

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 104, February 2013

DID PAUL WRITE 1 CORINTHIANS 13?

The following is reprinted with permission from *The Authentic Letters of Paul, A New Reading of Paul's Rhetoric and Meaning* by Dewey, Hoover, McGaughy and Schmidt and published by Polebridge Press 2010. It reinforces and expands the article on this subject in Newsletter 103, p6. "SV" is the Scholar's Version published by Polebridge Press.

Whether or not this chapter was authored by Paul or was even part of the original form of this letter are much debated questions. Several features of this beloved passage make it look like an insertion. In its vocabulary and structure, it is unlike any other passage in Paul's authentic letters. For instance, contrary to what is typical of Paul's language throughout his letters, there is no mention of God or of God's Anointed in this passage, nor is the love that is celebrated in this passage said to be the love of God or the love of God's Anointed. Further, the connections with what precedes this chapter (12:31) and with what follows it (14:1) are a bit forced and rather awkward. Chapter 12 is a discussion of gifts that are inspired by God's presence and power. Chapter 14 is a discussion of the gifts of ecstatic speech and prophetic speech. In the view of some scholars, chapter thirteen's lyrical praise of love disrupts Paul's discussion of special gifts in chapters 12 and 14, and is therefore likely to have been inserted into Paul's text by a later transcriber.

It is sometimes noted that the Greek term *pistis* (traditionally, 'faith'; SV 'confidence' [in God]) is used here in a way that differs from the predominant way it is used in Paul's letters. Paul most frequently uses the term *pistis* to refer to 'confidence and trust in God.' In this passage (13:2, 13) *pistis* refers to a person's special gift or attribute: the power to do miraculous or extraordinary deeds. But this usage of the term is not quite as unusual as it may seem. In two other passages in his Corinthian correspondence the term *pistis* occurs with the same sense it has here, namely 1 Cor 12:9 and 1 Cor 8:7. Further, in Gal 5:23 the term *pistis* occurs in a list of the 'evidence that God's power is present among us' where it refers to 'trustworthiness;' and in Gal 1:23 Paul quotes the remark that Jesus' followers in Judea made about him—that the man who had once persecuted them was now proclaiming 'the faith' (*ten pistin*). These Judeans were using the term *pistis*, with the definite article, as a name for their religious orientation.

So *pistis* is used by Paul with some variation of meaning, including reference to the power to do miraculous or extraordinary deeds to which the term refers in 1 Cor 13:2 and 9. While this usage of the term is infrequent in Paul, it does not furnish compelling evidence of the non-Pauline origin of this passage. **The principal reasons for suspecting that the passage may not have originated with Paul are that its placement in the text appears to disrupt the argument Paul begins in chapter 12 and continues in chapter 14, and its unusual poetic structure and lyrical language.**

A number of scholars continue to regard this chapter as part of Paul's original letter, some because they regard it as the climax of Paul's argument about the gifts that come from God's presence and power discussed in chapter 12 (because love transcends such gifts), others because they judge it to be a Pauline digression in which he draws upon his background in Hellenistic Judaism (which might account for the atypical vocabulary and style of the passage). Since scholarly opinion is so divided, SV translators have chosen to retain the chapter as part of the text of Paul's letter rather than consign it to the appendix, even though its status as part of Paul's letter remains uncertain.

In Memory of Valerie Grant

by Jill and Ian Harris

Valerie Grant

A recollection by Ian Harris

Dr Val Grant, a long-time contributor to the Sea of Faith in Auckland and nationally, died in Auckland on December 2, two months after delivering a paper to the Network's annual Conference. She was 75.

This was the third time Val had presented Conference papers. The first was on "Passing it (Religion) On", at Upper Hutt in 1995, the second on "The Is/Ought Argument" in human behaviour, at Silverstream in 2010. Her theme in Auckland last year was on rebalancing the core values of justice, stewardship and compassion.

The last of these reflected her keen interest in evolutionary biology and psychology, and the light it can shed on the value of religion for human survival and flourishing. That interest, in turn, grew out of her research over many decades into what is known as the maternal dominance hypothesis, to do with the mother's influence in determining the sex of her children. Val was respected as a world authority in this field, though more in Britain and the United States than at home.

Her research was triggered during the years she was having her own children, when she noticed that women with certain personality traits tended to have sons, and with other traits had daughters. Moreover, women in each category seemed more suited to bringing up either boys or girls.

Val wondered whether this might be due to an underlying evolutionary adaptation and, if so, what was the physiological process in play? The questions proved complex, and her research became increasingly specialised and technical. She died without seeing the questions fully resolved.

Valerie Jean Williams began life in Dunedin, where her father, the Rev. Dr David Williams, was a Methodist minister who later became principal of Trinity Methodist Theological College in Auckland. She attended Auckland Girls' Grammar School, and came to share her father's interest in psychology.

After training as a nurse, Val married architect Kelvin Grant, with whom she had three sons. She juggled home life in Devonport with studying psychology at Auckland

University, graduating with a PhD in 1981. Her thesis was on the developmental origins of coping.

She then taught at the Auckland School of Medicine for 34 years, first in Behavioural Science, later in Medical Ethics and the Humanities. She published over 50 scientific papers, and in 1998 Routledge (London and New York) published her book "*Maternal Personality, Evolution and the Sex Ratio: Do Mothers Control the Sex of the Infant?*"

Val also contributed occasional articles on social and ethical issues to *The New Zealand Herald*; the last being critical of the proposal to allow Auckland's casino 500 additional gaming machines in exchange for building a new convention centre.

For her many friends, my wife Jill and I among them for nearly 50 years, Val's influence went deep. We prized the quality of her friendship, including the way we could move quickly into searching and stimulating conversation on everything under the sun. A younger friend of hers noted how he would look forward to sharing a thought or experience with Val "as someone who could help to make sense of it, and always add an interesting, insightful and caring thought or perspective". Along with Kelvin, he said, she represented fun, enthusiasm, experimentation, good art, good design, good discussion, first-principle thinking. I would add encouragement, and thoughtfulness for others.

