

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 122, January 2016

MY SPIRITUAL ODYSSEY: PART 1

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson Sea of Faith New Zealand

PERSONAL ODYSSEYS: PATHS TRAVELLED BY SEA OF FAITH MEMBERS

At present three SoF branches are introducing to their meetings an idea loosely based on the Religious Odyssey programme at All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church, Kansas City, Missouri, USA. People there were encouraged to tell a little of their background and the religious journey they had travelled during their lifetime. It was introduced to NZ Sea of Faith by a member of that church now living in the Hawkes Bay.

Stories now being shared – some with rather different conclusions from the original US ones – by SoF members in Dunedin, Hamilton and Napier are being included in the Newsletter with the ultimate aim being to publish an enhanced collection in booklet form as an easily distributed resource. Such would reveal the diversity of people in SoF: their backgrounds, spiritual journeys, and current thinking, together with their reasons for their membership of SoF. Together, these could show to enquirers why SoF is 'a safe place to discuss unsafe things'.

LAURIE CHISHOLM'S ODYSSEY

My family was closely involved in the Roslyn Baptist Church. Its minister, J.T. Crozier, was a liberal who made a point of attending any visiting theology lectures at Knox College. The church also had a lively youth group, all kitted out with shocking pink beanies. Until TV arrived, they put on an evening concert each year to which everyone contributed. At high school, I worked only on subjects that interested me, so fell quickly behind in Latin and by the fourth form was in the lowest academic class for science. An explanation of how a 4-stroke petrol motor works captivated me and I became a devoted student, jumping to the top science class in the next year.

At university, I wanted to major in biochemistry, because it seemed to me the subject best suited to get to ultimate reality, the fundamental truth at the root of things. The first lecture declared that the aim of biochemistry was the complete explanation of life in terms of the laws of physics and chemistry. The Krebs cycle explained how living things were able to convert food into energy and the structure of DNA explained how inheritance works.

It wasn't long, though, before biochemistry disappointed and my interest turned to theology. It began with Bishop Robinson's *Honest to God*, which led me to Paul Tillich, who absolutely captivated me. I adopted his terminology, which replaced all the traditional words. Instead of sin, existential estrangement. Instead of faith, ultimate concern, instead of God, being itself or the ground of being. Instead of salvation, the new being. J. T. Crozier lent me a book by Tillich and I determinedly didn't open it so I could concentrate on my science studies. Between exams, I read the whole book and was so impressed by his ideas on the relationship between faith and doubt that I wrote a passage out in my best italic writing and put it up in the SCM room at university.



Faith and doubt do not essentially contradict each other. Faith is the continuous tension between itself and the doubt within itself....This distinguishes faith from logical evidence, scientific probability, traditionalistic self-certainty and unquestioning authoritarianism. Faith includes both an immediate awareness of something unconditional and the courage to take the risk of uncertainty upon itself. Faith says "Yes" in spite of the anxiety of "No." It does not remove the "No" of doubt and the anxiety of doubt....Faith embraces itself and the doubt about itself.

I spent a year working as Travelling Secretary for the SCM, completed my BSc and then began studying theology at Knox College. Looking back, it seems to me that I learnt a lot of information, but personal and spiritual development stagnated. In practical theology, we were trained in Carl Rogers' non-directive counselling, which seemed to me at the time an artificial technique of reflecting back what others said. So while some were attracted to counselling, I turned away from it, thinking that it provided no answer to the question of what a minister's role is.

In my last year, I made a special study of Dietrich Ritschl and, soon after I was ordained, he visited Knox. I travelled back down and was very impressed. I had hopes of studying with him in the US, but he shifted back to Europe. Eventually, however, I received a fellowship from the WCC to study at Heidelberg University for two semesters. There it was the Old Testament scholars, Claus Westermann and Hans Walter Wolff who made the greatest impression on me. Westermann's Introduction to the Old Testament, in particular, was wonderful. At Knox, Introduction meant a dry analysis of the date and authorship of each book in turn. Westermann's lectures were beautifully shaped and timed gems, each one going to the heart of the meaning of one strand of Hebrew tradition. On completion of the two semesters, I was invited to work in the church in Baden, beginning at the city church in the centre of Pforzheim. The first service I took there was rather daunting, as it was accompanied by a full Bach cantata, complete with choir, soloists and orchestra.

After two and a half years at the city church, I was inducted as parish minister at Huchenfeld, one of the outlying country areas surrounding Pforzheim. There I worked hard just to keep my head above water. I had 6 periods of religion classes to hold in the local high school and some 40 14-year olds to prepare for confirmation.

To write of what comes next is not so easy. There are two strands. One is a growing relationship of trust with a doctor, Gerhard Pfisterer, who normally only took privately insured patients but graciously accepted my wife and me. He was a practitioner of transcendental meditation and its value showed. He also had the rather

unusual practice of injecting flu sufferers with Echinacea, something that seemed to have almost miraculous powers to quickly ameliorate symptoms (several friends had similar experiences with it). Going to a normal GP or even a specialist was a hectic, stressful experience, but even a phone call to him was a therapeutic experience. He had no receptionist and so answered calls in person. He even purchased a computer without a fan to prevent any disturbance from its noise.

