

Celebrating 20 Years of SoF in New Zealand

The National Religious Discussion Network

# Sea of Faith

Exploring Spirituality, Religion and Ethics

Newsletter 103, November 2012

Conference Supplement Edition

## OBSERVATIONS FROM A TIME-TRAVELLER

Due to a most unusual fluctuation of the space-time continuum, I, Friedrich Nietzsche, was able to spend some time at your Conference. It was gratifying to see Lloyd Geering explaining my thinking and the Conference working on the revaluation of all values that I called for.

I hope that the Conference understood me well on the theme of “God is dead.” You will notice that I do not simply say “God does not exist.” I do not advocate a mere superficial and rational denial of the existence of a divine being. That would be “modern” while I am “post-modern.”

So, sometimes I regard God as invented:

*The concept ‘God’ was invented as the opposite of the concept ‘life’ – everything detrimental, poisonous and slanderous and all deadly hostility to life, was bound together in one horrible unit in Him.*

But at other times, I critique the common notion of God as insufficiently divine:

*What differentiates us is not that we find no God – neither in history, nor in nature, nor behind nature – but that we do not feel that what has been revered as God is ‘godlike’.*

I also argue against monotheism, but in favour of national gods, including the Yahweh of Israel before the Exile. These gods represented the strength and life-affirmation of their peoples.

When the madman asked “Where is God?” his hearers taunted him; they no longer believed in God, but they still had not recognized the event of the death of God and understood its significance. Similarly, most intellectuals in my time no longer believed Christian doctrines but they continued to propound an ethics that derived from Christianity, as if nothing had changed. This is something I hold against them; they have continued comfortably with a traditional morality

and found society's acclamation for it. I reject the notion that you can do away with the fundamental concepts of Christianity (God, sin, the soul) but keep its values and ethics. However, those who like me are bold enough to ask questions about morality find the abyss of nihilism opening up. When I say that the human being is a rope stretched across an abyss between the animal and the *Übermensch*, that abyss is nihilism and our task is to go beyond what we currently are, overcoming nihilism and enabling a new kind of human being.

I am puzzled that the Sea of Faith does not seem to be worried about nihilism. Perhaps you no longer feel the loss of God. Perhaps you just accept naturally values that seem right to you. But where do those values come from? What is it that makes them seem believable to you? By what process does a society come to accept some values and reject others? Questions like these have greatly exercised me:

*The question of the origin of moral values is therefore for me a question of the first order, because it affects the future of humanity.*

Just look at the titles of my books: *On the Genealogy of Morals*, *Beyond Good and Evil* and *Twilight of the Idols* (idols is my word for ideals). My conclusion is that a morality is an expression of the will to power of those who manage to establish it. **There is no 'moral law' out there, parallel to scientific laws, for us to discover.** Morality and values are not built into the structure of things, they are something that humans, preferably the thought leaders of a culture, establish, persuading others of their validity. Your Valerie Grant presented some ideas about where morality comes from, derived from evolutionary biology. The idea of reciprocal altruism giving an evolutionary advantage sounds quite similar to my idea of values being expressions

of the 'will to power'. But have we managed to give an adequate account of where values come from? I doubt it.

I suspect that nihilism is actually at work in your culture. How else do you explain the growing gap

between rich and poor and the failure to address the big issues you face? Perhaps my words have already turned out to be prophetic:

*If we cannot discover a new picture of man that will again give him a sense of his essential dignity, the State, in the hands of military despots, will demand that we should yield to it in idolatry; and eventually men will lose all respect for one another, all social structures will break down, and men will seek only to rob and exploit one another.*

You are sceptical and rejecting of traditional Christianity but for me, philosophy is about questioning what seems obviously true and generally agreed:

*Great spirits are sceptics. Zarathustra is a skeptic. Convictions are prisons.*

There is nothing very admirable about questioning what you don't believe anyway. What goes much closer to the bone is questioning those things that society generally accepts, that you hold dear and that you find the thought of giving up rather scary:

*Not to question, not to tremble with the craving and the joy of questioning...that is what I feel to be contemptible, and this feeling is the first thing I seek in everyone.*

I needed to be sceptical and questioning about the values that I was brought up with. I saw through them and critiqued them. I called myself 'the first immoralist' and an 'anti-christian'. Of course, I was not against morality per se, nor against the kind of Christianity that Jesus represented, but with these labels I anticipated the rejection I would experience from conventional society.

The issues of most concern to you (resource depletion, overpopulation, pollution, the instability of the monetary system) are new and foreign to me and I cannot help you with them. **The themes that were important to me were advocating a master morality (a morality of strength and leadership), becoming what you are and saying "Yes" to life.**

*Auf Wiedersehen, "Friedrich Nietzsche"*



Friedrich Nietzsche, who bore a striking resemblance to Laurie Chisholm, interrupted Lloyd Geering's address.

# ALL ABOUT US

## Sea of Faith

The National Religious Discussion Network,  
Exploring Spirituality, Religion and Ethics.

Our formal name is The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Inc.

We are an association of people who have a common  
interest in exploring religious thought and  
expression from a non-dogmatic and  
human-oriented standpoint.

We follow similar organisations in the UK and Australia  
in taking our name from the 1984 BBC TV series and book  
by the British religious academic, Don Cupitt.

The TV series both traces the decline of traditional  
Christian influence in the West in the past 250 years and  
invites the viewer to consider what might replace it. In  
New Zealand the Sea of Faith Network provides a forum  
for the continued exploration.

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 each year, maintains a website at  
www.sof.org.nz, assists in setting up Local Groups, and  
organises an annual Conference.

We have five **Life Members**: Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don  
Cupitt (UK), Noel Cheer, Ian Harris and Alan Goss.

**The Chairperson is Beverley Smith**

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**Membership** of the national organisation costs \$20 per  
household per year (\$30 if outside NZ). Both charges  
drop to \$15 if the Newsletter is emailed and not on paper.

**To join**, send remittance and details to The Membership  
Secretary, PO Box 15-324, Miramar, Wellington 6243 or  
Internet bank to 38 9000 0807809 00 and tell Peter  
Cowley ([pcowley@paradise.net.nz](mailto:pcowley@paradise.net.nz)) your mailing details.

**Members may borrow books**, CDs, etc. from the  
Resource Centre which is managed by Suzi Thirlwall  
[susanthirlwall@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:susanthirlwall@yahoo.co.nz) (07) 578-2775 Refer to the  
catalogue on the website.

**To offer a comment** on material appearing in the  
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## 2012 Conference Supplement

Four Pages of Highlights from October in Auckland

## Outwitted

*They drew a circle that shut me out  
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout  
But love and I had the wit to win  
We drew a circle that took them in*

Edwin Markham, Epigrams, 1901



# DOES GOD EXIST?

Doug Sellman, Christchurch

**Once again, the Panel was one of the highlights of the Sea of Faith Conference this year. And Andrew Bradstock must be one of the bravest men in New Zealand to be prepared to argue the existence of God with Lloyd Geering, while simultaneously being peppered with searching questions by Noel Cheer.**

As part of his defence of the existence of a personal God, Andrew first stated that over half of the world's population believes in God; but he then got me really listening when he made reference to a survey of scientists conducted at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and repeated towards the end showing that about 40% believed in God at the outset and a similar proportion continued to believe at the end.