Kelvin, also a long-time member of the Sea of Faith, died in 2008. Sons Paul and Bruce survive them: a third son, Ross, died in 2000. There are four grandsons.

Valerie Jean Grant

27 August
1937

—
2 December
2012



Incubation

In memory of Val Grant

Ordinary hen
white feathers
scrawny
scratching in the yard.
So what?

You think?

Pecks and forages all
over, misses nothing.
Bright eye on high alert
challengers seen off
with quick rush, sharp beak.
Ruffled feathers
nothing here reciprocal.

You think?

A glimpse, a show
a braggadocio flourish
of plumage on parade
- cocksure as it were.

Wait for the eggs
earth's history manifest.

Keeping them warm
she knows.
She fights her corner.

Black chick among
yellow. She laughs.

She laughs.

Let the show go on.

Jill Harris

CONTENTS

Newsletter 104, February 2013

1. Did Paul Write 1 Corinthians 13?

Further attempts to whip up a controversy.

2. Tributes to Valerie Grant

Friend to us all, especially Jill and Ian Harris.

4. Tell Me The Old Old Story

Shirley Dixon backgrounds the Conference Theme
"Tell Me The New, New Story".

5. On Reading The Bible

Yes, it is literature. But Rinny Westra shows that its
more complicated than that.

8. Bits and Pieces

Interesting orphan clips.

9. Demoting Jesus

Life Member Alan Goss asks how we can give Jesus
back his humanity.

11. Vatican is Stirred then Shaken

A recently deceased senior cardinal left a paper
calling for a radical transformation of the Catholic
Church. We still see it as a coincidence that Pope
Benedict resigned soon after.

12. From The Chair

Bev Smith previews the Conference.

SEA OF FAITH

The National Religious Discussion Network,
Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning.

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.

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.

The Chairperson is Beverley Smith

La Colline, 8A Adams Road, Whataupoko, Gisborne
4010, (06) 868-8208, beverleys@clear.net.nz

The Secretary is Laurie Chisholm

117 Collins Rd, RD4 Christchurch 7674,
(03) 325-2142, 021-201-0302
laurie.chisholm@ihug.co.nz

TELL ME THE OLD, OLD STORY

The well-known hymn *Tell me the old, old story*
was written as a poem by an English evangelist, Miss Arabella Katherine Hankey.
We have been stuck with it ever since Shirley Dixon comments.

Hankey was born in 1834 - the daughter of a prosperous banker in London. Her family were devout Anglicans but she was inspired further by the Methodist revival of John Wesley. She organised and taught in Sunday schools in London, and then assisted her missionary brother by working as a nurse in Africa.

In 1866, when she was in London, Hankey suffered a serious illness and was bedridden during a long convalescence; and it was during this time that she wrote a poem - of 100 verses! She recovered from the illness and lived to the age of 77, dying in 1911.

The words of *Tell me the old, old story* are part of Hankey's long poem and, having been set to music, became a popular hymn.

Tell me the old, old story Of Jesus and His love

We all need stories to live by - to inspire us, to inform and guide us, to comfort us, and to affirm us. The 'old, old story' of the hymn - its cosmology and theology - is based on five main assumptions:

- that there is a world, a reality, beyond this world
- that this earthly world is 'empty'
- that I am as a little child
- that I am inherently sinful
- that I can attain salvation only through Jesus

Let us look more closely at these assumptions and some of their consequences.

Tell me the old, old story, Of unseen things above

There is a world, a reality, beyond this world - beyond the physical cosmos. We cannot 'see' this world above, but it is the world of the glory and love of Jesus. This parallels the traditional Christian view of a physical, mortal, body and a non-physical, immortal, soul. And this, in turn, encompasses a set of views about the relationship between mind and matter based on a dualist concept of reality.

Dualism (which is contrasted with various kinds of monism) is closely associated with the philosophy of René Descartes (1596-1650), which holds that the mind is a nonphysical substance. Descartes identified the mind with consciousness and self-awareness and distinguished this from the brain as the seat of intelligence; hence, he was the first to formulate the mind-body problem in the form in which it exists today. Findings in contemporary neuroscience that concern the mind-body problem do not support dualism, but operate under the assumptions of

physicalism - that is, that everything which exists is no more extensive than its physical properties.

That this world's empty glory Is costing me too dear

This world is empty - genuine glory is to be found only in a post-death experience in some other world. Again, this posits a dualist concept of existence - of this life as simply a testing ground, and of the afterlife as one's true existence.

Tell me the story simply, As to a little child, For I am weak and weary, And helpless and defiled.

I am as a little child. In this world I can never achieve unfeigned maturity or adulthood. As Bishop Spong has said, when you enter a Church you need to crouch down to be less than a metre tall and to wind your watch back 300 years. Moreover, I am weak and helpless as well as defiled - surely a very negative conceptualisation of any adult, much less of a child.

Remember I'm the sinner

I am inherently sinful. Of course, we all mess up from time to time. We all make mistakes, make wrong choices, and don't think through the consequences of our actions adequately. And for such behaviour we are often profoundly sorry, and try to make amends. But, despite all my best efforts, however well-intentioned I am, however hard I try to do what I believe to be right, the theology of this hymn has me remain forever a sinner.

Tell me the old, old story: "Christ Jesus makes thee whole."

As inherently and constantly a sinner, I can - according to this old, old story - be saved only by the grace of God.

However, personally I can no longer accept the cosmology or theology of this hymn. I want, I need, I yearn to be told a 'new, new story' - a story that affirms my humanity, that affirms this life on this earth as my real life, that does not rely on the positing of an afterlife to release me from life-long infantilism and sinfulness.

