religionsgeschichtliche Schule' at the University of Göttingen. He is a Fellow of the Westar Institute in the United States, home of The Jesus Seminar.

Editorial: All Those Titles

In this year of 'The Conference Jesus' it is worth reflecting on the range of titles that he attracted. The following is a small list:

Christ/Messiah, I AM, Holy One, Righteous One, Holy and Righteous One, God's Anointed, High Priest, Immanuel, Lord, Lord of Lords, New Adam, Prince of Peace, Prophet, Rabbi, Servant of the Lord, Son of David, Son of God, Son of Man, Stranger of Galilee, Suffering Servant, Teacher.

In the traditional Jesus encountered in church settings, there is a tendency to indiscriminately mix-and-match the titles, unwittingly producing contradictions and anachronisms.

Over the next three pre-Conference issues of this Newsletter we will look at three quite different titles and the characteristics associated with them.

This issue deals with the *The Christ* on page 5. The next two will discuss *The Prophet* and *The Sage*.

Noel Cheer

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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 Newsletter six times per year, 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, P.O.Box 50-393, Porirua. Phone 027 440 9267. The Secretary is Alan Jackson, 55 Evans St, Opoho, Dunedin (03) 473 6947.

Membership of the national organisation costs \$20 per household per year (\$30 if outside NZ). Both charges drop to \$15 if your Newsletter is emailed. Send remittance and details to The Membership Secretary, PO Box 15-324, Miramar, Wellington 6243 or Internet bank to 389000 0807809 00 and tell pcowley@paradise.net.nz.

Members may borrow books, tapes etc from the Resource Centre (Suzi Thirlwall phone (07)578-2775.) See the website at www.sof.org.nz for a catalogue and other details.

To offer a comment on material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact the Editor: Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay, (04)236-7533 email: noel@cheer.org.nz

THE END IS NIGH!

Membership subscriptions fall due on June 30. Some members have paid years ahead and have nothing to worry about. For the rest, there'll be a couple more warnings before we lower the boom!

From the Chair

Changes to Conference Arrangements

We are continuing to respond to members' input on how they wish the Annual Conference to be set up to provide attendees with as much contribution to Conference as possible. Here is a summary of the three significant changes which we believe are improvements.

Elective becomes Plenary: A couple of years ago we changed the 'Elective' Speaker format to a 'Plenary' Speaker format because:

- Electives were made up of 3 speakers all presenting at the same time in different parts of the Conference Venue.
- Attendees could hear only one of the speakers and so missed out on the other two speakers, even though they could obtain a hard copy of the missed presentations.
- The new 'Plenary' presentations allowed **all** three speakers to be heard by **all** attendees.
- This raised the issues of the length of the session and the time allowed for each of the three speakers.
- So we have reduced the number of Plenary Speakers to two, giving more time for their presentations and for questions from the floor.
- In addition, we have modified the concluding Panel Discussion so that all speakers, Keynote and Plenary, take part.

These changes were supported by the survey taken at Conference 2007 and reported back to Conference 2008, as well as being debated at Conference 2008.

Restore Core Groups: A change sought for some time (and which was raised in the Survey) was to restore the Core Groups. So, for Conference 2009, we have reinstated the Core Groups, now called 'Breakout Groups'.

- At the end of each Keynote presentation there will be a Breakout Group session.
- Each Breakout Group will have the same number of people assigned to it by ballot.
- Each Breakout Group will have a Facilitator to keep it "on task". [We need volunteers to be Facilitators — email me at n.ely@xtra.co.nz]
- Facilitators will provide a handout of the Keynote presentation to each member of the Breakout Group for reference during discussion.
- Each Breakout Group will have the same members throughout the Conference. This restores the 'Core Group' function and allows for some familiarity within the group and an improved dialogue between members.

No Workshops: The third improvement (which could prove controversial) is to drop the Workshops. Given all the other things which we want to achieve, there is insufficient time during Conference to hold Workshops. During discussion at Conference 2008, the attendees were largely of the opinion that they would prefer the dropping of the Workshops in order to reinstate Core Groups. The current Steering Committee have taken that discussion on board and by consensus have come to the same view as that of the attendees of Conference 2008. Future Steering Committees will review this decision.

The current Steering Committee believes that we have now accommodated all the changes discussed and sought over recent years in respect of the Annual Conference. This year's Speakers are all of International calibre and the Theme is very pointed for faith in the 21st century. I anticipate a very strong attendance at Conference 2009.