I actually found this hard to believe so later asked Andrew for the reference, which he subsequently kindly sent me. In fact he was referring to a chapter "Has Science Disproved God?" in the book *The Dawkins Delusion* by Alister McGrath in which this survey is quoted, although not specifically referenced.

McGrath writes: "Back in 1916, active scientists were asked whether they believed in God – specifically a God who actively communicates with humanity, and to whom one may pray 'in expectation of receiving an answer'. (Deists don't believe in God by this definition). Roughly 40% believed in [a theistic] sort of God, 40% did not and 20% weren't sure. The survey was repeated in 1997, using precisely the same question, and found pretty much the same pattern, with a slight increase in those who did not (up to 45%). The number who did believe in such a God remained stable at about 40%."

I noted immediately this was a sample of scientists in the USA, which makes the findings understandable. The USA is known to be a significant outlier in the Western World in terms of population belief in a nature-intervening personal God, so its general scientists might be expected to reflect the population trend.

However, what is most interesting about these series of surveys is that a sub-sample of 'eminent scientists' amongst the general sample were analysed across the century. (See for example <http://www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/news/file002.html>)

In 1914 (the year the first survey was conducted) 28% believed in a personal God, while by the end of the century (1998) virtually none of these 'greater scientists' did (7%) – even in the USA.

Andrew used the assertion that a large proportion of scientists believe in a personal God in defence of the existence of the Christian God. Examining the survey

data a little closer inclines me to the opposite view; that the vast majority of leading scientists don't believe in such a phenomenon, although I personally wouldn't use this as good evidence for the non-existence of a personal God.

Lloyd Geering had the last word though, when he asserted his belief in God. He repeated it to make sure we heard. But he was quick to provide a modern and uniting definition of a worthwhile God to believe in – the Oneness of the Universe.

Doug Sellman, [doug.sellman@otago.ac.nz](mailto:doug.sellman@otago.ac.nz)

## Andrew Bradstock Responds

**Doug is very kind to commend me for bravery for 'being prepared to argue the existence of God with Lloyd Geering', but I'm not sure such approbation is quite justified.**

My recollection of that panel discussion is that we were asked to pick up on the statement 'God is dead' (which Professor Geering iterated in his paper on Nietzsche), and say to which 'god' we thought this might refer. I used the opportunity to repeat what I had said in my paper that, despite all predictions to the contrary in the 1960s, belief in God is now as strong, if not stronger, than it was then, and therefore it cannot make sense to continue to claim God's 'death'.

In my paper I noted how Christianity has seen a massive revival in recent years in places which were previously very secular – like Russia, China and even London – and that the re-emergence of religion generally in the public domain has forced a radical re-evaluation of the 'secularization thesis', including by those who helped to promulgate it. So we have seen in the last few years books appear with titles like *God is Back: How the Global Rise of Faith is Changing the World* (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2009) and *The Desecularisation of the World: Resurgent Religion and World Politics* (Berger, 1999). I noted how José Casanova observed in an essay in 2008 that religion has "returned as a contentious issue to the public sphere of European societies" such that it is possible to detect a 'significant shift' in the European Zeitgeist, and the claim by the *God is Back* authors (both senior figures on the very secular *The Economist* magazine) that religion is now a part of intellectual discourse in Europe.

None of this, of course, 'proves' or 'disproves' the existence of a personal God, any more than, as Doug

says, do those surveys of US and other scientists (though I do think, like him, that they prompt further interesting conversations); and I don't think I wanted to make that claim. But what did worry me during that weekend in Auckland – which I must say I enjoyed very much – was what I perceived to be a reluctance to accept the world as it is. People in the Sea of Faith may find it incredible that so many Christians and Muslims believe in the kind of God(s) they do, and might even wish to encourage them not to; but I fear they'll have little to contribute to conversations about the nature and role of religion in the contemporary world if they still think that Nietzsche had the last word on God's fate!

## God R.I.P. 1720

Don Cupitt wrote in *The Meaning of The West*: "I suggest then that some time around 1720 or so is perhaps the best date one can set for the Death of God. It is the date when metaphysical theism ceases to be sure, when the Great Tradition of Christian art peters out into the fantasy and illusionism of South German Rococo and the leading Enlightenment intellectuals begin mockingly to distance themselves from the Church. ... If then we take the 1720s as the most convenient date for the Death of God as a great and given public Fact, we will soon remark that the very same period also marks the beginning of the modern philanthropic and humanitarian tradition that has been growing steadily ever since."

## MEANWHILE, OOP AT T'MILL

**Westar Spring Meeting, 13-16 March, 2013**

**Flamingo Hotel, Santa Rosa, California**

**Elaine Pagels: Revelations** Early Christians seized on the Book of Revelation as a weapon against heresy and infidels of all kinds. Jews, even Christians who dissented from their increasingly rigid doctrines and hierarchies. But were they its original targets? Elaine Pagels persuasively interprets Revelation as a scathing attack on the decadence of Rome. She argues that its author, John of Patmos, was taking aim at the Roman Empire following the Jewish War in 66 CE, when militant Jews in Jerusalem, fired with religious fervor, waged an all-out war against Rome's occupation of Judea, and their defeat resulted in the desecration of Jerusalem and its Great Temple.

*Elaine Pagels is a Professor of Religion and is the bestselling author of several books, including The Gnostic Gospels (1979), Beyond Belief (2003), Reading Judas (with Karen L. King, 2007), and most recently Revelations (2012).*

**Robin Meyers, The Underground Church** Theories abound as to why the church is declining so rapidly in the West. Could the reason be that no one expects anything important to happen on Sunday morning? The first Jesus

people practiced pacifism, radical egalitarianism, and the redistribution of wealth (and paid for it with their lives). Today's church largely defends the status quo. But what if churches today became, once again, an underground movement, taking on the power structures of our times? In this workshop, a minister from the reddest of states will tell how the scholars of Westar helped corrupt at least one church in Oklahoma.

*Robin Meyers is a Professor of Philosophy Senior Minister of a Congregational UCC Church. His books include Why the Christian Right Is Wrong (2006), Saving Jesus from the Church (2009), and The Underground Church (2012).*

**Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre: Mary Magdalene Leads the Way:** Mary Magdalene was a much more important figure in early Christianity than either the New Testament or traditional histories allow. The New Testament both includes and sidelines her. Beyond the canon, some early Christians regarded her as a visionary and leader. Why was her story so contested? This workshop explores the texts, issues, and scholarly proposals that reconfigure Mary Magdalene's place in the history of Christianity imagination.

*Melanie Johnson-DeBaufre is Associate Professor of New Testament and Early Christianity and author of Jesus Among Her Children (2006), Mary Magdalene Understood, with Jane Schaberg (2006), and co-editor of The Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion.*

**Bernard Brandon Scott: From Jesus to Constantine, Why we need a Christianity Seminar:** The Acts of the Apostles, Irenaeus, the Canon, and Constantine tell of the pure teaching of Jesus that was handed on to the twelve apostles and then sullied by heretics. This is the orthodox story as we know it today. The real story is very different. How did a movement whose hero was crucified by an official of the Roman Empire end up as the official religion of that Empire? How did the historical Jesus become the second person of Trinity? How did a movement birthed in Judaism come to be anti-Jewish? The Christianity Seminar will tackle these and other seminal questions.