In the second part of this article, in the next Newsletter, I look at some of the possible components of a 'new, new story'.

Shirley Dixon, Titahi Bay

Information on A.K. Hankey and the concept of dualism
both sourced from Wikipedia.

ON READING THE BIBLE

**Most people who have read the Bible have read only parts of it.
The Bible is boring if one sets about reading it from cover to cover.**

Rinny Westra

Rinny Westra was born in the Netherlands in 1944 and moved, with his parents, to Whakatane in 1951.

He attended Auckland University from 1963 to 1965 studying Biblical History and Literature and graduated BA majoring in Classical Greek.

By the time he got back to New Zealand after theological study abroad, the Reformed Churches would no longer accept him because they suspected that he was no longer sufficiently conservative in his theology.

In 1971 he was received for ministry in the Presbyterian Church of NZ, spending 6 months at Knox Theological Hall in Dunedin, and then working for almost 8 years in parish work in Napier. That was followed by almost 5 years as Parish Development and Mission consultant in Auckland.

He has also spent 10 years in education, both at tertiary and secondary levels.

After more parish ministry in Auckland he resigned from the ministry in 2008. He still considers him to be a 'cultural Christian'. He also works as a celebrant for the NZ Association of Rationalists and Humanists.

He has been married to Barbara for 40 years and they have two sons and a grandson.

If one reads the Bible in discrete bits it is not at all boring. As a young boy in a church-going family I heard Bible stories that my father read to us every day after the main meal. They were accompanied by really good illustrations. In fact I liked the stories so much that I would ask him to read more of the stories to me before I went to bed, and I have very happy memories of sitting on my father's knee when he read them to me. My father enjoyed them as much as I did. Adam and Eve and the snake in the garden; Cain and Abel; Noah's Ark; the Tower of Babel and the confusion of languages; Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; the stories of Joseph in Egypt; Moses taking on Pharaoh and the Exodus of the Hebrew slaves from Egypt; Samson (a Hebrew version of Hercules?); Gideon; Samuel; David and Saul; David and Jonathan; and, moving on to the New Testament, the stories around Jesus followed by the missionary journeys of St. Paul. These stories are as vivid and as exciting as any that you will find elsewhere.

THE BIBLE: THE WORD OF GOD?

The foregoing is all rather difficult to line up with the Bible understood as the ultimate authority – a book of divine rules, the revelation of God, the very Word of God. Obey it, or else! It is written! The Qur'an for Muslims and the Book of Mormon for Mormons, function in a similar way, but they do not have the literary quality that characterises so much of the Bible.

In Catholic Christianity the Catholic Church, headed by the Pope, is *the* divine authority. The Bible is part of that, but only as it is interpreted by the Church and its authoritative Tradition. After the Reformation the Protestant churches, groping for certainty, turned the Bible into their final authority as the Word of God, from

cover to cover, from Genesis to Revelation. As the twentieth-century Swiss theologian Emil Brunner wrote, the Bible had become for Protestants "a paper pope". To quote the mid-seventeenth century Westminster Confession of Faith (Chapter I, Section 6):

The whole counsel of God, concerning all things necessary for his glory, man's salvation, faith and life is either expressly set down in scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from scripture; unto which nothing is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.

Liberal or free-thinking Christians soon began to move away from this position, but it has been passed on to conservative evangelical Christians. In the United States this happened through the Puritans in New England (the Pilgrim Fathers), and via them to the campfire meetings of the West, the Southern Baptists, and today's Christian Right.

The Bible says so! Thus says the Lord! And don't you dare contradict it! It is divinely inspired! It is verbally inspired – every word – every phrase – every jot and tittle! It is infallible. And – it is inerrant. It can make no mistakes. It is the inspired and inerrant authority. The Word of God. The words of God.

And those who believe all this use texts from the Bible to back this up. I will allude to three such texts. (Text taken from the *Revised English Bible*, 1989.)

1. II Timothy 3: 16: "All scripture is inspired by God, and is useful for teaching, for reproof, and for training in righteousness..."

Here scripture is described in Greek as 'God-breathed' (*theopneustos*) i.e., 'inspired', and it is 'useful' for the purposes mentioned. But nowhere here is it described as inerrant or infallible, or even as the Word of God.

And what is meant by 'scripture' here? Certainly not the whole Bible as we know it – it was not acknowledged in its present form until the festal Epistle from Athanasius in 367 CE and by a church council in Rome in 382. Most likely the scripture here referred to is that acknowledged by the Jews, probably in its Greek translation known as the Septuagint. At the most it refers to what we call the Old Testament.

2. I Peter 1: 20, 21: "...you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy of scripture ever came by human will but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God."

This text states a theory of how the prophets functioned, and of the divine inspiration ("moved by the

Holy Spirit”) when they spoke “from God”. But this only applies to the prophetic parts of the Hebrew Scriptures, and the writings of the prophets who operated in this way; and these make up only approximately one third of those scriptures. This text thus cannot be applied to the whole Bible.

3. Revelation 22:18,19: “I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to that person the plagues described in this book; if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away that person’s share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.”

This text has been understood frequently as referring to the whole Bible as we know it. But apart from the fact that the Bible did not yet exist in that form when this book was written, the fact is that ‘this book’ refers here to the book of which it is part, book number 66 of the Bible, the last book in the Christian canon, the book of Revelation itself. It cannot be used to refer to the whole Bible.

None of these texts prove what the Christian fundamentalists say they prove – a divinely-inspired, inerrant and infallible Bible. The texts have simply been cherry-picked to support the preconceived doctrine of a paper pope.

Please note that Christian liberals do **not** subscribe to this theory of the Bible. For them the Bible is authoritative in that it is somehow linked to the revelation (of God in Jesus). The Bible or bits of the Bible for them may be ‘inspired’, but it is neither ‘infallible’ nor ‘inerrant’. It is important that we keep these distinctions in mind. By no means all Christians are fundamentalist, as so much rationalist polemic seems to presuppose.