Norm Ely
Chair, Steering Committee 2009

Send Your Workshop To The Newsletter

If you had an idea for a Conference Workshop, why not write it up and send it to the Newsletter? It will get a bigger audience!

It should be relevant to the Conference theme, well-argued and a maximum of 800 words.

Mailing addresses are on page 1. Next deadline is 1 June.

Conference 2009: The Venue

Waikato Diocesan School for Girls, Hamilton



When valiant efforts by the Tauranga Branch to set up the 2009 conference in that city turned out to be fruitless, other venues were explored and the choice fell on the Waikato Diocesan School for Girls in Hamilton. The School is sited in beautiful grounds close to the River. Its conference facilities are brand new – they were opened at Easter, the accommodation offered is comfortable and private, ranging from single and double rooms to completely enclosed cubicles in small dormitories of 8 units and the food is renowned. So we have been lucky. “Dio” is in River Road, 10 minutes from the centre of the city by direct bus, and if you are motel-inclined there is a choice of about 50 within five minutes by car.

Hamilton has much to offer within its boundaries if you have the time to enjoy it: a museum and art gallery (currently featuring a display of Leonardo da Vinci designs and a retrospective of Waikato artists); the gardens, planned around national themes, are famous and particularly interesting is the newly opened Maori garden cultivated in the traditional ways; there is a wealth of history to be explored in the city and environs and a night life which I mention for completeness though it will doubtless be of little interest to you.

Within a radius of 200km you have the Coromandel beaches, the thermal playgrounds, fishing, forests, mountains, the wild west coast and of course Auckland.

For the past twenty years we have expended our energies in breaking clear of the traditions which formed, shackled and frustrated us. The Conference topic for 2009, "Who needs Jesus?" gives us the opportunity to reappraise that tradition and draw from it positive elements apt for the shaping of a new humanity. I am looking forward to it.

Welcome to the Waikato

Fred Marshall, Local Co-ordinator
Steering Committee Member

Provisional Programme

FRIDAY 25TH SEPTEMBER	SATURDAY 26TH SEPTEMBER	SUNDAY 27TH SEPTEMBER
2:00 – 3:00 Afternoon Tea & Registration.	8:00 – 9:00 Breakfast	7:30 – 8:15 Breakfast
3:05 – 3:25 Conference Opening: Norm Ely.	9:30 – 11:00 Keynote Speaker: David Boulton	8:30 – 10:00 Keynote Speaker: Greg Jenks
3:30 – 5:00 Keynote Speaker: Lloyd Geering	11:00 – 11:30 Morning Tea.	10:00 – 10:45 Breakout (Core) discussion groups
5:00 – 5:45 Breakout (Core) discussion	11:30 – 12:15 Breakout (Core) discussion groups	10:45 – 11:15 Morning Tea.
6:00 – 7:30 Happy Hour and Dinner.	12:15 – 1:30 Lunch.	11:15 – 12:45 Panel discussion, all speakers, chaired by Noel Cheer.
7:30 – 8:30 Plenary Speaker: Doug Sellman	1:30 – 2:30 Plenary Speaker: Margaret Mayman	12:45 – 1:00 Norm Ely: Conference 2009 Close and handover to convener of Conference 2010.
	2:30 – 4:00 AGM and Election of the Steering Committee for 2009. Chaired by Norm Ely.	1:00 Lunch and depart for home or holiday.
	The New Committee will meet immediately after the AGM.	
	Afternoon tea available at AGM.	
	6:00 – Finish Dinner	

Conference: Labour Weekend 2009

Hope is our Song
Peace - Justice - Creation

National Hymn Conference Labour Weekend

Hope is our Song: Peace-Justice-Creation is the title for the national conference celebrating indigenous hymnody, to be held in Palmerston North, and organised by the NZ Hymnbook Trust. The conference brochure is now available, either through the Trust website: www.hymns.org.nz or hard copy from the Trust office, email: info@hymns.org.nz

Organisers have set out a three-part description of the Conference's aims, expressed in this invitation:

- Come and learn new hymns to inspire your congregation and community
- Come and be energised by the message of hope in hymns and songs of justice, peace and the integrity of creation
- Come and network with others whose spirituality is nurtured by singing words and music that are relevant to Aotearoa in 2009

Readers of the SoF Newsletter may be interested to read notes given to the Conference organisers from a keynote speaker, **Clive Pearson**, Principal of the Uniting Theological College, Sydney, Australia (and also a NZer):

What I think I could do is speak of the need for images (iconopoic energies) to speak into the agenda of a public theology. Such a theology presupposes a multifaith, secular, post-Christian, Christian democracy (all of that needs to be unpacked but it is in keeping with Habermas' idea of the present now being one of a post-secular democracy). A public theology presupposes the need to be open to global flows (like peace, justice and creation) and how they earth themselves in local contexts (glocalisation).