As a clergyman I couldn't be introduced to transcendental meditation without first going through 40 hours of video talks by the Maharishi, so he offered to assist. With the help of a book, and occasional but helpful comments during GP visits, I became a mantra meditator. But that was just the beginning. Together with my wife, we attended a weekend seminar run by a non-directive counselling therapist who had been trained by Carl Rogers himself and then a weekly therapy group for the parents of young people with drug issues.

The other strand emerged when the time came to return to New Zealand. The original intention had been to study then work for a year and then return. Now I was keen to return and fearful that if our children had all their education in Germany, they would remain there even if we subsequently returned to New Zealand. My wife did not want to return. She was happy in Germany and had bad memories from her time in NZ. Months of discussion were unable to resolve this fundamental difference in life project. It was just too massive an either/or for us limited, fearful creatures. When my wife's mental health began to suffer, Dr Pfisterer arranged for her to spend 12 weeks in the Bad Grönenbach psychosomatic clinic. A few weeks into her time there, she wanted to end our relationship. One of the conditions of this clinic is that partners are given immediate access, and so I was able to also spend 12 weeks there, immediately after my wife. Dr Pfisterer said that he would like to go there himself, which made the decision easier for me. The other attraction was that the clinic claimed to be able to cure migraine, something I had suffered from since childhood. No medication was allowed, so while I was apprehensive about having migraines without pain-killers, I accepted this, though I did not see any point in the rule.

Now I'm not a believer in providence, but I am just amazed at the combination of extraordinary factors that led me there. It seemed to me the one place on earth that was right for me and that events had conspired to get me to this place where I needed to be. I also thought that if people knew how wonderful Grönenbach was, they would all want to be there. This merits an article or even a book by itself. However, you can get a good impression of the clinic from the book *I exist, I need, I am entitled by*



Jackie Lair, an American who went through Gronenbach's parent institution in Bad Herrenalb. I gained a lot of insight into myself and the headaches came occasionally afterwards, in a weaker form, and then ceased altogether. One other migraine-sufferer experienced an instant end to her migraines in an almost biblical healing scene.

Not long after this, I returned to New Zealand after 7.5 years in Germany to take up the position of ecumenical chaplain at Otago University. My wife came later, reluctantly, and deeply resentful of the situation she was in. My work in the German church had been very structured; almost nothing I did was my free choice. Being chaplain was the absolute opposite: I can't imagine a more unstructured, open-ended, undefined job position. I didn't have the courage to just be myself, and so spent a lot of time and energy trying unsuccessfully to work out what the role of the chaplain should be.

Towards the end of my fixed term as chaplain, my marriage, which had been unhappy since leaving Germany, came to an end. Shortly thereafter, my career as Presbyterian minister also effectively came to an end. My life project, which aimed to do good theology to serve the church, was in ruins. The Presbyterian Church claimed to provide financial security, but cannot in reality provide it. Strangely enough, the song that spoke most to my situation came from an evangelical American gospel singer, Amy Grant.

I had laid some mighty plans
Thought I held them in my hands
Then my world began to crumble all away
I tried to build it back again
I couldn't bear to see it end
How I hurt to know You wanted it that way

[Chorus:]

And I'm so glad, glad to find the reason
That I'm happy-sad that You've torn it all away
And I'm so glad, though it hurts to know I'm leaving
Everything I ever thought that I would be
Once I held it in my hand
It was a kingdom made of sand
But now you've blown it all away
I can't believe that I can say that I'm glad

I had to admit that I had had mighty plans, that they had come to nothing, that it was a kingdom made of sand. That hurt. But there was also a liberation and a feeling that the song describes as "happy sad." There was sadness in all that loss, but also the exhilaration of leaving a painful relationship and the scariness, tempered by the fact that I was already in a new relationship, of an open but uncertain future. A lid had been lifted.

Part 2 in the next issue

CONTENTS

1. Laurie Chisholm's Spiritual Odyssey: Part 1
Continuing the series of the spiritual memoirs of some of our members.
4. All About Us
The who, why, when and where of SoF NZ
4. The UK Network's Conference in July
"Religion – Where Next?"
4. Good Reads
Get a deck chair, a sun-hat and a good book!
5. Understanding Space, Time and Ourselves
A book review by Beverley Smith.
5. "You ain't no Muslim!"
The difference between the terrorism of Islamic State and the teachings of the Islamic faith.
5. We are not at war with Islam
But we are at war with terrorists. Should we kill?
6. Geoengineering
The Planet Remade, How Geoengineering Could Change the World by Oliver Morton.
7. Farewell to Alan Leadley of Hamilton
A contribution by our Secretary, Jock Crawford.
8. Creative Faith and Why "Sea of Faith"
Authority and Revelation are dead, writes Don Cupitt.
8. Progressive Spirituality Conference
"Common Ground" Napier, 6-8 May 2016.
9. Farewell To Barbara Miller of Auckland
Not for Barbara were the confines of a narrow orthodoxy. Nor was she constrained by conservative tradition.
11. The Force Awakens
"From a galaxy far, far away to a cinema just down the road". Shirley Dixon discusses the mythology, too.
12. The Last Word
Chairperson Laurie Chisholm asks whether SoF be socially active or remain analytical on the sidelines?