TERMINOLOGY

The Bible: Our word ‘Bible’ comes from the Greek words ‘*ta biblia*’, literally ‘the books’. It is not just one book, but a library of 66 books consisting of 39 Hebrew scriptures and 27 Christian scriptures. And other writings have here and there been absorbed into some of these books.

Literature: Classy writing, as distinct from just ‘fiction’. Usually this term refers to writing that has stood the test of time. It consists of fiction, poetry, drama, and even history.

Epic: This term, too, is important, though it is not part of our title. It comes from the Greek word ‘*epikos*’, which means ‘narrative’. To quote Webster’s Dictionary: epic is “A long narrative (poem) conceived on a grand scale, telling a story of great or heroic deeds.”

The scale of epic is larger than life. Its heroes are taken up into events that set them apart for celebration by their fellow men, and so each detail (however trivial in itself) is invested with gravity.

An obvious example of such an epic is to be found in Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. We do not know who Homer was, but tradition tells us that he was a blind minstrel, who sang his songs and stories at one of the Ionian Greek royal courts. Each court may well have had such a minstrel or bard – they are certainly present in the writings attributed to Homer. Many of the stories in the Homeric epics may have been sung by different minstrels and been brought together by a number of them. And perhaps one, called Homer, put them all together in their present format. Perhaps something similar happened with the Biblical books of Moses, the five books that make up the Pentateuch. It is hardly likely that Moses could have written the story of his death while he was still alive!

Are the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* historical? No ... and Yes.

No, because basically they are fiction based on myths and legends. They grow, in their epic form, into something massive and supernatural. They can be enjoyed as stories and literature even when we do not share their supernatural assumptions and belief in the ancient Greek gods.

Yes, in the sense that they presuppose historical realities from which they flow. The ruins of Troy, with evidence of destruction, have been found at several archaeological levels. Greeks would have wanted to conduct trade and to establish colonies on the coasts of the Black Sea. Hence war with a city that could have blocked the Dardanelles would have been rather likely. But the places and people are on a far larger scale in Homer than indicated by the ruins that are still with us today. And the reason given for the Trojan War in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are not trade and migration, but rather ‘the face [of Helen] that launched a thousand ships.’ Much more romantic and interesting, it seems to me. And the writings in which those stories are told is beautiful literature.

THE BIBLE AS EPIC

The writings that have been brought together in the Bible are diverse: legends, stories, law codes, historical elements, chronicles, poetry, prophetic utterances, wisdom, gospels, letters, apocalyptic writings. Many different authors, many different sources and backgrounds are reflected in this collection. (In some ways similar to the Homeric epics in this regard.)

Is there a grand over-all epic narrative in the Bible? Yes there is. In fact there are two.

1. The Hebrew-Jewish Epic

The Hebrew-Jewish Scriptures centre on the story of the Exodus from Egypt – the liberation of the Hebrew slaves through the work of Moses. Then comes the move through the desert to the promised land – ‘the land flowing with milk and honey’ – the conquest of that land and the slaughter and subjugation of its inhabitants, followed eventually by the establishment of a Hebrew-

Jewish state. Then there are various invasions and Exile in Babylonia, followed by the return of the Jews to their promised land, and that again is followed by more invasions and occupations, together with unfulfilled promises from the prophets.

Presupposed in all this is the God of Israel – Elohim or Yahweh. (Erroneously called ‘Jehovah’ until recently.) It is magnificent literature on an epic scale, and here too the epic scale is larger than life. The Hebrew heroes such as Moses, David and Solomon are depicted as much grander than they probably were.

And there is history in the background here too. Influences from Mesopotamia and Egypt are present throughout, including in the mythology. Such evidences are also present in the law codes and the poetry.

2. The Christian Epic

The Christian Epic does not reject the Jewish-Hebrew Epic but it takes it over – it absorbs it. By taking up the Jewish expectation of the Messiah, God’s anointed deliverer, the whole of the Hebrew scriptures become for Christians the foreshadowing and foretelling of the Messiah – translated into Greek as Christos (Christ). And all that is latched on to the figure of Jesus of Nazareth who in the epic was raised to be the god-man of the most successful mystery religion that the ancient world produced – the Way, or what we call Christianity. He died, was raised from death, and so offers eternal life to all who follow him. He is now Lord of Lords and King of Kings, *Christos Pantokrator* or Christ Almighty, and the gates of death shall not prevail against him.

That is the Christian epic, a magnificent narrative celebrated in story and song, and attached to the main holy days of the Christian year and also observed in statutory holidays in our erstwhile Christian and now secular societies.

It is also great literature which can still be enjoyed as such even though we may no longer believe in the supernatural world which is presupposed in these stories. After all, as we have seen, we can still enjoy the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* even though we no longer believe in the Greek gods.

There is history in the background here too. The Roman Empire, the crisis in Jewish culture (unfulfilled prophetic promises), perhaps a historical Jesus of Nazareth, and the existence of the Christian Church. But the epic itself is mythological and theological, not historical.

THE WORK OF JACK MILES

In two separate works, the American scholar of literature and religion, Jack Miles, has described God and Christ as *literary characters*.

God: A Biography (1995): “Using the Hebrew Bible as his text, Miles shows us a God who evolves through his relationship with man, the image who in time becomes his rival.” “Here is the Creator who nearly destroys his

chief creation: the bloodthirsty warrior and the protector of the downtrodden; the lawless lawgiver, the scourge and the penitent.” (Quoted from the Jack Miles website.)

Christ: A Crisis In The Life Of God (2001): “He presents Christ as a hero of literature based only in part on the historical Jesus, asking us to take the idea of Christ as God Incarnate not as a dogma of religion but as the premise of a work of art, the New Testament.” (Quoted from the Jack Miles website.)