A public theology presupposes moving beyond privatism and denominations; it presupposes the need to secure a place in the marketplace of ideas/images; a capacity to address public issues; an ability to be 'bilingual' (speaking into the public domain and the church) and the capacity to draw out the public consequences of Christian doctrines.



John and Gillian Thornley, Co-Managers for the Trust, say that both **words** and **music** will have equal emphasis and place at this event. There will be 150 new hymns and songs from the third hymn collection, *Hope is our Song*, to be published mid 2009, and these will, in the words of John Wesley, be 'sung lustily and with a good courage.'

PostModern GobbledeGook

While there are those (including this editor) who will defend the term 'postModernism' as naming a substantial phenomenon, there are others who see it as only pretentious nonsense. One who thought this was a professor of physics at New York University, Alan Sokal.

The 'Sokal affair' was a hoax perpetrated on the editorial staff and readership of the postmodern cultural studies journal *Social Text*. In 1996 Sokal submitted a paper for publication as an experiment to see if a journal in that field would, in Sokal's words: "publish an article liberally salted with nonsense if (a) it sounded good and (b) it flattered the editors' ideological preconceptions." The paper was titled *Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity*.

In 1998, Sokal co-authored *Fashionable Nonsense: Postmodern Intellectuals' Abuse of Science*. The book contains a long list of extracts of writings from well-known intellectuals containing what Sokal and co-author Bricmont characterize as blatant abuses of scientific terminology.

The above was abstracted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sokal_affair

Now, you can create your own pommo text at <http://www.elsewhere.org/pomo/>

Pre-Conference Jesus Watch

Part 1: The Christ

At some point, the followers of Jesus attached the title 'Christ' to his memory such that he became 'Jesus the Christ'. 'Christ' is not a surname. It is a title, an honorific. But the way that the Apostle Paul wrote might mislead us into looking also for a Mary Christ and a Joseph Christ. It is commonly, though not universally, supposed that this post-mortem status was written back into what is widely assumed to be biography — the letters of Paul and the Gospels.

The word 'Messiah' is an Anglicisation of the Hebrew 'Mašiah' which is rendered in Greek as 'Christ'. It has two uses in the Old Testament.

The earliest refers to the consecration of earthly kings by anointing with oil. The Greek 'Khristos' (anointed one) preserves this usage. The anointing was accompanied by the proclamation that the king will rule over the earth as the vice-gent (deputy-manager) of God. Though the anointed king was predestined, elected and adopted into sonship with Yahweh/God, he was not divine. Furthermore he remained subject to the censure of prophets. This style of **political** messiah started with Samuel's anointing of Saul at around 1000BCE and fizzled out with the less than satisfactory Zerubbabel in 520BCE.

A **divine** messiah had been hoped for, at least since the time of Daniel (169BCE). Daniel also gave us an inflated supernatural version of 'Son of Man' which became attached to the memory of Jesus in competition with his own more earthly use: the prosaic "I" or "me". Daniel also provided much of the end-time imagery for the Book of The Revelation.

The Apostle Paul, and later the writer(s) of the fourth gospel assigned this sort of cosmic significance to Jesus' messiahship even though it is apparent from the synoptic gospel records that Jesus was reluctant to be thought of as **any** sort of messiah. By his time, to claim to be one who would liberate the people from Roman oppression would have been a dangerous claim to make, or admit to.

Paul's 'Christ Jesus', 20 years after Jesus' mission, was offered to the Hellenised peoples of Asia Minor who were steeped in mystery religions and divinised emperors. To them, a divine Messiah/Christ would have more clout. Paul's claim for the status of Christ is succinctly summarised in Philippians 2:5-11. ("... took upon him the form of a servant ... he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. ... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord ..."].

In parallel, but decades later, the Jewish 'Jesus Movement', recouping after the loss of the Temple in 70CE and competing with post-Temple rabbinic Judaism in the decades that followed, declared Jesus to be the divine Messiah — one who had relevance for all times and all peoples. As Bob Funk (in *Honest To Jesus* p42) wrote of John's gospel: "... the pretense of a flesh-and-blood figure is dropped: Jesus has been made co-eternal with the Father and he doesn't mind telling us so in episode after episode. The history of Jesus the man has been smothered by the myth of the Christ."