*Bernard Brandon Scott (Ph.D., Vanderbilt University) is the Darbeth Distinguished Professor of New Testament at the Phillips Theological Seminary, Tulsa, OK. He is the author of several books, including The Trouble with Resurrection (2010) and Re-Imagine the World (2002).*

## HERETICS? YES!

"... the only true religious beliefs are heresies, ... [those] that you personally have appropriated and tested out in your own life, and have articulated and defended in conversation with others."

**Don Cupitt *The Way To Happiness* p67**

*"Though I speak with the tongues of men, and of angels, and have not charity .....*

## WHO PUT CHAPTER 13 INTO I CORINTHIANS?

Noel Cheer

It's an old controversy but worth another go-round: did the Apostle Paul write that lyrical passage, the 13th chapter of I Corinthians? Or is it an interpolation by a later editor.

This article puts a few scattered ideas in front of the reader and then invites her to respond.

Such assertions of proof as this writer knows to exist are as follows:

- If you remove the 13th chapter, the 12th connects seamlessly with the 14th. This at least suggests that ch.13 is an afterthought, a sort of preface to 14:1 "Make love your aim ..." (RSV). But, even if ch.13 is an interpolation, it could still have been authored by Paul.
- Chapter 13 is utterly self-contained – perhaps pulled off the wall of a fashionable Greek villa and plugged into neo-Christian scriptures. Think of fashionable wall plaques such as *Desiderata* or a few verses of *The Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam*.
- The mood changes abruptly from ch.12 to ch.13. Ch.12 and ch.14 both talk of gifts of the Spirit but ch.13 sees Love as self-contained and above everything.
- Quite unlike Paul, ch.13 does not mention "God", or "Lord", or "Christ". To the author, love is its own authenticator.

Letters to The Editor on this, or any other appropriate, subject are welcome.

Send to Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay or email [noel@cheer.org.nz](mailto:noel@cheer.org.nz). Next deadline is December 10<sup>th</sup>

*... and now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity. "*

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## DISPLAY OF ARCHIVES

Our Archivist, Alison Eng, produced a static display of archived material at the Conference. It celebrated 20 years of Sea of Faith activity in New Zealand. Alison also addressed the Conference about her archiving work. The transcript can be found at [http://www.sof.org.nz/2012engarchi\\_vestalk.pdf](http://www.sof.org.nz/2012engarchi_vestalk.pdf)



## RECENT ACQUISITIONS IN THE RESOURCE CENTRE

### Books

- B217 Sheldrake, Rupert: A New Science of Life
- B218 Zohar, Danah and Marshall, Ian: The Quantum Society
- B219 Clements, Kevin: Honouring The Other
- B220 Hamilton, Clive: The Freedom Paradox - Towards a post-secular ethics.
- B221 Cooke, Bill: A Wealth of Insights, Humanist Thought since The Enlightenment
- B222 Livingstone, Dinah: Poetic Tales. Logosofia Down To Earth
- B223 Gilding, Paul: The Great Disruption
- B224 Robottom, RL: Essays on Evolution, Creation, Religion, Philosophy and Politics
- B225 Robottom, RL: False Belief

### DVDs

- D17 Matters of Dying: Death on Request; Euthanasia; Dennis Potter's Last Interview
- D18 The Wisdom of The Dream: Carl Jung
- D19 Jung, The Unconscious and Us Lloyd Geering 2011 (request either D19A: parts 1 and 2 or D19B: parts 3 and 4)
- D20 Jesus: The Cold Case Bryan Bruce 2011 (book also available, see below)
- D21 Christianity and Buddhism: Can they remain relevant to the 21st century. A panel discussion with Lloyd Geering and Stepehn Barchelor, chaired by Noel Cheer.
- D22 Evolution: The Real Genesis. Lloyd Geering takes us through Cosmogenesis, Geogenesis, Biogenesis, Anthropogenesis
- D23 The Nature of Human Beings & the Question of Their Ultimate Origin. Rowan Williams, Richard Dawkins 2012

Look on the website [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz) for ordering details.

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# CAN LÜDEMANN LEAD US TO A SECOND ENLIGHTENMENT?

Laurie Chisholm, Christchurch

## Tom Hall's interview with Gerd Lüdemann

in Newsletter 102 indicates that Lüdemann has been rejected by the Lutheran Church, so that he could no longer be a professor in the theology of the New Testament. Such a rejection is almost a seal of approval for the Sea of Faith, but I would like to raise some critical questions of this critical thinker.

What strikes me most about the interview is the language Lüdemann uses to describe the way that the early church modified the original teaching of Jesus: fiction, invention, forgery "spins", distorts. This is not the language of the careful historian, weighing up the evidence; it is the language of the partisan polemicist. If the original words of Jesus are sacred and of a totally different character than other people's words, deliberately changing them is a bad thing. But what if those words were relatively unimportant to the first Christians, those who lived within what they would call "the presence of the living Lord"? If the risen Lord is present among you, leading and guiding now, why would you rely on old dead words?

(Notice how Paul pays the words of Jesus almost no attention, even though his letters were written closer to the historical Jesus than

were the gospels.) According to John's gospel, Jesus promised that the Spirit would lead them into all truth. Lüdemann seems to have an in principle assumption that, whatever 'spirit' is at work, it can only lead to error, when it comes to orthodox Christians. When it comes to Gnostic Christians, who also put words into the mouth of Jesus, Lüdemann seems to have no problem, portraying them in an almost entirely sympathetic light (see <http://www.firstuunashville.org/sermonblog/?p=21>).

Scratch the surface of this radical questioning of the historicity of the sayings of Jesus and we find the old liberal assumption that Jesus is in but the Church is out. But what if religions are essentially community productions, and Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Zoroaster and the Buddha are merely the arbitrary spark that happened to initiate the fire? What if the notion that movements are initiated by great leaders turns out to be a nineteenth century myth and that figureheads are largely productions of the society of their time?

I also feel a need to free myself from the idea that I should put my spirituality on hold until the expert scholars have ascertained just what Jesus said and did. Indeed, there is a kind of professorial hybris in the world of German New Testament scholarship that the Herr Professor will be able to give us final answers. But isn't it in the nature of historical inquiry that we can never get beyond a greater or lesser probability in our reconstructions? It is sobering to look back at the various 'results' that scholars have produced since the nineteenth century. Albert Schweitzer's debunking of the entire nineteenth

century research into the life of Jesus should serve as a salutary warning. I see little evidence that Lüdemann is aware of the hypothetical and provisional nature of his (and others') historical-critical reconstructions.

I must hasten to add that I am not familiar with Lüdemann's actual work. But I do have one of his books. Only available in German, it is *Texts and Dreams. A walk through the Gospel of Mark in Debate with Eugen Drewermann*. I appreciate the fact that he has taken some trouble to engage with Drewermann (a very different scholar who has also fallen foul of the Church), when most biblical scholars have ignored him (Sandra Schneiders, Bernard Lang and Cesare Marcheselli are some notable exceptions). Again and again he finds that Drewermann's biblical interpretations do not align with the primary purpose of the biblical text, as if the conscious intention of the authors were the only aspect of the text that could speak to us and the archetypes that Jung speaks of were non-existent. He shows little awareness of the fundamental critique of the 'historical-critical' method<sup>[1]</sup> that Drewermann

has provided in a major two-volume work on biblical interpretation. Both Enlightenment-style scholars and defenders of the

*This is not the language of the careful historian, weighing up the evidence; it is the language of the partisan polemicist.*

orthodox faith looked to the 'facts' of history, positivistically understood, to support their views, but in so doing treated the texts as if they were modern historiography, ignoring the particular genres they represent (myth, miracle story, apocalypse, prophecy, prophetic call, for example).