BACK TO THE YEAR DOT

All backnumber Newsletters, from Number 1 in November 1992 to the next-to-current, are accessible on the website: <http://sof.org.nz/doclist.htm#NL>

There's a wealth of material included in them and they form a record of the concerns of the times at which they were published. And there are gems of profound and incontestable wisdom, like this:

**BLESSED ARE THE CRACKED,
FOR THEY LET IN THE LIGHT.**

ALL ABOUT US

Sea of Faith: Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

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.

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

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. **See also page 8.**

"Sea of Faith" 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, Sea of Faith 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 Fred Marshall. (The late Alan Goss was, for a time, a Life Member).

Chairperson: Laurie Chisholm, 117 Collins Rd, RD4, Christchurch 7674, (03) 325-2141, 021-201-0302, laurie.chisholm@ihug.co.nz

Secretary: Jock Crawford, P.O. Box 12-246 Chartwell Square, Hamilton 3248, (07) 854-7553 jockcrawford@actrix.co.nz

Treasurer: Norm Ely, 2/15 View Road, Titahi Bay n.ely@xtra.co.nz

Membership Secretary: Peter Cowley, 1/30A Dunns St., Silverstream, Upper Hutt 5019 pcowley@paradise.net.nz

Newsletter Editor and Webmaster is Noel Cheer, the **Copy Editor** is Shirley Dixon and **Newsletter Distribution** is by Yvonne Curtis (paper copies) and Peter Cowley (emailed copies).

To offer a comment on material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact **The Editor, 26 Clipper St., Titahi Bay, Porirua 5022**, (04) 236-7533 or 0274-483-805 or email to noel@cheer.org.nz

Publication deadlines for submitted Newsletter copy for 2016 are: 21/12/15, 21/2/2016, 21/4/2016, 21/6/2016, 21/8/2016, 21/10/2016.

Members may borrow books, CDs, and DVDs from the Resource Centre which is managed by Suzi Thirlwall phone (07) 578-2775 email susanthirlwall@yahoo.co.nz Refer to the catalogue on the website.

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 (listed above) or Internet bank to 38 9000 0807809 00 and tell pcowley@paradise.net.nz your mailing details.

Bonus: If you already receive the paper version, then you can receive the email version in addition, *at no charge*. Send an email requesting that to pcowley@paradise.net.nz

THE UK SEA OF FAITH NETWORK ANNUAL CONFERENCE, JULY 2016

From their monthly publication *Portholes*, December 2015:

"At their recent meeting the Network's trustees have agreed the following suggestions from next year's [viz 2016] Conference Planning Sub-Committee.

The title: "**RELIGION – WHERE NEXT?**"

It was agreed that the conference theme and general steer, whilst being an exploration of religion as manifest in its various forms to date, should also look ahead to where it might be going, why and how... i.e. Two key streams to be developed:

(a) understanding religion as it is (including the reasons for its hold on us/mankind generally) and

(b) examining the way it might/ could/ should go next.

We plan to address this subject via disciplines under-explored by our conferences to date e.g. through cognitive science. One body interested in our theme might be the Cambridge Institute of Applied Psychology of religion. We are hoping to track down a suitable speaker from here.

However, we are delighted to announce that one keynote speaker has already agreed to address conference. We will be welcoming Dr John Breadon currently Assistant Chaplain at Eton College) who apparently relates strongly and enthusiastically not only to our two-stream title but identifies sympathetically with Sea of Faith.

GOOD READS



Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind by Yuval Noah Harari, an Israeli professor of history. Nearly 500 pages of paperback in which, according to *The Guardian*, "Harari swashbuckles through ... vast and intricate matters in a way that is – at its best – engaging and informative." *Sapiens* is the remaining species of probably six members of the genus *homo*. The genus *homo* is named by the Latin for 'man', while **homosexual** comes from the Greek for 'same'.

The Swerve: How the Renaissance Began (alternatively: ***How the World Became Modern***) by Stephen Greenblatt, tells the story of how (in the words of *Wikipedia*) Poggio Bracciolini, a 15th-century papal emissary and obsessive book hunter, saved the last copy of the Roman poet Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* from near-terminal neglect in a German monastery, thus reintroducing important ideas that sparked the modern age. The concept "swerve" refers to an idea in ancient atomistic theories according to which atoms moving through the void are subject to *clinamen*: That is, while falling straight through the void, they are sometimes subject to a slight, unpredictable swerve. Poggio's contribution helped the West veer into the Renaissance – and into today.

UNDERSTANDING SPACE AND TIME ... AND OURSELVES

A Book Review by Beverley Smith

From Monk to Modernity: The Challenge of Modern Thinking

By Dominic Kirkham

In 1993, Clive James wrote “*if President Clinton is a better speechmaker than President Bush it is because he steals better stuff*”. Clinton not only had a better personal library than Bush, but he knew how to research.

Dominic Kirkham’s book *From Monk to Modernity: The Challenge of Modern Thinking* is a gift to clergy, ordained and lay, of the Progressive kind looking for a topic for their Sunday services.

Dominic Kirkham is a member of the UK Sea of Faith and has been a regular contributor of worthy articles. After spending many years in a religious order, he describes how he was driven to meet the challenge of modern thinking, an exercise which has proved both freeing and frightening. In a broad sweep from Neolithic times to the twenty-first century, he considers our human quest for meaning and a good life, and how we can engage in it today.