This cosmic redeemer is a mile away from the devout social radical who welcomed sinners and outcasts, who proclaimed that personal relationship with God needs neither broker nor intermediary. The Christ who 'died for our sins' is recognised throughout Christianity but the question of who the 'ransom' was paid to varied — was it to the Devil or was it to God? For some, a blood-sacrifice is a metaphor too far — Mel Gibson's *Passion of The Christ* is dark and distasteful.

The majestic Christ of John's gospel is positioned, like a nightclub bouncer, outside The Kingdom (which in that gospel looks suspiciously like The Church) determining who can and who cannot enter. The Jesus Seminar is hesitant in making the obvious connection between Ex 3:13 and Jesus Christ's "I Am" statements in John's gospel. Instead they suggest that this formula was widely known in the Graeco-Roman world as typical of what a god would say. In John's gospel, messiahship is elevated into "the Way, the Truth and the Life". (Jn 14.6). Power resides in the very name of Jesus.

We might ask: is it appropriate to attach the title 'Christ' to Jesus, in either the earthly or in the divine sense? Is such a status compatible with claims that the actual Jesus (as far as can be recovered) would have made for himself and would have recommended for others.

Yet, without 'Christ' — especially in the divine sense — how could there be 'Christianity'?

*Noel Cheer, Wikipedia and others
next month: The Prophet*

God is not Dead, but Religion may be Dying

New Zealanders are Becoming Less Religious, Survey Shows

A press release from Massey University on 2 April 2009 stated that 40 per cent of respondents to a study by the University say they have no religious affiliation. This compares to 29 per cent 17 years ago.

Just over a third of New Zealanders in the latest census describe themselves as religious.

Fifty-three per cent say they believe in God (although half of those say they have doubts), 20 per cent believe in some form of higher power and about third say they don't believe or don't know.

However, 60 per cent say they would prefer children to have religious education in state primary schools with strongest support for teaching about all faiths.

Researchers from the Department of Communication, Journalism and Marketing received responses from 1000 people as part of the International Social Survey Programme.

Professor Philip Gendall, who led the research team, says that the view that New Zealand is a very secular country, is supported by the relatively low levels of active involvement in religion. "The survey shows that God is not dead, but religion may be dying," Professor Gendall says.

"There is evidence that New Zealanders have become less religious over the last 17 years; however, most New Zealanders believe in God and there has been no change in the proportion of those who say they believe in a higher power."

"So perhaps the apparent decline in religiosity reflects a decline in traditional religious loyalties – rather than a decline in spirituality as such."

The study found that significant numbers of New Zealanders believe in the supernatural with 57 per cent believing in life after death, 51 per cent believing in heaven and 36 per cent believing in hell.

A quarter of those surveyed think star signs affect people's futures, 28 per cent say good luck charms work and 39 per cent believe fortune-tellers can foresee the future.

The survey also asked questions about euthanasia and 70 per cent of respondents supported assisted suicide for someone with a painful incurable disease, provided a doctor gives assistance.

Questions for your consideration

- Does 'being religious' require 'belief in God'?
- What does 'belief in God' mean?
- Is 'higher power' the same as 'God'?
- Could 'religion' decline but 'spirituality' persist?
- Is 'religious education' the same as 'religious instruction'?

Finding David Boulton

David's email address is dboultondent@btinternet.com which differs from the address given in Newsletter 81.

Ayn Rand

The following passage was written by the controversial philosopher Ayn Rand. While her works may not be widely appealing to a typical SoFtie (if there is one), this exhortation may have merit:

"In the name of the best within you, do not sacrifice this world to those who are its worst. In the name of the values that keep you alive, do not let your vision of man be distorted by the ugly, the cowardly, and the mindless ... The world you desired can be won, it exists, it is real, it is possible, it is yours."