Drewermann points out that when the biblical texts want to say fundamental things about the significance of Jesus, they use the language of myth (virgin birth, baptism, temptations in the wilderness, ascension, resurrection). He would like to set scholars like Lüdemann the task of interpreting a Grimm's folk tale, to get them away from historical questions to focus on the content and meaning of the text.

In the interview, Gerd Lüdemann concludes that we need a second Enlightenment, and he is undoubtedly right. His treatment at the hands of the German church may well indicate a hardening and a move to the right. In an earlier time, Rudolf Bultmann continued as Professor of New Testament in spite of the controversy surrounding him, and Karl Barth rejected calls to have him removed, saying that the best way to counter him was through good theological work. But this Enlightenment needs a multi-dimensional approach. A programme of searching for the historical Jesus based on a superseded positivistic concept of history just won't get us there.

Laurie Chisholm

[1] **Historical criticism** is a branch of literary criticism that investigates the origins of ancient text in order to understand "the world behind the text". Its primary goal is to ascertain the text's meaning in its original historical context. The secondary goal seeks to establish a reconstruction of the historical situation of the author and recipients of the text. *From Wikipedia*

Tom Hall: Reimagining Religion

## JESUS CHRIST, THE SAME YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW.

Hebrews 13:8

### **The anonymous author of Hebrews was wrong**

on this point, because “Jesus Christ” was *not* the same then as now, and surely will be seen differently in the future. In fact, the adherents of at least a half dozen widely diverse early Christian traditions—Jewish, Q, Thomas, Ebionite, Gnostic, and Docetic—would have found the term ‘Jesus Christ’ an oxymoron. They knew that ‘Jesus’ was the name of a Galilean teacher and prophet, while ‘Christ’ is a title derived from the Jewish dream of a restoration of the Davidic throne. It is the Greek equivalent of ‘Messiah,’ which means simply ‘one anointed by God’ and thus denotes a divine appointee. Isaiah 45:1 so identifies King Cyrus of Persia, who released the Jews from captivity in Babylon!

Despite the affirmation that Mark placed on Peter’s lips (8:29), this title was not assigned to Jesus until after his supposed resurrection. In short, ‘Christ’ is a mythical category that fairly soon after his death came to denote Jesus’ deification. That explains Bob Funk’s advice in *Honest to Jesus*: “Give Jesus a demotion. He asked for it, he deserves it, we owe him no less.”

This modern view of Jesus is hardly without precedents. We can see its roots not only in proto-Unitarians like Francis David, Socinus, and Peter Waldo, but even in the Nicean controversy and the unwillingness of some fourth-century delegates to acknowledge Jesus’ divinity. Not only that, but neither Q, Thomas (likely pre-Markan), nor the Didache (early second century) mention Christ’s crucifixion, resurrection, divinity, or atonement; because, for their authors, Jesus was simply a prophet and teacher. Besides, the four gospel writers drew heavily from Paul, who had recently created a new religion starring a largely fictional Jesus, and they in turn offer notably different portraits of Jesus. Thus from the very beginning Christianity consisted of groups that showed a considerable variety of doctrines and practices.

The roots of modern dissatisfaction with traditional Christianity go back to Galileo’s insistence that imagination, however noble its intuitions, must yield to the evidence of the senses. Faith, hope, and love are lovely, but they must be expressed in terms of the best definition of reality we can construct. If they inspire beliefs that don’t accord with the experience of others, they are at best fine-sounding hot air. At worst they produce dangerous or poisonous doctrines. What Galileo did was to show that the three-tiered universe of scripture—this world with heaven above and the underworld below—was a product of the imagination, and such a worldview did not describe reality: earth is in fact a relatively insignificant ball of rock and water circling a third-rate star somewhere in a trackless universe.

Traditional belief faced several serious challenges during the next 400 years, and largely shook them off, but it suffered two especially heavy blows just after WWII. John Robinson’s

*Honest to God* badly shook up the establishment, and Paul Tillich’s liberal theology inspired a whole generation of ministers and scholars to challenge “that old-time religion.” The central theme of both the preacher and the teacher was that the supernatural deity of the past had no place in the future. Galileo was getting mainstream recognition.

Marcus Borg is a distinguished and widely respected professor at Oregon State University, perhaps best known for his best-selling *Meting Jesus Again for the First Time*. He grew up in a very traditional church and community, but discovered when he went to seminary that he had been sold a bill of goods, and over the years has developed a new slant on the Christian message. Marcus is adept at introducing very traditional congregations to the idea of thinking critically about what they have been told; he still more or less speaks their language.

And yet he shakes many people up, for although he does not question God’s existence, he sees a very different deity from that imagined by most Christians. He rejects the standard-brand theistic God—a supernatural deity external to the universe he created, but who from time to time reaches in to pull a string or push a button in order to carry out his plans and purposes. Instead, Borg is a panentheist for whom God is an integral part of the reality all around us: God is more than the natural world, but all of the natural world contains or partakes of the reality known as ‘God.’ And he insists that Christians need to do a thorough overhaul of a number of other antiquated notions about the Bible, Jesus, faith, and salvation. He knows that his childhood faith—“Believe now for the sake of Heaven later”—has no long-term future.

John Shelby Spong is the retired Episcopal Bishop of Newark, New Jersey. A little more radical than Marc, he has an equally strong belief in the need for change. Among Jack’s many books are *Why Christianity Must Change or Die* and *A New Christianity for a New World*. He is especially concerned about what he calls “the church alumni association” or “believers in exile”—those he describes as “the countless host of modern men and women for whom traditional religious understandings have lost most of their ancient power ... that silent majority of believers who find it increasingly difficult to remain members of the Church and still be thinking people.”

According to his ‘Realm of God’ theology, God is to be discovered and realized in social action and by combating inequality on behalf of all those on the fringes of church and society. People must learn to fulfill their true, God-given nature by “living fully and loving wastefully”; for to expand the presence of love is to promote the work of the kingdom.

But like Borg, Spong hangs on to God; for both of them the word refers to a real being or presence in the universe. Don Cupitt, on the other hand, knocks traditional Christianity into a cocked hat. He calls himself a Christian Buddhist, and whereas Borg and Spong are theological realists, he is a self-proclaimed and vocal non-realist. Reality is not ‘out there’ the world as we



know it is nothing but the sum of impressions gained through the senses and processed by our brains. It is we humans who have created the world we live in, and largely by means of language, which is also our creation. So what's left for God? Not much, except to serve as a sometimes useful but often misleading symbol of our highest ideals and concerns and strivings.