Dominic’s hope that people who read his book will respond in the sort of dialogue envisaged by John XXIII over fifty years ago. He writes “*one of the things of which I am most aware in looking back over my life is that virtually everything I have been taught or believed of any importance I have now found to be wrong. As an example I quoted how the discovery of the ancient megalith ‘temples’ at Gobekli Tepe had totally changed our understanding of the origins of civilisation¹*”. He describes how we fabricated a creation myth and why it is no longer credible. Words are powerful, especially the opening passages from the Bible, leading us to believe that there must be a creator of everything.

For me, the chapter ‘Changing Time’ – how clocks changed our lives and created a secular world, is the crème de la crème of his research. I am looking forward to sharing this aspect as part of the next service I take for St. Andrew’s Presbyterian Church, Gisborne.

I quote ‘*One of my favourite pieces of spiritual reading has long been the opening passage of Jean-Pierre de Caussade’s treatise, Self-Abandonment to Divine Providence, also known as The Sacrament of the Present Moment. This classic text of eighteenth century Quietism urges not only an acceptance of what life throws at us – seen then from the perspective of a divinely preordained purpose – but also of our ‘duty’ to grasp the opportunities presented in the present moment. In passing he refers to, “the hand of a clock which marks*

each moment of the hour” as the model for fixing our attention on the possibilities of “each successive moment”’.

In England, the first clocks were beginning to appear in the fourteenth century. By 1350 Richard of Wallingford was constructing a complex astronomical clock at the monastery of St. Albans and a clock tower was installed in Norwich cathedral. Soon this useful spiritual accessory was moving beyond the confines of the cloister to the market place.

Our understanding of space and time has now been transformed, and with it our understanding of ourselves.

“*Life’s mystery and how modern thought is challenging our understanding of life*” is Dominic Kirkham’s closing wisdom, this book is certainly a gift for his readers. Like President Clinton we have the opportunity to steal ‘better stuff’.

Beverley M. Smith, Gisborne

1. C. Mann, *The Birth of Religion: The World’s First Temple* (National Geographic, vol. 219, no 6 June 2011).

“YOU AIN’T NO MUSLIM”

The man in the ticket hall at Leytonstone tube station on Saturday afternoon who shouted “You ain’t no Muslim, bruv” at the armed attacker, spoke for a Britain that most of us would like to live in.

As UK PM David Cameron has acknowledged, that one sharp riposte encompassed a volume of speeches about social cohesion, and the difference between the terrorism of Islamic State and the teachings of the Islamic faith.

In the aftermath of the Paris atrocities, when attacks on Muslims have increased threefold, it has become all the more important. *The Guardian, 7 December 2015*

“WE’RE AT WAR WITH TERRORISTS. WE’RE NOT AT WAR WITH ISLAM”

Sourced from Associated Press and printed in the Dominion Post of January 4th, 2016, the US deputy national security advisor went on to say “The terrorists want us to act like we are at war with Islam. That’s how they recruit people .. [and] .. stir up grievances. **To defeat terrorists we need to kill terrorists on the battlefield***, but we also need to defeat this narrative that allows them to recruit people”.

***Got any better, workable ideas? Editor**

GEOENGINEERING

The Planet Remade: How Geoengineering Could Change the World by Oliver Morton

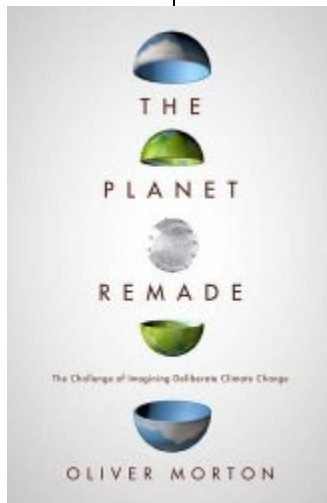
A blurb from Amazon ...

Despite the on-going political horse-trading over emissions targets, each piece of new scientific research offers further evidence that no feasible reduction in the emissions can now effectively mitigate the carbon crisis. With limited time for action, an increasingly influential minority of climate scientists are exploring proposals for planned human intervention in the biosphere. A stratospheric veil against the sun; the cultivation of photosynthetic plankton; a fleet of unmanned ships seeding clouds: these are technologies from the radical fringes of climate study, and they are chilling, not least given the risk of hostile use. And yet, we're now at the point where we have no choice but to take them very seriously indeed.

The Planet Remade explores the science, history and politics behind these strategies. It looks at who might want to see geoengineering techniques used, and why – and why others would be dead set against any such attempts.

Throughout history, people have made huge changes to the planet – to the clouds and the soils, to the winds and the seas, to the great cycles of nitrogen and carbon – that are far more profound than often realized, and which can help us to fundamentally rethink our responses to global warming. With sensitivity, insight and expert science, Oliver Morton unpicks the moral implications of our responses to climate change, our fear that people have become a force of nature, and the potential for good in having such power. *The Planet Remade* is about imagining a world where people take care instead of taking control.

Geoengineering is the artificial modification of Earth's climate systems through two primary methodologies: Solar Radiation Management (SRM) and Carbon Dioxide Removal (CDR)



From The Economist ...