More 2009 Anniversaries

- 400 years since Galileo's first telescope
- 400 years since the publications of Shakespeare's sonnets
- 250 years since Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*
- 220 years since the fall of the Bastille
- 170 years since photography
- 130 years since Edison's first light bulb
- 80 years since Huxley's "Brave New World"
- 70 years since the first "Viewmaster"
- 50 years since the first Barbie doll
- 50 years since the Dalai Lama went into exile
- 20 years since the inception of the World Wide Web
- 20 years since the Tiananmen Square protests

Giving and Receiving Offence

In the 2nd of April edition of the UK Magazine *The Economist*, an article comments on the UN's Human Rights Council's resolution on 'religious defamation' which was adopted on March 26th. The resolution says "defamation of religions" is a "serious affront to human dignity" which can "restrict the freedom" of those who are defamed, and may also lead to the incitement of violence.

The Economist believes that a serious blurring of categories is taking place with this resolution. To criticise someone's religion is not, they insist, the same as depriving them of human rights. They suggest rather that "decent people everywhere, should try to ensure that the things they say do not entrench religious prejudice or incite acts of violence; being free to give offence does not mean you are wise to give offence."

Thomas Jefferson, author of the U.S. Declaration of Independence, wrote in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781-1785) "The legitimate powers of government extend to such acts only as are injurious to others. But it does me no injury for my neighbour to say there are twenty gods, or there is no God. It neither picks my pocket nor breaks my leg." More deist than theist, Jefferson today sounds liberal, even radical.

Letter to The Editor

Te Puke
11 March 2009

Dear Editor,

People say that Ephesus is like a sister group to Sea of Faith. What is the attraction, the pull, of this binary star that draws so many Sea of Faith members to belong to both? Probably gripping discussions are ubiquitous to all our groups; as for the deepest philosophy books and website postings, Sea of Faithers enjoy the excellent reviews in their Newsletters. I wonder if Ephesus will ever run out of things to talk about, a circumstance of which we are warned frequently. But it has not happened yet, the thoughtful confabulations continue.

A short time ago Ephesus was renowned for writing poetic modern liturgies. Any such group agreeing on the phraseologies alone would be commendable.

However, poetic literature can have a powerful effect upon all of us. An eloquent speaker presenting a poignant quote about, for example, drama-soaked nature, sends a frisson of emotion around the room, and brings a lump to every person's throat, the words are so beautiful. We listen entranced. We are in the throes of contagious poetic euphoria. Gaia wins easily over any pragmatic planet ideas lurking among us.

In Ephesus we sense a worthy aim to achieve a higher level of human consciousness through the growth of spiritualities, especially in the arts and graces. And insights are gained which may elude the grasp of others at first. Shy atheists can now call themselves non-theists. Religion is an accommodating and comprehensive term, and a vintage word is back in the vocabulary: mystery. Moreover, although our species evolved over the millennia to become a material component of the ecology, yet our interconnectedness with ecology is almost fey? As Charles Wesley once wrote, "'Tis mystery all! Who can explore this strange design?" And that conclusion is a fact.

Margaret Whitwell, Te Puke

Margaret's point, that many SoF members also belong to Ephesus (as does your Editor), is worth further discussion. Any takers?

From the Archives: Newsletter 33, July 1999

“NATURE, RED IN TOOTH AND CLAW”

Alfred, Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam*

As part of this year’s Darwin-fest and lest we get too sentimental about “Nature”, consider the following excerpt from the opening pages of Jay McDaniel’s book, *Of God and Pelicans: A Theology of Reverence for Life*.

"If God watches the sparrow fall, God must do so from a very great distance". This observation made by Holmes Rolston III, a North American environmental philosopher and Christian who wrestles with the fact that so many sentient creatures die violent and painful deaths before reaching maturity. How, he asks, is God related to such creatures and their suffering? Does God share in their suffering, or does God watch from a distance. Is God empathic, or cool and distant?

As a case in point, Rolston considers the plight of newborn white pelicans. Female pelicans generally lay two eggs, the second two days after the first. Because few parents can raise two young, "the earlier hatched chick, more aggressive in grabbing food from its parent's pouch, becomes progressively larger, attacking the smaller sibling" The second chick ... is often driven out of his nest by the first chick. His return to the nest is prevented by the parents, lest they accidentally adopt an alien chick and waste precious parental energy. Nine times out of ten, he thrashes about in search of food and then dies of abuse and starvation.

Rolston points out that this mode of parenting has been very successful from an evolutionary perspective. It has led to the survival of generations of white pelicans for almost thirty million years. The second chick is an insurance policy in case the first chick runs into trouble. He is a "backup chick." Neither the parents nor the first chick should be condemned for their behavior. Both are genetically conditioned to behave as they do, and they have little if any capacity for moral responsibility in relation to the second chick. The treatment of the hapless chick is a 'subroutine in a larger evolutionary process,' a means to species continuation.