Note: the “crisis in the life of God” is the five hundred years of unfulfilled prophetic promises for the Jews who had returned from the Babylonian Exile.

THE LITERARY AND CULTURAL INFLUENCE OF THE BIBLE

In *The Literary Guide To the Bible* (1990), edited by Robert Alter and Frank Kermode, the Bible has been described, correctly, I think, as “a work of great literary force and authority”, a work that has “shaped the minds and lives of intelligent men and women for two millennia and more.” This is true historically of art and music. It can also be seen in the influence of Luther’s translation of the Bible into German, and the influence of that translation on the development of High German. It is also true of the influence of the King James Version of the Bible on the English language. In New Zealand the Maori translation of the Bible has been, to some degree, responsible for the development of written Maori, which in turn has had its effect on spoken Maori. Many stories and poems in the Bible have become part and parcel of our wider culture. Genesis 1-11, with the stories of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Eden – and “the serpent in the Garden”, for example. The story of Noah and the Great Flood, and subsequent to that the story of the Tower of Babel. The stories of the patriarchs and of Joseph in Egypt. The stories of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt as a major paradigm for liberation struggles. Psalm 23 – “The Lord is my shepherd” also comes to mind, as do many sayings from the Book of Proverbs and the Book of Ecclesiastes, for example “everything is vanity and striving after wind.” The Book of Job is another example, with the expression ‘Job’s comforters’ having become part of our common parlance. And then there is the beautiful erotic poetry in the Song of Solomon or Song of Songs as it is also called – it really does not need to be spiritualised as has so often been the case in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Two texts from the Minor Prophets also appeal to me. **Amos 5:24:** (Following a ferocious attack on the empty worship that he encountered.) “But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream.” (Note the beauty of the parallelism here that is characteristic of Hebrew poetry.)

Micah 6:8: “He has told you, o mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you, but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.”

Remember also that two books in the Hebrew Scriptures, Esther and the Song of Solomon, make no reference to the divinity at all.

From the Christian scriptures the word 'gospel' has become part of common parlance, such as 'gospel truth' when trying to persuade someone that we are telling the truth.

'Gospel' has become a literary category, as a book that focuses on the life and teaching of Jesus. At present we know that there are some twenty-two such works, only four of which made it into the Christian scriptures.

From the letters which make up a large part of the New Testament I refer only to 1 Corinthians 13, with its "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not love, I am a noisy gong or a tinkling cymbal." [see page 1 - ed]

And finally, the last book of the Bible is called in Greek '*apokalupsis loanou*', the Revelation of John. It provides us with many pictures of judgment, such as that painted by Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican. The word '*apokalupsis*' means 'taking away the veil' or 'revelation' (of that which was hidden). From its links to the last judgment we get our words 'apocalypse' or 'apocalyptic'.

CONCLUSION

What I am suggesting is a different way of looking at the Bible, not as the Word of God which brooks no contradiction nor as a book to throw stones at, but from a purely literary point of view as writings to be read and enjoyed as the literature of ancient Israel and the literature of the earliest Christian Church.

This literature has had and still has a huge influence on our culture and heritage.

And one can appreciate that without accepting any of the supernatural conceptions that are also part of the Biblical world.

BITS AND PIECES

Thinking Meat: The "Mind/Body Problem" summarised

In a 1991 science-fiction story by Terry Bisson, we listen in on a conversation between the robotic commander of an interplanetary expedition and his equally electronic leader, reporting with astonishment that the human inhabitants of Earth are "made out of meat":

"Meat?"

"There's no doubt about it. ... "

"That's impossible. ... How can meat make a machine? You're asking me to believe in sentient meat."

"I'm not asking you. I'm telling you. These creatures are the only sentient race in the sector, and they're made out of meat" ..

"Spare me. Okay, maybe they're only part meat. ... "

"Nope, we thought of that, since they do have meat heads. ... But ... they're meat all the way through."

"No brain?"

"Oh, there is a brain all right. It's just that the brain is made out of meat!"

"So ... what does the thinking?"

"You're not understanding, are you? The brain does the thinking. The meat."

"Thinking meat! You're asking me to believe in thinking meat?"

"Yes, thinking meat! Conscious meat! Dreaming meat! The meat is the whole deal! Are you getting the picture?"

Why are we here?

"As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light in the darkness of mere being."

Carl Jung: *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, p.326

The London Sea of Faith Conference ...

... will be held on Saturday 21st September 2013 at St John's Church, Waterloo. Speakers: Don Cupitt and Richard Holloway.

New DVD in the Resource Centre

"Journey of the Universe" by Brian Swimme.

If you are a financial member of the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) you can borrow books, CDs and DVDs from the Resource Centre at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga. It is maintained by Suzi Thirlwall whose phone number is (07) 578-2775. More on the website.

Free Downloads ...

... are available on the St. Andrews Trust for the Study of Religion and Society www.satrs.org.nz

The Sof Website

www.sof.org.nz has a Google search attachment that lets you search the entire website for whatever you are looking for. Its on the front page in the bottom left corner.

Seven Things That Will Destroy Us

- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character
- Religion without sacrifice
- Politics without principle
- Science without humanity
- Business without ethics

Mahatma Gandhi

SoF (NZ) Steering Committee: 2012-2013



Laurie Chisholm (Secretary), Noel Cheer (Newsletter/Website), Bernadette Krassoi, Jack Crawford, Margaret Gwynne (Arrangements Committee), Peter Cowley (Treasurer), Beverley Smith (Chair), Maureen Roxburgh

DEMOTING JESUS: ON RESTORING HIS HUMANITY

What must be done to give Jesus back his humanity? How can we honourably 'strip Jesus of his stripes'?
How can we rescue Jesus from the supernatural trappings which make him into a God-man?