Economist briefings editor Morton offers a calm, rational discussion of deliberate technological interventions to cool the planet's climate system.

Once dismissed as the province of cranks, geoengineering approaches to climate change have gained new respectability. The first international academic conference on research in the field was held in Berlin in 2014, and both British and American science academies have issued reports. Even so, as the author writes, the notion of global climate interventions “still strikes many as truly wild.” Despite skepticism, a small coterie of top scientists, including Harvard physicist David Keith (*A Case for Climate Engineering*, 2013), continues to explore different strategies to offset warming, from cultivating photosynthetic plankton to spraying sulfates into the upper atmosphere to

block sunlight. In a thoughtful, complex, and sometimes-technical overview of “the promise and attendant perils of deliberately modifying climate,” the author argues that this field “should be taken considerably more seriously.” Though it may not necessarily offer a solution, it can provide a way to reduce harm from climate change. For instance, technology could be used to slow warming while better methods are developed to mitigate carbon emissions. Mindful that the risks are not well-understood, Morton describes the science behind the various climate interventions now being studied, including one physicist's work on machines capable of sucking carbon dioxide out of the atmosphere. He covers the history of climate interventions — notably, volcanic eruptions spewing ash and dust into the atmosphere—concerns over possible harms (such as human engineering replacing “the authentic world with a fake one”), and the danger that even talking about technological interventions will lead to less climate mitigation.

This book is an important account of cutting-edge research that will fascinate serious readers and demand the attention of policymakers.

FAREWELL TO ALAN LEADLEY OF HAMILTON

Our Secretary, Jock Crawford, writes:

Alan Leadley, a well loved Methodist minister, died on December 1st, 2015 after a long and tough battle with a degenerative respiratory disease. Warwick Silvester and I both spoke at his funeral which was attended by more than 600 people. He was a longtime active member, I think foundation, of Hamilton Sea of Faith.

I read the attached at his funeral on December 4th.

I first met Alan back in 1996 when, as a minister of this church, he visited my wife and me, recently arrived to the parish and city. We had the first of many subsequent stimulating conversations during which there were revealed - with grace and humour - facets of theological thinking and Christian expression I had not before experienced in anyone ordained. That was the beginning of what became a close friendship during which I came to recognise him as having probably the most well-rounded personality yet encountered.

Alan had a huge circle of acquaintances-become-friends from all walks of life and moved easily in whatever surroundings he found himself. He respected those he came in contact with, seeing and encouraging the good he saw in everyone. He listened properly and gave his attention 100% to the subject in hand. He was considerate, compassionate, hospitable, thoughtful; he had a highly developed social conscience, championed the underdog, was unafraid to speak truth to power and led by example and good humour.

His thirst for knowledge with intellectual integrity equipped him for significant roles both within the

Methodist Church – which he served effectively and faithfully all his adult life – and in the wider community. He was a loving husband, father, grandfather and friend, accepting of his own and others' frailties and spending himself with generosity and commitment as long as he had the strength to do so.

As a well-loved minister he paid his congregation the compliment of allowing them to think for themselves and did not expect them to hang up their brains at the church door. His attitude was inclusive of everybody, affirming all that is good in life and prepared to attempt change to that which is not.



**Rev. Alan John Leadley, QSM,
1943-2015**

Earlier this year the death of Marcus Borg, Alan's "favourite theologian", was reported. The fact that Borg had died from the same rare disease from which Alan himself had suffered for some years seemed to have a special resonance for him. Perhaps that was because both men had come to similar understandings

of what the heart of Christianity is: how to love others and live life fully, cope with its ultimate deterioration and die with grace and integrity.

Alan's interpretation of Christian living has had significant effect on many who have had the benefit of his friendship and ministry. He was a committed follower of the Way of Jesus in every respect. We can honour that commitment and memory of him by sincerely trying to travel a similar path with the love and affection he had.

Jock Crawford

CREATIVE FAITH

'Authority' is dead, 'revelation' is dead ... now it's over to Creative Faith: the morals of Jesus in the only world we have, or ever will have.

Don Cupitt

In his programme *Religion for Life* on 15 August 2015, John Shuck in the U.S. interviewed Don Cupitt. They discussed the thoughts behind Don's 50th book *Creative Faith: Religion as a Way of Worldmaking*.

As John Shuck observed, Don "rejects all ideas of gaining salvation by escaping from this world of ours: 'all this is all there is' he says and he now sees true religion in terms of joy in life and an active attempt to add value to the human lifeworld."

This interview can be heard at

http://religionforlife.podomatic.com/entry/2015-08-15T18_53_46-07_00

In Newsletter 118, Lloyd Geering reviewed this book and, based on what Don had written, assumed that it was probably Don's last book. But, it wasn't! Don's 51st book *Ethics in the Last Days of Humanity* which deals with the absence of a serious ethical and religious in response to climate change. A publisher's blurb appears in Newsletter 121.

WHY "SEA OF FAITH"?

The name comes from a phrase in Matthew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach":

The Sea of Faith

*Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore,
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl'd.*

But now I only hear

Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

Retreating, to the breath

Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear

And naked shingles of the world.

In 1984 the phrase was used as the title of a BBC television documentary series and book by the English theologian Don Cupitt.