From the backup chick's own perspective, however, this evolutionary analysis misses something. The analysis presents him from the outside rather than from the inside. **Viewed externally, he is indeed a cog in the evolutionary process:** a mere backup. But from the inside, in terms of his own point of view, he is a sentient creature who suffers pain and enjoys pleasure, and who desires his own well-being, however trivial that well-being might be compared to our standards.

As cognitive ethologists such as Donald Griffin point out, the recognition of sentience and internal needs in nonhuman organisms with nervous systems is not mere human projection. It is a sound inference from biological evidence. Analysis shows that birds such as pelicans have the nervous systems and the biochemical endowments to enjoy pleasure, to suffer pain, and to have interests in avoiding pain and preferring pleasure. Moreover, evolution itself posits a continuity between human mentality and nonhuman psychic life. As Bernard Rollin explains, 'given that evolutionary theory is the cornerstone of all modern biology, and evolutionary theory postulates continuity of all life,' it is unlikely 'that a creature that has a nervous system displaying biochemical processes that in us regulate consciousness, or that withdraws from the same noxious stimuli as we do, or from other dangers, and that has sense organs, does not enjoy a mental life.

And herein lies the problem, at least for the chick. Because the chick is the second or backup chick, his yearning for satisfaction is frustrated and his life ends in pain. **While the chick's brief existence may serve larger evolutionary ends, this fact is of no consolation to him. From his perspective, his life matters for its own sake. He is an end in himself.**

How about from God's perspective? From the divine point of view, does the pelican chick matter for his own sake? Does God envision him as an end in himself, or merely as a means to other ends?

This is the question that Rolston raises and one that any Christian interested in the relation between God and nature must address."

I having been subjected to the Rite of Christian Baptism in infancy (before reaching an age of consent), hereby publicly revoke any implications of that Rite and renounce the Church that carried it out. In the name of human reason, I reject all its Creeds and all other such superstition in particular, the perfidious belief that any baby needs to be cleansed by Baptism of alleged ORIGINAL SIN, and the evil power of supposed demons. I wish to be excluded henceforth from enhanced claims of church membership numbers based on past baptismal statistics used, for example, for the purpose of securing legislative privilege."

“De-Baptism”

John Hunt, in UK, is a part is a campaign to make available a way of cancelling baptisms given to children too young to decide for themselves.

The National Secular Society would like the Church of England to devise a formal procedure for cancelling baptisms, with a change in the baptismal roll as part of it.

In the face of resistance from the Church, the society has come up with a document of its own. Its at <http://www.secularism.org.uk/debaptism.html>

The "Certificate of Debaptism" has a deliberately home-made look, with its mock-official decoration and quasi-official language.

It has now been downloaded more that 60,000 times, and has taken on a life of its own. [The scroll format is unique to this Newsletter – ed].

The Church wonders aloud why, if atheists and secularists believe baptism is so meaningless, they are letting it upset them.

from BBC NEWS

Being Human Isn't Easy

The text below is promotional material. We look forward to a review from a member.

Between the Monster and the Saint: Reflections on the Human Condition
by Richard Holloway

Being human isn't easy.

We might think that consciousness and free will give us control over our lives but our minds are dangerous and unpredictable places.

Humans are susceptible to forces beyond our comprehension. We're capable of inflicting immense cruelty on one another and yet we also have the capacity to be tender, to empathise, to feel.

In *Between the Monster and the Saint*, Richard Holloway holds a mirror up to the human condition. The reflection isn't always pretty. But by drawing on a selection of writings from history, philosophy, science, poetry, theology and literature, Holloway shows us how we can stand up to the seductive power of the monster and draw closer to the fierce challenge of the saint.

Provocative, wide-ranging and full of wisdom, *Between the Monster and the Saint* is a brilliant book about our place in the world.

One of the most outspoken and best-loved figures in the modern church, Richard Holloway recently stood down as the Bishop of Edinburgh but remains Gresham Professor of Divinity in the City of London and a Fellow of the Royal Society. Publisher for Australia/NZL Text Publishing Company, Swann House, 22 William Street, Melbourne VIC 3000., Phone: +61 3 8610 4500, Fax: +61 3 9629 8621

Richard Holloway will be a speaker at the Auckland Writers and Readers Festival on 16th May.





Jesus and Christ

Shirley Dixon, Titahi Bay

I am very grateful to Doug Sellman for sharing his painting *Jesus Christ* by Kees Bruin with us (*Newsletter* 81, p.12).