Alan Goss of Napier

David Galston, Professor of Philosophy at Brock University, Ontario, Canada raises these questions in the religious magazine 'The Fourth R' which is published by the Westar Institute in the USA.^[1] These questions are based on Galston's recently published book *Embracing The Human Jesus*. What follows is an abbreviated version of the article in the magazine.

Jesus would probably have been surprised to find himself regarded as the founder of a new religion. But that is precisely what history made him. In this new religion he is God incarnate, begotten by the Father, born of a Virgin, and a Person of the Holy Trinity. Quite a CV!

The Jesus of history on the other hand was a human being. He was crucified by Imperial Rome. The challenge is to find the real human Jesus, a task more recently undertaken by scholars in the Jesus Seminar. Now this challenge has arrived on the church's doorstep as the crisis of the historical Jesus.

Treating Jesus like an emperor

Christianity is a tragedy: it is the story of how Jesus' teachings slipped through his fingers to become a different language. For the early Christians it became a language addressed to the nobility. When Christians today confess that "the Lord is great" and "God rules over the earth", these words are similar to confessions about Caesar^[2] and King David who were similarly praised as rulers over the earth. Throughout history we encounter ecclesiastical or church language used to praise the mighty and the powerful and seek their favour. The language of the Christian church is the language of praise and pleading (supplication). Taking the historical Jesus seriously means rescuing him from the Imperial church and the influence of a Christian empire. This is no easy task.

From Jesus to Trinity

There are a set of propositions in Christian doctrine that turn Jesus from a regular human being into the second person of the Trinity. This was problem number one for the early Christian theologians. The Bible is sketchy in presenting Jesus as both human and divine, it

ran the risk of making him like other divinised humans. So the question was: how can God be the one transcendental God while at the same time walking around on earth? To put it another way, if Jesus (or at least half of him) was to have the power of salvation, you have to have something about this person that was permanent and unchanging. But how could this unchanging element appear in the changing nature of everyday life? It was at the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE that the Orthodox confession of Christianity was definitively stated. To confess Christ in an orthodox way is to confess that Jesus is one person with two natures – fully human and fully divine. The brilliance and creativity of these early theologians made a religion called 'Christianity' possible.

The trouble with the Trinity

The confession that God is with us and all our human

frailties shows remarkable insight. The trouble is that this insight is built on a foundation that no longer exists. It is hard to imagine, in our age, why Jesus or Caesar or anyone else

should be thought of as both human and divine. While doctrines like the Trinity were necessary to give early societies moral stability and to justify social arrangements, the divine no longer serves that purpose. The sciences and the social sciences work much better and make more sense. They don't need invisible devices to support them. Indeed, why have the divine in human affairs at all? Why can't we just be human?

Ancient archetypes and modern literalism

The difference between ancient and modern thinking is the difference between archetypal and literal thinking.

Archetypal thinking

The Greek philosopher Plato and his theory of Forms (a Form is a perfect or original shape) is most often used to explain what archetypal thinking means. Every thing on earth – people, governments, even religions – is a copy of a perfect original or Form 'out there'. There is a perfect or ideal human being, a perfect or ideal of justice, of value, of knowledge and so on. An objective supreme reality 'out there' is in control.

**"JESUS NO LONGER
NEEDS TO BE
THE CHURCH'S CAESAR"**

Literalist thinking

Modern people think in terms of facts. They seek explanations according to the evidence. While this works well in science, it performs poorly with religion. Science and religion have different functions. The use of the Bible as science is a modern sin, but it happens that we can't understand Christianity at all any more because literalism reflects the modern mindset.

But there is no use pretending that if we ever get 'all the facts' just right – if we can just understand Christianity – our problems will be solved. In fact, it's worldview is history – it's out of date. Certainly it can be appreciated and even poetically understood, but as a confession of archetypal perfection Christianity does not function as reason. There are no archetypal, ideal, supposed-to-be's out there – at least not within human experience. There is only this world and the way things are, now. Human ideals like love and justice are not archetypes. God is a human creation and so are justice and love.

Recovering Jesus wisdom

Jesus no longer needs to be the church's Caesar and he no longer needs to be confessed as such. For Christianity, turning to the historical Jesus means giving him back his humanity. It means giving Jesus a demotion by taking away the badge of Saviour and turning to his human wisdoms. When this is done, Galston suggests that we change practices in three areas:

Banquet

This involves replacing the traditional Eucharist (or Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Mass) that worships the divine Saviour with a banquet that honours and imitates Jesus. There is nothing sacred about it, it is the indulgence of joy, it celebrates our coming together to give ourselves to one another in fellowship.

Equilibrium

In wisdom (the stock-in-trade of the sage) the concern is 'you', regardless of where you happen to be. Wisdom is about equilibrium, which cancels the holiness of the special and the separate, as in holy times and places.

Joy

The gospel is 'good news' – joy. It's not joy because your sins are forgiven. In wisdom, sin amounts to not being aware, not being awake, or not being joyful. The gospel of the historical Jesus awakens life as a free gift. The cancellation of sin is not magic but rather the art of being human.

Banquet, Equilibrium, and Joy – these are what come alive when the Christian Christ is allowed to be the historical Jesus.

Alan Goss

Alan is a Life Member of SoF (NZ)

Post Script

In a recent edition of *The Fourth R* (Nov/ Dec 2012), David Galston explains why he wrote his book *Embracing the Human Jesus*. People have frequently asked him how to take the historical Jesus to church. Galston writes:

There are at least three reasons – and certainly more – to embrace the historical Jesus in church. The primary one is a commitment to honesty. No one can develop a spiritual life worthy of integrity based on a lie ... All the Christian apologetics in the world cannot move modern people back into Antiquity. Our generation, like every generation, can only go forward. ... To be honest, I confess that I do not believe Jesus was the son of God or saviour of the world, any more than I believe Caesar was. I can understand those titles historically and in context but, honestly, they don't work anymore.