Until recently, Cupitt was an ordained Episcopalian priest, and like Spong sees the church drifting into irrelevance, but he holds on to the hope that Christianity is in the process of becoming secular humanism, and is thus moving from its warped ecclesiastical form to its 'Kingdom' stage of development. Cupitt goes beyond Spong in that he calls himself a 'post-Christian,' by which he means that:

1. Religious meaning has become part of everyday culture; the distinction between the religious and the secular is rapidly disappearing; "God" is a symbol, not a name or title of a being; all of life is sacred.
2. This life is all we have; we should commit ourselves to making all we can of it.
3. Salvation means expressing and giving of ourselves—he calls it "Solar living."
4. Ethics are humanitarian and global matters, not obeying a list of do's and don'ts.
5. The religion of the future must be this-worldly, and must show the way to fulfilling this life; in the absence of sacred objects or persons, we must develop sound religious attitudes by which to guide ourselves.

The radical and *avant-garde* Cupitt is in many ways an echo of Lloyd Geering, a New Zealand pastor, professor, biblical scholar, and theologian who introduced most of Cupitt's central ideas ten or more years ahead of the effusive Englishman. Lloyd, who is not a self-promoter and who hails from a small country at the other end of the world, has been called the New Zealand Cupitt, but in reality Cupitt is the English Geering. Lloyd is a more historical and systematic thinker, and not, like Don, a compulsive writer who continues to change his mind and his focus.

Where Cupitt tends to light off brilliant Roman candles, Geering gathers materials for a signal fire.

To be truly religious, Geering tells us, is to change the meaning of the God-symbol. When the deity is no longer seen as a champion against our tribal or national enemies, no longer the issuer of passports to eternal bliss, then the idea of God must be invoked and utilized to preserve our planet. Our ultimate concern must be the possible destruction of the world that sustains our life:

"This God is in the physical earth of which we are a tiny part. Even more, this God is to be found in all living creatures. Most of all, however, this God is rising to self-awareness in the (as yet) confused collective consciousness of the global human community. This is Tomorrow's God, calling us from a world yet to be created. But to create this world, this God has no hands but our hands, no voice but our voice, no mind but our mind, and no plan for the future except what we plan." [Concluding words of his *Tomorrow's God* 1994]

These two non-realists see religion, like all of life, as one continuously evolving process. This world is all there is, and since it must therefore be our ultimate concern, then how we

respond to it is the essence of our religious experience. To be sure, Cupitt's emphasis is more on the individual while Geering's concern is to seek the welfare of the secularized and globalized world by promoting ecological morality and an end to ethnic and religious strife—but the two are complementary.

As my friend Nigel Leaves puts it, "non-realism is ultimately aimed at getting ourselves and the planet into shape to tackle what life throws at us so that we can preserve and extend the world we inhabit. This is the task of religion!"

Let me close with a parable told by John Robinson's widow, Ruth, in the course of commenting on her husband's theology. He had written this: "The Kingdom of God is a vision of our world transformed ... the love of God is a vision of the human heart transformed by compassion, hope, and trust. We change the world by loving it for the sake of every child."

This is her parable, a true story: "Just before New Year I was returning home across London after a Christmas visit. On an underground stairway a small thin boy was huddled in a corner. His face was grey and his eyes looked desperate and hopeless. A piece of cardboard was lying on the ground beside him. Among the pennies scattered on it, two words were written: 'Change please.'

With but a slight change in inflection, one could imagine those words as a divine appeal to all of humankind: 'Change—PLEASE!'"

**Tom Hall 2012**

*Tom is one of our overseas members—he lives in the USA—and has attended several of our Conferences at which he presented workshops. Tom is a member of the Westar Institute and edits publications for Polebridge Press.*

## UP, AND RUNNING!

The Steering Committee met briefly after Conference and:

- Appointed Beverley Smith as Chairperson, Laurie Chisholm as Secretary and Maureen Roxburgh as Local Groups Coordinator
- Agreed that Peter Cowley continue as Treasurer
- Confirmed Margaret Gwynn as Chair of the local Arrangements Committee for Conference 2013
- Heard from Tom Hall about some members of the Westar Institute who might be suitable as Conference speakers.
- Reviewed the Conference just past.
- Brainstormed ideas and speakers for Conference 2013

It met again on Nov 1<sup>st</sup> for a teleconference (our usual monthly practice). Our Treasurer, Peter Cowley, reported the good and rather unexpected news that Conference had made a small surplus. The Committee agreed on a theme for Conference 2013, and on a list of speakers to approach. There has been some success .....

### STOP PRESS: CONFERENCE 2013

**Dates:** October 4-6

**Venue:** Hawkes Bay, either Pukeora or Lindisfarne

**Theme:** "Tell Me The New, New Story"

**Confirmed Speakers:**

- Nigel Leaves (Director of The St John's Centre for God-Talk, Spirituality and Ethics, Brisbane.)
- Michael Benedikt (author of *God Is The Good We Do*)
- Winton Higgins; (Australian secular Buddhist)
- our own Lloyd Geering.

**Details are subject to confirmation in about March 2013**

## CONVERSATION BETWEEN GOD AND ST. FRANCIS

**GOD:** Frank, you know all about gardens and nature. What in the world is going on down there on the planet? What happened to the dandelions, violets, milkweeds and stuff I started eons ago? I had a perfect no-maintenance garden plan. Those plants grow in any type of soil, withstand drought and multiply with abandon. The nectar from the long-lasting blossoms attracts butterflies, honey bees and flocks of songbirds. I expected to see a vast garden of colours by now. But, all I see are these green rectangles.

**St. FRANCIS:** It's the tribes that settled there, Lord. The Suburbanites. They started calling your flowers 'weeds' and went to great lengths to kill them and replace them with grass.

**GOD:** Grass? But, it's so boring. It's not colourful. It doesn't attract butterflies, birds and bees; only grubs and

**St. FRANCIS:** Yes, Sir.

**GOD:** These Suburbanites must be relieved in the summer when we cut back on the rain and turn up the heat. That surely slows the growth and saves them a lot of work.

**St. FRANCIS:** You aren't going to believe this, Lord. When the grass stops growing so fast, they drag out hoses and pay more money to water it, so they can continue to mow it and pay to get rid of it.

**GOD:** What nonsense. At least they kept some of the trees. That was a sheer stroke of genius, if I do say so myself. The trees grow leaves in the spring to provide beauty and shade in the summer. In the autumn, they fall to the ground and form a natural blanket to keep moisture in the soil and protect the trees and bushes. It's a natural cycle of life.

**St. FRANCIS:** You better sit down, Lord. The Suburbanites



sod worms. It's sensitive to temperatures. Do these Suburbanites really want all that grass growing there?

**St. FRANCIS:** Apparently so, Lord. They go to great pains to grow it and keep it green. They begin each spring by fertilizing grass and poisoning any other plant that crops up in the lawn.

**GOD:** The spring rains and warm weather probably make grass grow really fast. That must make the Suburbanites happy.

**St. FRANCIS:** Apparently not, Lord. As soon as it grows a little, they cut it. Sometimes twice a week.

**GOD:** They cut it? Do they then bale it like hay?

**St. FRANCIS:** Not exactly, Lord. Most of them rake it up and put it in bags.

**GOD:** They bag it? Why? Is it a cash crop? Do they sell it?

**St. FRANCIS:** No, Sir, just the opposite. They pay to throw it away.

**GOD:** Now, let me get this straight. They fertilize grass so it will grow. And, when it does grow, they cut it off and pay to throw it away?

have drawn a new circle. As soon as the leaves fall, they rake them into great piles and pay to have them hauled away.