I find the painting fascinating – most importantly because it is so thought provoking! It makes visible the dichotomy between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith that many SoFers have struggled with - and continue to struggle with. This painting stands in stark contrast to the pious – while sometimes beautiful – re-workings of out-worn clichés of so much contemporary religious art.

I am of the opinion that the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith are two different, and largely incompatible, personages.

While I cannot personally accept the theistic and supernaturalist Christ figure, I regard it as foundational to Christianity. And the Christ figure of the painting captures this so well – one may readily 'read' this figure – a crowned king, young and beautiful (beauty = goodness), and fair haired so that I, as a Caucasian, may easily identify with him. This has been a trend all through Western religious art — artists have 'domesticated' Jesus and other religious figures to make them relevant to their viewers. Thus, in the wonderful paintings from Renaissance, Mary is portrayed as either a European mother or a fashionably dressed aristocrat; the glimpses of towns and countryside in the background are not Galilee but Europe; and the magi visit among the Roman ruins of Italy.

The Chris figure is the Jesus of my childhood Bible picture book – the 'friend of little children' as well as King of Heaven. I do not regard this image as 'false' any more than I regard the Christ story as 'false'; rather, I regard it as a genuine and magnificent creation by humans to express the divine in ways that were appropriate to the times in which the dogmas were formulated.

However, I now regard such concepts – whether expressed in words or in images - as past their 'use by' date; and while I increasingly regard the attempt to modernize or 'reform' Christianity as largely futile, I believe that there are still gems to be salvaged from the experience and wisdom of the past two thousand years of Christian endeavour. And among the gems are the timeless and thought provoking parables and aphorisms told by the sage, Jesus.

Doug says that Kees "tended towards idealising Jesus and humanising Christ" and that the figures are "less contrasting than I first envisaged". Certainly, the Jesus figure might have been made even more naturalistic – less handsome, with more weather-beaten skin and less tidy hair and beard, and with rougher clothing. Similarly, the Christ figure could have been portrayed with paler skin, more beautifully coiffured hair, and with more elaborate clothing. Such things would have made the contrast greater but I cannot consider that it would have been much less effective as an image that provoked thought. It would have been so easy for the figures to slip into stereotype or caricature. Such contrast would have lacked nuance and subtlety and would thereby have diminished the ambiguities and paradoxes that provoke speculative thought with the result that dialogue about the relationship between the two conceptualisations would have been stifled.

And yes, Doug, I will certainly avail myself of your kind offer to see the original painting when I am next in Christchurch.

I would be interested if other people who own, or have seen, or know about, other thought-provoking contemporary religious images would submit them for inclusion in the Newsletter.

[Doug is to be a plenary speaker at this year's Conference - ed]

The Value of Jung to Sea of Fathers — A Reply

Bill Cooke, Auckland

First of all, congratulations on the recent *Sea of Faith* Newsletters. They have been contentious, passionate and engaged, as any good journal dealing with ideas should be. In Newsletter 80, Jim Feist made some considered objections to my 'Theses on Jung' piece which had appeared in the issue before and to which I would like to respond.

Let's begin by dealing with the issue of criticising Jung as a person, and emphasising his many unattractive qualities; megalomania, rampant misogyny, intellectual dishonesty, racism and anti-Semitism being only the worst of them. I agree with the Chinese philosophers who, unlike Western thinkers, consider one standard by which a person's philosophy can be judged is by its impact on the person espousing it. If that person speaks of truth and beauty and acts dishonestly and basely, we are justified in being sceptical about the person's statements. Think of this as an example: if you found Nelson Mandela and Heinrich Himmler could both be quoted as saying very similar things on an issue, who would you be more prepared to cite? Neither does Jim repudiate any of my claims against Jung, beyond declaring them 'unconvincing' and implying they aren't relevant.

With respect to Jung and the Nazis, Jim doesn't deal with my main claim. Yes, Jung was Swiss and didn't live in Nazi Germany. I never said he wasn't. In fact, his living outside Germany makes his long-standing collaboration with a high-level Nazi journal all the more appalling. His occasional comment and even more occasional action in support of individual Jews does not make him an opponent of Nazism.