These traced pivotal changes in western science, philosophy and religion over the past 350 years, which together call for a radical re-thinking of our faith traditions.

It was as a consequence of this TV series and book that Sea of Faith Network emerged, initially in the UK and later in New Zealand and Australia.

PROGRESSIVE SPIRITUALITY CONFERENCE

NAPIER, 6-8 MAY 2016

So you find religious orthodoxy inadequate? And ruling cultural values vacuous? But you can't wait until the Sea of Faith conference in October? Then you'll welcome news of the Progressive Spirituality Conference – subtitled *Faith as resistance to Ego, Orthodoxy and Empire*: a vigorous presentation of faith-in-action. That's faith very broadly defined, and action very variously portrayed.

Following the very successful "Beyond the Borders" conference in Auckland in August 2014, Hawke's Bay Progressives invite you to Napier this May. The planning committee come from Presbyterian, Methodist and Anglican churches: clergy and lay, male and female, gay and straight, and in the 45-60 age bracket. We believe we have put together a fine and feisty line-up: Robin Meyers from Oklahoma (prior to a tour of Australian cities) matched by a trio of Kiwi speakers: Jo Randerson, Robert Myles and David Clark, MP.

Bookings made before Easter (27th March) will attract an early-bird discount. Flights from Auckland and Wellington can now be found for under \$50. For a booking form, go to progressivespirituality.co.nz. Details of local accommodation deals will also appear there soon.

Email address info@standrewshastings.org.nz will put you in touch with SoF steering committee member, Adrian (not Andrew as mistakenly reported in an earlier Newsletter) Skelton, who is involved in planning this conference.

Like a number of organisations, though Sea of Faith is not formally connected to Progressive Spirituality New Zealand, we have what might be described as a sympathetic connection. As Adrian noted above, the SoF Conference in October in Wellington will present Gretta Vosper, another passionate advocate of progressive Christianity.

Adrian Skelton and Noel Cheer

FAREWELL TO BARBARA MILLER OF AUCKLAND

***This tribute to Barbara was written by George Dodd
on behalf of the Auckland Sea of Faith group:***

Barbara was born in Palmerston North, the fifth of six children. Her parents moved to Auckland whilst she was still a baby and after living briefly in Epsom the family moved to Remuera. Barbara spent most of her life in Remuera where her association with St Lukes Presbyterian Church (later St Lukes Community) began and continued until her death. For the last seven years she and John have been resident in St Andrews Village in Glendowie.

Barbara had her secondary education at St Cuthbert's College in Auckland where she had periods both as a boarder and a day girl. She enjoyed all sports but especially ball sports at which she excelled. At the recent SoF national conference held at St Cuthbert's she was particularly proud and keen to point out pictures on the wall of the atrium which included her at various stages of her school career playing sport. As a senior student she became Head Prefect and Head Girl. On leaving St Cuthbert's she began a degree at the University of Auckland but after a year decided an Arts degree was not for her so moved to Otago to study physiotherapy. This became her life long career and she pioneered using physiology in the treatment of neurology patients. Subsequently, in 1987, she co-founded the Physiotherapy School at the Auckland University of Technology situated on the north shore.

At St Lukes she was a Sunday School teacher, Bible Class leader and, later on, one of the first women to be appointed an elder of the church. She took leading roles in church committees including the Parish Council and the Central Committee which was responsible for the courageous step of appointing David Clark, an openly gay man, as minister to the Church.

At the suggestion of John Hinchcliffe she was instigator of the establishment of U3A (The University of the Third Age) in New Zealand, its first branch being in Remuera which Barbara served for a period as president.

To church members Barbara was a person who was always positive and encouraging, and someone truly interested in your welfare. For her "How are you?" was not merely a word formula but a genuine request to share your space and give sympathy if needed and be truly happy with you if you had joys to celebrate. Many spoke of how her smile and her sparkling blue eyes were such potent features of Barbara's humanity and love!

A narrow faith was not for Barbara and she joined SoF at its beginning in New Zealand. She and her husband, John, were part of the Auckland Branch and crucial members of the arrangements committees for the national conferences held in Auckland - including our most recent (2015) conference at St Cuthbert's. We of the Auckland Branch and St Lukes Community have been shocked and deeply affected by her sudden death. Her warmth, honesty, wisdom and input - both intellectual and practical - were an immensely valuable part of our branch and community. We say a sad farewell to a truly lovely lady.



**Barbara Deuchar Miller/Irwin
11 July 1932 – 3 January 2016**

***This was one of the Eulogies at
Barbara's funeral at the
Community of St Luke on 9
January, 2016.***

For nearly forty years, this church has had a lively tramping club. Barbara was a vital member of that group, taking part, when possible, in its monthly walks and annual camps. She contributed fully as a camp leader and, as a team leader, created memorable meals. Together with John, she was a wonderful host for tramping club reunions at Long Barn.

Tramping gives an opportunity for quality time – for in-depth conversations; to share socially and enjoy the company of others; to take pleasure from beautiful bush, stunning scenery, and mountain views. Barbara was a greatly valued member of the St Luke's Tramping Club, who always participated one hundred percent. Her care for people was reflected in her conversation. To walk and talk with Barbara was to engage in discussions ranging from the meaning of life, to an appreciation of the beauties of nature, to reflecting on the people, particularly family, who were very important to her.