**GOD:** No!? What do they do to protect the shrub and tree roots in the winter to keep the soil moist and loose?

**St. FRANCIS:** After throwing away the leaves, they go out and buy something which they call mulch. They haul it home and spread it around in place of the leaves.

**GOD:** And where do they get this mulch?

**St. FRANCIS:** They cut down trees and grind them up to make the mulch.

**GOD:** Enough! I don't want to think about this anymore. St. Catherine, you're in charge of the arts. What movie have you scheduled for us tonight?

**St. CATHERINE:** 'Dumb and Dumber', Lord. It's a story about....

**GOD:** Never mind, I think I just heard the whole story from St. Francis.

[This piece appears in many locations on the Internet. The original author is not credited – ed]



# WALL POSTERS AT THE CONFERENCE

Words by Laurie Chisholm, Pictures by attendees at Ralph Pannett's Workshop

The words and pictures were conceived separately. Their coming together is a work of editorial licence.



The values of sustainability are important to all of us here and I enthusiastically include myself. We therefore might hope that these too are built into us by natural selection. I shall tell you today that

this is not so. On the contrary, there is something profoundly anti-Darwinian about the very idea of sustainability.

*Richard Dawkins*

Perhaps the greatest value of the Gaia concept lies in its metaphor of a living Earth, which reminds us that we are part of it and that our contract with Gaia is not about human rights alone, but includes human obligations. *James Lovelock*

Niall Ferguson suggests that 'financial markets are like the mirror of mankind, revealing every hour of every working day the way we value ourselves and the resources of the world around us.

*Andrew Bradstock*



The mainstream has yet to learn that the much-vaunted productivity of developed nations is the result not of the magic of the market, human innovation, creative finance or some vaguely-defined 'technology'. It is due to the magic of fossil fuels.

*John Peet*

By urging us to take up a standpoint 'beyond good and evil', Nietzsche is saying that we should look at the various competing human moralities as if from outside, and in a cool and critical



spirit. We should question the morality of morality. What good does it do? Will these teachings really help us to conduct our common life more successfully? Does our morality really succeed in making our life seem to us more worthwhile?

*Don Cupitt*

While we New Zealanders can be justly proud of many of our achievements, the reality is, that over recent decades we have not been teaching and replenishing those attributes of character that are essential for social cohesion, the maintenance of a civil society and the preservation of a liberal democracy. *John Heenan, Director of NZ Foundation for Values Education*

This alone I know with certainty, namely that man's value judgments are guided absolutely by their desire for happiness, and are therefore merely an attempt to bolster up their illusions by arguments. *Sigmund Freud*



... we are indeed at the brink of the abyss... Governments can't act because the people are not demanding it strongly enough to counter the

lobbying and financial pressure of the corporates. It is now up to the people. I believe this has to involve non-violent direct action - civil resistance - in sufficient numbers that governments are forced to act or be voted out. That requires a change in values for most of the public.

*Jeanette Fitzsimons 2011 Conference*

More than any previous generation, we are surrounded by signs and images. Billboards, electronic signs, print media, television, computers, tablets and smart phones all bombard us with visual information. All contrived images embody some presumptions about "values". How we look at images is conditioned by society's constructs of knowledge, its strategies for control and the cultivation of desire.

How are we to survive with integrity in the visual jungle?

*Ralph Pannett  
2012 Conference*





# FROM THE CHAIR

Beverley Smith signs on

**Firstly, our grateful thanks** to our retired Chairperson, Natali Allen, for her work on our behalf over the past three years, and to Alan Jackson our appreciation for being an excellent Secretary.

**Secondly, our grateful thanks** to Stephen Warnes and the Arrangements Committee of Auckland (especially Ron Wilson) for the smooth running of an excellent Conference. Stephen has retired from the Committee, but we hope he will be back.

Steve Collard's from Auckland has finished his term finished.

We extend a warm welcome to new Committee members:

- Laurie Chisholm (Christchurch)
- Jock Crawford (Hamilton)
- Bernadette Krassoi (Hawkes Bay)

From all reports and my observation, it was a really superb Conference in every way: venue, accommodation, the fine dining; and what a privilege it was to listen such awesome lectures – a feast of memories to take away. There were 101 registrations with 30 people living in at St. Cuthbert's.

I was so grateful for the clarity of **Lloyd Geering's** opening lecture, as Nietzsche's writings have, for me been difficult to understand. Fancy having a clone of Nietzsche interrupt proceedings!

Nietzsche's greatness was to perceive the radical character of the cultural and religious change then taking place in the West. He had a love-hate relationship with Christianity. It was the love of truth which he had imbibed from Christian culture which enabled him to be so critical of it.

Nietzsche believed that in the transition to modernity, a transition in values was taking place. He called it 'the revaluation of all values'.

**Dr Valerie Grant** brought enlightenment to us on Justice, Stewardship and Altruism:

"There are some indisputable givens that form the basis of evolutionary theology. Two of these are inequality and competition. These two underlie the characteristics of all living things. Whether we speak of trees in the forest, or fish in the sea, spiders or humans, each and every one is unique and hence different. Each will have some advantageous characteristics and some disadvantageous

characteristics. And it is the presence or absence of these in each individual that decides the results of the competition to survive and reproduce. If anything at all has been 'ordained' it is inequality and competition, which means, basically, that life is not 'fair'."

**Dr Andrew Bradstock** on Theology and Values in a secular society.

"The purpose of religion is not to encourage people to focus all their attention on the next world to the detriment of their responsibilities to this one."

He spoke of the absence in the media of any real discussion about the deeper issues underlying our culture and that Public Theology might be thought to have something worthwhile to contribute to public life here in N.Z.

**Dr John Peet** asked us whether a peaceful, just and sustainable future is possible. The root cause of unsustainability – and including climate change – is our approach to economics.

**Ralph Pannet's: workshop** "The Writing on the Wall: Being an Artist Prophet" was appreciated by all who attended. Some of its fruits appear on page 11.

**Tom Hall**, wearing a wooden whistle necklace made from an oak tree on Henry David Thoreau's farm, held an informal workshop – quoting aphorisms galore from his subject.

There is a lot there for you to discuss in your local groups. Your Steering Committee Committee is now planning a Conference in Hawke's Bay that you won't want to miss.

**Beverley M. Smith,**  
**Chairperson 2012-2013**



Footnotes:

- The Keynote Papers and Natali's Report and Ralph's Workshop are all on the Website
- Sorry ... the audio recording of the Keynote Speeches and Panel Discussion failed. We still don't know why. [Noel Cheer]

**“THE REVALUING OF ALL VALUES: WHAT VALUES DO WE NEED TO SURVIVE?”**

## **CONFERENCE SUPPLEMENT**

### **EXCERPTS FROM SPEAKERS' PAPERS**

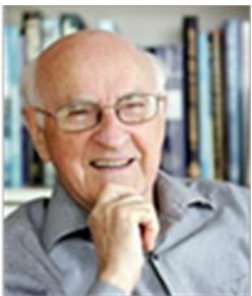
*The full papers are on the website at [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz)*

## **Professor Sir Lloyd Geering** **Nietzsche's Contribution**

**Who was Nietzsche? What did he say and why has been called “the awakener and creator of new life-values”?**

This presentation will explore relevance of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche's (1844-1900) thought in today's world. Nietzsche may be described as the prophet par excellence of the new age. **Martin Buber referred to him as “the first pathfinder of the new culture”, “the awakener and creator of new life-values and a new world-feeling”.**

Nietzsche believed that the traditional Christian concern with the supposed spiritual realities of the other-world, far from leading to human fulfilment, had the effect of falsifying all the real human problems of politics, of social organization and of education, and of causing men to despise the basic concerns of life itself.