Jim then tries to dismiss some of my sources. For instance Jeffrey Masson's *Against Therapy* is dismissed as 'clearly biased', which is altogether too easy. One cannot dismiss relevant evidence as biased simply because one doesn't like what it says. He then accuses me of citing only the hostile parts of Ellwood's work. All I can do is deny that. Robert Ellwood would not agree with my philosophy, and sees more value in Jung than I do. But I would continue to claim that my use of Ellwood's criticism of Jung is sound and proportionate.

And finally, Jim sees some of my observations about Jung's scholarship as being about marginal things. I would disagree, because this would involve precisely the sort of dissecting and analysing that Jung saw as inimical to his sort of inner-directed, holistic psychological insight. His discredited scholarship on Hinduism and Mithraism and so on critically undermines the pseudo-religious utterances which underpinned his psychology. And it is significant that Jim makes little effort to defend Jung from my charge that his work in psychology has been completely by-passed and as being of value merely as a distasteful footnote in the history of psychology.

Jim and I agree that Jung has much to offer Sea of Faith members, but we would certainly disagree on the nature of that contribution. For me, Jung offers us a warning against self-absorbed pseudo-scholarship, and we can be grateful to him for that.

Bill Cooke, Auckland



Carl Jung

From the Chair My View

“Who needs Jesus? Life in the 21st Century AD”. This is the theme of Conference 2009. What is the impact of Jesus in the 21st century in New Zealand? How many people in New Zealand would consider whether Jesus has any influence whatsoever on their day-to-day life in New Zealand?

The ‘impact’ of Jesus in the 21st Century may be quite significant. Over the many generations since 50 AD or thereabouts, the interpretation of acts and sayings of Jesus have impacted significantly on the progressively growing Christian populations.

These interpretations have been handed down generation to generation. Over the following one thousand nine hundred and fifty years these interpretations have been reinterpreted according to the (perceived?) needs of people of power be they Church based, Government based, or some other group with a vested interest (Christian liberals, conservatives or extremists).

This process has generally had no regard to what Jesus may have been able to try to communicate to members of his society 1,950 years ago when the process of communication was so different to any time during that 1,950 years let alone now.

Imagine Jesus moving from community to community with his followers some 1,950 years ago. He was moving around a very small area of the world. What he said and did at that time would have had little or no impact on any other part of the world, including Italy.

Jesus was communicating to a Jewish population with Roman rulers and other people of various faiths who were coming and going. His method of communication was to use the known texts and beliefs of the time and attempt to reinterpret those to the then ‘modern’ thoughts and beliefs. He was a Liberal or Progressive thinker/believer and therefore not held in any regard (let alone high regard) by the people of power at the time.

I can think of many instances of this process now. Any Liberal/Progressive thinker who has a message that differs from one or other of the mainstream (Christian?) organisations finds that they are under severe pressure to ‘toe the line’ of the organisation that they are perceived as criticising.

As I write this after Easter, I find myself thinking of modern day crucifixion.

We no longer physically “Nail People to a Cross” but we most certainly do metaphorically. Whilst this has no physical pain attached, it has what I consider a worse outcome. People in 2009 can be attacked by other than physical means and be left mentally, physically or otherwise severely hurt. They can be stripped of their work, they can be stripped of their friends, they can be stripped of their associates, they can be stripped of their future, they can be stripped of their family and most importantly, they can be stripped of their Faith.

To denigrate people in 2009 we do not use nails and timber. We use texts, computers, web sites, and media.

We are able to communicate with the world rather than a very small strip of land.

We are able to communicate with many millions of people rather than many thousands of people.

In 2009, do we think of Jesus when other Christians (or, come to that, members of any faith) are treated in this manner by modern day Priests and Money Lenders in their particular Temples? I would suggest not.

I would suggest that very very few New Zealanders give any consideration as to whether Jesus has any influence whatsoever on their day-to-day life.

On the other hand, the passing down of ‘The story of Jesus’ and related stories over the last 1,950 years has given people of the many generations over that time a moral and ethical foundation on which to base the way they live their lives, especially in how they treat others.

In my opinion, most people would not attribute any moral or ethical foundation they have inherited to Jesus, albeit some may well attribute this foundation to ‘The Bible’.

These are just my thoughts or ramblings after Easter and with the Theme of Conference 2009 at the back of my mind.

Over Conference weekend in September, you will hear from vastly greater minds than mine on the theme of Conference 2009. We have again been able to bring to Conference 2009 a strong group of presenters both local and international who are all well able to present their thoughts on the international stage.

I look forward to hearing from these presenters as to their opinion on ‘whether anybody in New Zealand needs Jesus in the 21st Century AD’.



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