Simply put, there needs to be another language besides that of ancient aristocracy and mediaeval hierarchy in the church. The historical Jesus can provide that language.

A second reason for writing the book lies in the fact that there are many in (theological institutions) and in the church who want to silence the historical Jesus and make sure it has nothing to say about genuine and honest life. To reduce Jesus only to someone who believed in the end time that never arrived is to defend the church as it is: an institution that guards hierarchical power and holy language before which common people must beg for mercy.

Thirdly, the key question is about how to take the historical Jesus to church. (Galston suggests three areas for a change in practices which are summarised above. In addition to the Eucharist/Holy Communion suggestion, other practices ready for change are the Sunday service, baptism, and confirmation.)

The appeal to the historical Jesus is to life. 'Life-language' (cf. Don Cupitt) displaces ecclesiastical language, and honesty replaces the lie. It's easy to do and very refreshing and it follows naturally from following and embracing the human Jesus. Primarily, it is for the sake of such refreshment that I wrote my book.

[1] Westar is dedicated to promoting religious literacy, seeing it as the fourth 'R' after the traditional "reading, 'riting and 'rithmetic". Visit their website at www.westarinstitute.org and find the Membership link a couple of frames down on the left side. – ed

[2] At the height of the imperial cult during the Roman Empire, sometimes even the emperor's deceased loved ones — heirs, empresses, or lovers, were deified in addition to the emperor. .
- Wikipedia

And Jesus said unto them, "... and whom do you say that I am?"

They replied, "You are the eschatological manifestation of the ground of our being, the ontological foundation of the context of our very selfhood revealed."

And Jesus replied, "What?"

found on the Internet

VATICAN IS STIRRED, THEN SHAKEN

One of Italy's most revered cardinals has stunned the Catholic Church by issuing, from the grave, a damning indictment of the institution, which calls for its 'transformation'.

Days later, Pope Benedict resigns. We are not suggesting a connection.

Hours after Milan's former Archbishop, Cardinal Carlo Maria Martini, died at the age of 85, the leading daily paper *Corriere della Sera* printed his final interview, in which he attacks the Church – and by implication its current leadership – for being "200 years out of date".

"Our culture has aged, our churches are big and empty and the church bureaucracy rises up, our rituals and our cassocks are pompous," the Cardinal said. "The Church must admit its mistakes and begin a radical change, starting from the Pope and the bishops. The paedophilia scandals oblige us to take a journey of transformation."

Church insiders believe he wished for the interview to be published following his death.

Cardinal Martini, who was on the liberal wing of the church hierarchy, was once tipped to succeed John Paul II as Pope. His chances of being elected fell away when he revealed he was suffering from a rare form of Parkinson's disease and he retired as Archbishop in 2002. Instead, the ultra-conservative German cardinal Joseph Ratzinger became Pope Benedict XVI in 2005.

The body of Cardinal Martini was laid out in Milan cathedral, with thousands of people coming to pay their last respects.

The left-wing Mayor of Milan, Giuliano Pisapia, who recently angered church authorities by recognising gay couples and providing them with the same rights the city gives married couples, led the tributes to the dead Cardinal. "Difficult times require words of wisdom and hope from great men," he said. "Carlo Maria Martini illuminated the way for the entire city, not just for part of it. For this reason, today more than ever, Milan mourns its Archbishop".

Cardinal Martini was noted for supporting the use of condoms, at least a decade before the Vatican grudgingly accepted they might be acceptable in certain situations to prevent the transmission of HIV. He also questioned the Church's line on gay relationships and divorce – calling on it to reconsider what constituted a family in the 21st century or risk losing even more of its flock.

Conservative voices in the Church tried to repair damage caused by Cardinal Martini's criticism. Marco Tarquinio, the editor of the bishops' daily paper, *L'Avvenire*, accused the mainstream press of distorting the Cardinal's comments, although he did not give specific examples.

"The attempts to distort and manipulate in an anti-ecclesiastical way the Cardinal's final hours on this earth, are a bitter reminder of similar actions against even the blessed John Paul II," he said.

The suspicion – ever present in Italy – that the Vatican has tendrils everywhere, even in the mainstream press, was heightened by the failure of the article to appear on the *Corriere della Sera* website. Following inquiries by the newspaper *The Independent*, the editor of *Corriere*, Ferruccio de Bortoli, said there had been no pressure to keep the article off the website. Robert Mickens, the Rome correspondent of *The Tablet*, called for Cardinal Martini's deathbed comments to be taken very seriously.

"They must be seen in the context of coming from a man who loved the Church and who gave his life to the institution. He made a profound statement, which he had already said many times to Benedict and John Paul II in private," he said.

Cardinal Martini caused controversy in his final days after refusing artificial feeding, contravening church policy on end-of-life issues.

Mr Mickens said that although Cardinal Martini's ideas had 'zero support' in the Vatican, he was revered by rank and file members. "The people in the trenches looked up to him. He was a giant. We're in a very conservative period. But that won't last forever. A whole generation have been inspired by Martini's writings. That will be his legacy."

Carlo Maria Martini was born in Turin in 1927, entered the Society of Jesus in 1944 and was ordained to the priesthood in 1952. His appointment in 1980 as Archbishop of Milan, Italy's most important diocese, was considered highly unusual; Jesuits are not traditionally given bishop posts. He retired from the post in 2002, the year he was diagnosed with a rare form of Parkinson's disease. He then moved to the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Jerusalem. He passed away at the Jesuit-run Aloisianum College in Gallarate near Milan.