The modern growth of this-worldly concerns meant, for Nietzsche, that mankind was entering on an entirely new era, one pregnant with both hope and disaster on the grand scale. In the transition to modernity, a transition in

values he called **“the revaluation of all values”** is taking place..... “There are no moral phenomena at all, only a moral interpretation of phenomena”. Instead of becoming the slave of values, falsely believed to be absolute, each person has to become the master of the moral component of his/her own human condition.

In my book *Christian Faith at the Crossroads*, (initially published as *Faith's New Age*), I described Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche (1844—1900) as the prophet *par excellence* of the new age. Nietzsche ceased to be a believing Christian during his schooldays. In an essay which he wrote at the age of eighteen he said, **“That God became man shows only that man is not to seek his bliss in eternity, but to establish his heaven on earth”.**

Nietzsche sketched the post-theistic character of the new religious age very strikingly in his now well-known Parable of the Madman. There he described a madman running through

the market-place with a lantern during the brightness of the morning and crying out that he was looking for God. The bystanders poked fun at him and asked him if God had lost his way or gone on a distant voyage. Thereupon he declared that God was dead and would remain dead. Moreover, he said, humans were all responsible for the death of God. As a result of the death of God, it was just as if the earth had become unchained from the sun and was already moving out into the cold, dark and empty space of the vast universe. That was why he had lit his lantern even though it was still light. This strange announcement silenced the onlookers and caused them to stare at him in astonishment. Then the madman grew silent and threw his lantern to the ground, where it broke into pieces and went out. That led him to say, “I have come too early; my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way. It has not yet reached the ears of men”. He then went round many of the churches and made his pronouncements within them declaring, “What are these but the monuments and tombs of God?”

Yet it was something of a love-hate relationship which he had with Christianity. It was the love of truth which he had imbibed from Christian culture which enabled him to be so critical of it. He said, **“even we students of today, who are atheists and anti-metaphysicians, light our torches at the flame of a millennial faith; the Christian faith, that God is truth and truth divine”.** Indeed it was this very concern for truth, hidden at the heart of Christianity, which was now, in his view, bringing about the dissolution of the historical forms of Christianity. He wrote, **“This Christianity as dogma perished by its own ethics, and in the same way Christianity as ethics must perish; we are standing on the threshold of this event. After drawing a whole series of conclusions, Christian truthfulness must now draw its strongest conclusion, the one by which it shall do away with itself”.**

Professor Sir Lloyd Geering is the author of at least 10 books, including his autobiography, *Wrestling with God*, (2006). He was awarded an Honorary DD by the University of Otago in 1976 and a CBE in 1988; in 2001 he was named a Principal Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, and in 2007 he was admitted to the Order of New Zealand.

## ***Dr. Valerie J Grant***

### **Justice, stewardship and altruism: Could religion make a difference?**

*Here is a summary of the story so far ...*

- **Reciprocal altruism will only work well if reciprocity is maintained and we can find a way of controlling the level of cheaters and freeloaders.**
- **Justice will only be achieved if we can find a way of coping with inborn inequality and competition.**
- **Stewardship of the environment will only eventuate if we can agree on shared goals and find the motivation to look after the planet.**

So now we come to the question of religion. Believing that religions overall had a negative impact on society, evolutionary anthropologists set out to trace their origins, mainly in order to find a way of getting rid of them. To everyone's surprise they found that no society had survived without a religion. If they had a religion they survived; if they did not have a religion, or if they had a religion and gave it up, they did not survive. The anthropologists have yet to find a surviving society, past or present, that is or was not controlled by some form of religious guidelines. This, they suggest, must mean that having a religion provided something that gave people an evolutionary advantage.

So my question today is, would any of the problems we have with contemporary values be helped by having a strong, plausible, contemporary religion?

As with so many other problems, I believe it is a matter of building onto existing models rather than throwing away the whole thing to start again.

On the other hand, what we had was clearly faulty and in need of some serious re-thinking. We need to recognise at least two major factors – first, that some of the ancient religious admonitions and advice were designed for people living in small groups in primitive settings. While the rules worked well in those circumstances, they do not automatically translate to the very large populations we now have, nor to our current scientific world view.

But second, as humans we have not outgrown the same basic impulses and needs we've always had. When the chips are down, we still compete to survive and reproduce.

\*\*\*\*\*

In this last part of my talk I want to make a few suggestions about this. Basically, these are original. That is to say, I'm not

citing anyone else here, even Alain de Botton, who, as many of you know recently published a book spelling out his view of the good things that religion has provided in the past. My list is quite different and derives from my evolutionary perspective.

So what does a religion provide that society cannot do without? First, what most religions seem to provide at the most basic level is surveillance. This provides essential support for reciprocal altruism by giving everyone the feeling that they are being watched and evaluated by some all-powerful being that knows even their most private thoughts. Everyone behaves better if they think they're being watched, so this tends to damp down the frequency of cheaters and free-loaders.

The second thing that religions tend to provide is some way of counteracting the inequalities of the natural order to make things fair, or just.

My third suggestion is that religion can provide sense that we are all part of something greater than ourselves ... and, perhaps even more important, that even the most powerful person is accountable to a higher authority.

The fourth thing on my list of important things that religion can provide us with that nothing else can, is motivation, which in turn is directly related to goal-setting, purpose and hope.

My fifth ... idea incorporated into most of the world's great religions, that each and every one of us is unique, special, cared for, respected and loved by God. If all else fails, at least God still loves you. This idea has proved of inestimable value to lonely people everywhere, and to everyone who has ever felt a failure or brought disappointment to their loved ones.

So perhaps a secular society may not after all be the best possible model. Today I have suggested there are at least five attributes of religion, that little else can provide, and which contribute to our very survival in densely populated societies. As it happens, these five attributes seem to be directly related to the re-valuing of those contemporary values mentioned earlier – altruism, justice and stewardship.



**Dr. Valerie Grant studied psychology at the University of Auckland, later specialising in evolutionary psychology. She taught at the Auckland School of Medicine for 34 years, first in Behavioural Science, later in Medical Ethics and the Humanities. She has published over 50 scientific papers and is still actively engaged in research on her maternal dominance hypothesis.**

**Born into a Methodist parsonage in Dunedin, and later living at Trinity Methodist College Auckland where her father was the principal, she has a life-long interest in religion and the search for meaning.**



**Dr John Peet**

## **How New Zealand Became a Green Leader**

**[You must imagine that it is now the year 2050 and that you are looking back after 40 or so years.]**

From New Zealand's position now in the year 2050, in a state of strong sustainability, it is clear that its citizens were quite unready in 2009 to embrace the concept of sustainable living and the changes required to achieve it. Modern historians have marvelled at the fact that the 2008 general election scarcely mentioned the subject, despite the substantial evidence of imminent, unprecedented change. The drivers of major change that had been identified soon appeared in 2008, some with much more severity than had been envisaged.