Barbara had a capacity for engaging with people about what was essential in their lives.

There are stories that can be recounted of shared experiences such as climbing Ngaruhoe and Ruapehu. But not all adventures reached the mountain top. The one word, “Pukekaikioire”, will summon up memories for those who experienced what became a ten hour tramp in the shadow of Ngaruhoe in the hot blazing sun; dehydration for some, and DoC staff coming to the rescue of several of our party, including Barbara. But there was resilience about Barbara. She was a great encourager, a highly valued contributor to the group and will be greatly missed.

Barbara and John enjoyed walking in Spain and in Norway. They were part of a group led by Bob Kinnear to Nepal in 1990. Their highpoint was Pike [Peekay] Mountain at over 4,000metres or 13,500 feet. John recounted to me that he didn’t think he would make the summit. He called out to Barbara to come back so he could give her the camera. But Barbara was out of hearing range and forged on leading the way to the summit, which John eventually reached.

There is for many a spiritual dimension to tramping. The physical journeys we embark on are expeditions of discovery about ourselves, about others, and about the surroundings we traverse. It’s not surprising that Barbara, who was so much at home as a trumper, was also a spiritual adventurer. The Sea of Faith network, in which Barbara fully participated, brought her into a life-changing association with others, exploring religious faith with an open and inquiring mind. Not for Barbara, the confines of a narrow orthodoxy, constrained by conservative tradition.

Together with John, Barbara organised the national conferences for the Sea of Faith held in Auckland. Last year, although they both wanted to take a back seat, they were nevertheless involved again in helping arrangements for the national conference held in Auckland.

As for many others, Professor Lloyd Geering, through his writings, lecturing, and leadership in the Sea of Faith Network, was a great inspiration for Barbara. Together with John, Barbara participated in a tour he led to the Middle East where the Judeo-Christian tradition was explored in the places where it originated. Over the years friendship grew between Barbara and John with Lloyd, and he sometimes stayed with them when he visited Auckland.

The theological and spiritual exploration undertaken by Barbara was matched by her intellectual curiosity. The founding of the University of the Third Age – U3A – was suggested to Barbara by John Hinchcliff as something that this church could promote. John was head of ATI (now AUT), where Barbara was working and they were

both at the time members here at St Luke’s. Barbara suggested to John Stewart, who was recently retired, to organise what was the foundation group for U3A in New Zealand. The first meeting of what became the Remuera U3A group was here at St Luke’s in 1989. Barbara later became an active member, serving as its president in 2011.

This involvement in leadership has been a characteristic of Barbara’s life as we have heard – at school, as a physio, here at St Luke’s, in the tramping group, in U3A. During the last eight years while Barbara and John have lived at St Andrew’s they became very involved in the activities of the village’s Community Centre. Debra Wilsher, Event Co-ordinator at St Andrew’s, has written, ‘that over these many years ... Barbara attended Happy Hour, the Mid Winter and Christmas dinners and most recently over the past year attended our Play Reading Group She often said to me, “When I retire then I will attend more activities”.’

‘Barbara often popped in just to see how we girls were going in the office. Most times it was on her way to the gym for her regular workout or just going for a walk.’

‘Barbara was a wonderful support as a member of the Event Social Committee, along with John who was Chairman at the time.... She would sit back at meetings, look at me, take a breath and say very calmly on how she saw the Centre growing.’

‘Barbara’s bright cheerful optimistic personality’ Debra concludes ‘will be missed by both the team here at St Andrews and all those who had the pleasure and honour to spend time with her.’

One of the very last things Barbara did last Saturday was to visit with John a very close friend who has been unwell. This was so typical of Barbara.

Barbara was a people person, who valued family, friendship and personal relationships, and worked at strengthening them. She seemed to do this naturally and effortlessly. There was a deep compassion and caring to her friendship. When she asked, “How are you?” this was no glib inquiry or standard greeting. She often followed this up, looking directly at you, with another question – “How are you **really**”? Barbara, the professional who cared for people, was the same Barbara who was concerned personally about her friends’ wellbeing.

That we will miss Barbara so much is an indication of what she meant to us. We give thanks that she was part of our lives, and will be a continuing part of our memories.

We are the better for knowing Barbara and being loved and befriended by her. We say goodbye to her with deep sadness, but also with rich appreciation that we are better people for having known her.

Rev. Dr. Allan Davidson

THE FORCE AWAKENS

"From a galaxy far, far away to a cinema just down the road"

(*The Economist*, 19 December, 2015)

On New Year's Day I went with my husband and a bevy of grandchildren to see the movie *The Force Awakens*, the latest episode in the *Star Wars* series. And we all thoroughly enjoyed watching – and hearing! – this contemporary story that has been specifically created to bring mythology to modern readers and viewers.

We are all familiar with biblical myths, with Homer, and the myths of Europe and Scandinavia, the King Arthur myths and, perhaps less deeply, with the myths of the Americas, Asia and Africa and, of course, with Maori mythology.

Because we have been steeped in these traditional myths, we sometimes forget that myth-making is not restricted to ancient times or pre-modern cultures, but is an on-going process in which authors draw on mythological devices, structures, themes and archetypes to give their contemporary fiction cultural resonance. Myth-making is one of the prime ways by which we convey important existential and spiritual understandings through memorable stories. Here I might cite J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and C.S. Lewis' *Narnia* series. And, more recently, books and films such as the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling, and the *Hunger Games* series by Suzanne Collins.