Adapted from an article by Michael Day in The Independent,

3 September 2012 and with thanks to SoFia, the magazine of SoF UK for drawing it to our attention.

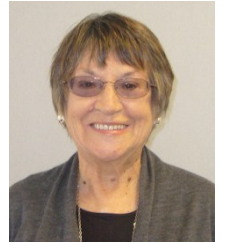
POPE BENEDICT RESIGNS

This news came through as this Newsletter was being readied for printing. Pope Benedict's words were:

I renounce the ministry of Bishop of Rome, Successor of Saint Peter, entrusted to me by the Cardinals on 19 April 2005, in such a way, that as from 28 February 2013, at 20:00 hours, the See of Rome, the See of Saint Peter, will be vacant and a Conclave to elect the new Supreme Pontiff will have to be convoked by those whose competence it is.

Being an almost unique event – the last such resignation was 600 years ago – the story is likely to build.

FROM THE CHAIR



It is with great sadness that we learned that Dr. Valerie Grant died on Sunday 2nd December 2012.

Ian Harris, a long time friend of Valerie, is the author of the obituary in this issue. We were privileged to have experienced the wisdom of Valerie at three Conferences. Valerie and her husband Kelvin were members of the Auckland group and their contributions over the years were much valued; Valerie's special field was in social and psychological development, human and animal reproduction, donor anonymity and savior siblings – testing for a match from embryos. Kelvin's contribution reflected his architectural background.

At the 1995 Wellington Conference Valerie's lecture 'Passing It On' was a timely reminder of what was it was that we actually wanted to pass on to the next generation and that children are deprived if they do not have access to the language and stories of their culture of origin. Valerie expanded on the theme of human potential in her last lecture.

Valerie was generous in that she was always willing for anyone to use her material, and I was personally grateful when she gave me permission to quote from "Passing It On" for a service I was preparing for St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Gisborne. I even managed to spread her message to the local Baptists and the combined Anglican/Presbyterian Church in Tolaga Bay!

In 1999 Valerie and Kelvin published a small book *What Goes On In There?* – a survey of twenty-five Central Auckland Churches that they visited during 1998.

Valerie wrote: "I was born into a Methodist Parsonage and for my first 50 years, went to Church every Sunday. Then I changed, mainly as a result of reading and thinking about the new theologies. Not only has my view been broadened, but I feel a new commitment to seeing the church survive."

Sound familiar?

Valerie, for many years was a valued member of the Sea of Faith New Zealand Network and we were privileged to have her as a guest speaker at several of our Conferences.

We recall the valuable insight that she presented to us from her research, especially in human psychology and religion from the earliest human times to present day. Her decision to attend our Conference at St. Cuthbert's in October, when she was unwell, was so much appreciated and we are grateful to her family for sharing her on that occasion.

During their lives, there are people who make a difference and leave a legacy of their understanding of being human. Valerie was one of these.

Conference 2013 Lineup

Sir Lloyd Geering will launch the Conference with his reflections on the book *Honest to God*, the 50th anniversary of which occurs this year. This book was a catalyst for a library-full of new stories.

Here is another story: A man of great faith moved into a house prone to flooding from a nearby river. One day the river flooded its banks and began to fill the streets. Neighbours urged him to leave, but he declaimed: "Have no fear the Good Lord will take care of me." The flood waters rose. Police arrived

in a boat and urged him to come aboard, but he refused, declaiming again that God would take care of him. The floodwaters rose even higher until at last he was on the roof. A National Guard helicopter arrived. Hovering over his house, it dropped a ladder and a crewman shouted for him to take this last opportunity. Again the man refused, putting his faith in God.

Eventually the waters swept him away to his death. Upon arrival at the pearly gates, the man petitioned to see God. Petition granted and head bowed, he tremblingly asked "Heavenly Father, I was faithful to you and loved life. I put myself in your hands. Why did you do nothing and let me die?"

And God replied: "Do nothing my son? What are you talking about? I sent you caring neighbours; I sent you a boat; I even sent you a helicopter!"

The story is quoted from Michael Benedikt's book *God is the Good We Do* which is available from the Resource Centre.

Professor Michael Benedikt is Director, Center for American Architecture and Design School of Architecture, The University of Texas, and is very much looking forward to coming to New Zealand for Conference 2013. He tells me that he is particularly fond of roast lamb – so we will see what the kitchen at Lindisfarne can do.

Rev. Canon Dr Nigel Leaves – of the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane, Adjunct Lecturer: Charles Sturt University, Fellow: Westar Institute, USA, Fellow: The Jefferson Centre, USA, author of *Odyssey on the Sea of Faith – The Life & Writings of Don Cupitt*. His latest book *Religion Under Attack, Getting Theology Right* is a timely read for us preparing for **Tell me the New New Story**, the theme of the 2013 Conference.

Winton Higgins – a secular Buddhist dharma teacher from Sydney who has an interest in the way that Sea of Faith "seeks to maintain the ethical, spiritual and cultural continuities and communal practices of religion while abandoning its no longer tenable supernatural truth-claims. It takes for granted that all religions are human artefacts that serve human purposes."

Workshops – on Saturday afternoon (as options to trips yet to be announced) there will be two workshops scheduled such that you could go to both. Tom Hall will re-introduce us to the American poet, Robert Frost. Our very own **Shirley Murray** wrote "after a lifetime of pew-sitting and hymn singing, I am impelled to consider what creates or wrecks meaningful worship where hymns are involved". For many years, Shirley has collaborated with Colin Gibson bringing a body of hymnology and religious song which acknowledges the past but has freed us for the future. We look forward to both contributions to **Tell Me the New New Story**.

The Conference Venue is Lindisfarne College, the Presbyterian boys' boarding school in Hastings. It has a superb auditorium with tiered seating, full technical equipment and wheelchair access. The accommodation, which is some distance from the dining room and auditorium, is in four houses and wheelchair access is poor, especially for bathrooms/toilets. We would recommend staying in one of the nearby motels for those who might find this aspect difficult.

Beverley M. Smith
Chairperson 2012-2013