The world economy fell into a deep recession. This recession was triggered initially by the turmoil in the money and credit system that began in 2007 and 2008, then snowballed into major declines in aggregate demand and international trade. Political unrest in several major nations and blocs spurred recession further and resulted in multiple regional conflicts. The economic forces supporting globalization weakened markedly.

As this happened, some of the basic assumptions about global economics began to change. Investors realized that they could not expect global economic growth to resume and, hence, that the prices of securities would in the future have little or no growth component. In the mid-2020s, money supply processes became regulated when commercial banks lost the privilege of creating the national currency and money supply as profit-making loans. This function reverted to the reserve bank, which acted in the national interest, and money itself reverted to its traditional role of facilitating the exchange of goods and services. Driven by the imperative to follow the requirements of a steady state economy, fiscal and other legislative changes were well under way by 2025, imposing substantial taxes on the use of nonrenewable resources and, at the same time, reducing the rates of direct sales, income, and company taxation. These changes were the first major steps in the shift to the new economics.

Through all of these events and continuing thereafter, sensible decisions were made in New Zealand whenever they were needed. With the benefit of hindsight we now know that if any of the key actions had not been taken or had been unduly delayed, our recent history would have been one of much greater confusion, chaos, and hardship. There would have

been a substantial collapse in human well-being in this country, together with irreparable damage to our ecological systems.

New Zealand's economic output fell markedly and its dependence on international trade was drastically reduced. Consequently, principles of regional and local self-sufficiency were introduced. The years between 2009 and 2020 were very difficult—globally and in New Zealand—as the entrenched economic and governance systems struggled to cope, with deteriorating degrees of success.

As the severe inadequacy of the traditional approaches to economics and governance became apparent, movements in civil society began to question, with rapidly strengthening influence, the viability of the institutions involved and the validity of the principles upon which they were based. Advanced development of the Internet had (and still has) great power in ensuring the connectivity of people who were now more physically separated. The Internet facilitated the rapid spread of transformational initiatives that began in civil society, then acquired strong political interpretations in northern Europe and germinated quickly in New Zealand. The relative simplicity of government in this small country made the changes easier to implement.

In this gradual but insistent process, the traditional ideologies and institutions of economics and governance were rejected because they were failing and were replaced by alternatives. The people who led these changes are now greatly respected. At the time, the chaotic global situation did not support optimism, but these people had hope and vision, together with personal resilience and a commitment to find a path through the morass. Of course, those who were still engaged with the traditional approaches tried strenuously to maintain them, but the evolving changes eventually prevailed. They were quite different from any previous approaches to political economy.

As a result of the reforms brought about by this movement, New Zealand is now strongly sustainable within its sovereign territory and possesses substantial influence in other countries that are on a similar path.



**Dr. John Peet was born in the UK and has been living in Christchurch for the last 50 years. He is the author of *Energy and the Ecological Economics of Sustainability* and papers on systems, sustainability and the ethical requirements of stakeholder involvement. He contends that, without economic growth, our current money system will fall apart. This is because the money we use is created nowadays as interest-bearing debt, with the consequence that repaying that debt requires economic growth, since otherwise debt would rise faster than the ability to service it.**

**There is a hidden problem here, which is that economic growth—meaning growth in the production of goods and services—inescapably connected to consumption of physical resources and production of waste.**

**Dr. Andrew Bradstock**

## Theology and Values in a Secular Society?

Public theology is a relatively new discipline – or at least, the *term* is new, coming into vogue only in the 1970s. Fashioned partly in reaction to a trend in the United States to interpret faith in terms of individual piety and salvation, to essentially *privatise* it, public theology addresses the possibility of utilizing the resources of the Christian faith to speak *publicly* into contemporary discourse.

The narratives, teachings and insights of Scripture have much to offer to debates on current issues, public theology would contend, provided these texts are interpreted imaginatively, wisely and with due attention to the specific context addressed. Noting how public discourse can be refreshed and deepened by insights drawn from the Judaeo-Christian tradition, public theology will offer its contribution with confidence and boldness, albeit with an awareness of the marginal position of 'faith' in modern societies and the need for critical engagement with other disciplines. Rather than try to enhance the status or privilege of 'the church', so often the motive behind the articulation of 'religious' perspectives in the past, public theology will seek, in words found in the prophet Jeremiah (29.7), 'the welfare of the city', in particular the welfare of those least able to enjoy the 'life in all its fullness' which Jesus came to announce (John 10.10). Public theology affirms, in contradistinction to what most critics of 'theology' imagine to be the case, that the purpose of religion is not to encourage people to focus all their attention on the next world to the detriment of their responsibilities to this one, rather to work to redeem the world that we have and, as the Gospels impel us, seek first the Kingdom of God.

Given the sometimes shallow and restricted nature of our public discourse, and virtual absence of any real discussion about the deeper issues underlying our culture, public theology might be thought to have something worthwhile to contribute to public life here in New Zealand; yet there are a number of challenges facing anyone seeking to do public theology in this country, not the least being the uneasiness we feel about the idea of 'doing' religion in public. ...

It would be interesting to know how far a concern to respect and uphold the country's 'secular' status underpins this reticence to speak 'religiously' in the public square. ... I am struck how far the situation here reflects the intellectual consensus that has obtained over the past few decades, that public discourse, particularly around political and other issues that matter, should employ language, principles and reasoning which are intelligible to any reasonable person and based on public canons of validity, with religious voices needing either to

be excluded or to 'translate' what they say into a secular 'Esperanto'. As the leading and most sophisticated proponent of this position, John Rawls, has argued, while of course citizens affirm a diversity of reasonable religious and philosophical doctrines, they should be ready to explain the basis of their actions to one another in terms each could reasonably expect that others might endorse as consistent with their freedom and equality.

Or, as Richard Rorty puts it, to introduce into public debate arguments rooted in a religious worldview is not only in bad taste but potentially dangerous to the stability of the liberal democratic polity: "We shall not be able to keep a democratic political community going", Rorty writes, "unless the religious believers remain willing to trade privatization for a guarantee of religious liberty". 'The main reason religion needs to be privatised', contends Rorty, 'is that, in political discussion with those outside the relevant religious community, it is a conversation-stopper'. Thus, on a liberal-secular reading, religious believers must either find arguments which fit within the bounds of 'public reason', or offer no arguments at all. If they do not do that then there is a risk that their arguments may prevail and they will end up imposing on their fellow citizens laws which rest on a particular moral or religious doctrine. ...

[T]his widely-held conviction that democracy and religion are essentially incompatible, that secularism is a necessary presupposition of democracy, has been rigorously challenged in recent years. Now, as writers such as Archbishop Williams [...] and others are saying, religious voices should no longer be excluded from the public domain, not only because religion is more high profile than before, but because, as Williams himself puts it, one of the consequences of religious interests being excluded from public debates is a coarsening of political discourse. Religious perspectives, argues Williams, are able to imbue the language of public deliberation with a "depth and moral gravity that cannot be generated simply by the negotiation of . . . balanced self interests". British theologian Elaine Graham has noted how "political theorists of many kinds are now asking questions about the self-sufficiency of the secular to furnish the public domain with sufficiently robust values for consensus."



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