Rather than arising out of centuries of oral tradition, contemporary myths are penned over a short period of time, usually by a single author. But, like all myths, they are compelling because they help us to understand and to deal with our contemporary world by tapping into primordial human urges – for refuge, redemption and harmony.

Having seen *The Force Awakens*, I was fascinated to read, in a publication better known for its commentary of current affairs, business and finance, an article titled "Star Wars, Disney and myth-making". *The Economist* of 19 December 2015 states **"modern myth-making, reliant though it is on new tools and techniques, is really just pushing the same old buttons in stone-age brains"**.

The Economist continues: "The internal mechanics of myths may not have changed much over the ages, but the technology used to impart them certainly has. In Homer's day, legends were passed on in the form of dactylic hexameters; modern myth-makers prefer computer graphics, special effects, 3-D projection, surround sound. . . [and their stories] are chronicled in interlocking films, television series, books, graphic novels and video games".

Joseph Campbell, the eminent American comparative mythologist, spoke of a Nietzschean world which has today outlived much of the mythology of the past. Campbell claimed that new myths must be created because,

without relevant mythology, society cannot function well. It is no accident that film-maker George Lucas and his successors drew on the work of Campbell in fashioning screenplays that owe much to mankind's oldest stories.

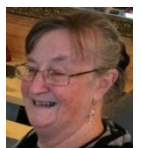
It was Campbell who outlined the 'monomyth' structure in which a hero answers a call, is assisted by a mentor figure, voyages to another world, survives various trials and emerges triumphant. An interesting, and societally relevant, variation on such a hero figure is that the protagonist of *The Force Awakens* is a woman. Rey is smart, sassy, resourceful, athletic, knowledgeable and not overtly sexy – though there is a love interest between (white) Rey and (black) Finn.

A *Wikipedia* article on *Star Wars* notes that George Lucas told journalist Bill Moyers, "With *Star Wars*, I consciously set about to re-create myths and the classic mythological motifs." It also quotes film critic and author, Frank McConnell, as saying that *Star Wars* "has passed, quicker than anyone could have imagined, from the status of film to that of legitimate and deeply embedded popular mythology". And film critic, Steven D. Greydanus, argues that *Star Wars* is the primary example of American myth-making: "The Force, the Jedi knights, Darth Vader, Obi-Wan, Princess Leia, Yoda, light sabres, and the Death Star hold a place in the collective imagination of countless Americans that can only be described as mythic. . . I call *Star Wars* the quintessential American mythology".

A last comment from *The Economist*: "What explains the power of all this modern-day mythology? There is more to it than archetypal storytelling, clever technology and powerful marketing. In part, it may fill a void left by the decline of religion in a more secular world. But it also provides an expression for today's fears. In uncertain times, when governments and military might seem unable to keep people safe or stay honest, audiences take comfort in the idea of superheroes who ride to the rescue."

Myths are as old as humanity and remain as important today as they ever were. Modern myths have the power to unify people across generations, social groups and cultures, creating frameworks of shared references even as other forms of media consumption become ever more fragmented.

So, even if you do not have grandchildren to take with you as an excuse, I can highly recommend that you take the opportunity to immerse yourself in the mythic universe of this latest episode of the *Star Wars* saga, though, if like me, you have sensitive hearing, I suggest you take ear-plugs, or, if you are hard of hearing, you can always turn off your hearing aids!



Shirley Dixon, Titahi Bay

"STAR WARS ... THE QUINTESSENTIAL AMERICAN MYTHOLOGY"

LAST WORD

JANUARY 2016



As I write this, the Paris climate change conference has finished. While the negotiators are elated that there has been a result, commentary and analysis is likely to seriously deflate that elation. Closer to home, and on a much smaller and more amateurish scale, the New Zealand Sea of Faith recently had its annual Conference, which also dealt with the increasingly uncertain future and the risks that climate change, among other things, poses. It is quite natural to ask what the outcome of our discussion was. Did we come to any conclusions? Will anything change as a result and what actions will come about? The answers on the surface are No, No and None and that seems very unsatisfactory. Images of fiddling while Rome burns or rearranging the deck chairs on the Titanic come to mind. Surely climate change is a most urgent and pressing matter? We have only one planet and we are fundamentally disrupting its balance and the processes that stabilise it. Doesn't the urgency of the matter and the difficulty of winning out against the forces that have brought us this far mean that it would be irresponsible for the Sea of Faith not to act? At the very least, we could become a supporting organisation for Wise Response, whose aim is to call on Parliament to undertake a serious assessment of the risks we face in five different areas (see <http://wiseresponse.org.nz>). Religious figures who have had the courage to act are among those we find most appealing; Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Desmond Tutu and Mahatma Gandhi can serve as examples.

However, this is counter to a long-standing view. The Sea of Faith does not have particular views about anything. It is a talkfest. Its strength is that there is no official line, so we have the freedom to follow the argument wherever it leads. This is particularly liberating for those of us coming from Church traditions where there is an official doctrine, a line propagated from above. Protestant churches especially have often defined their identity through a confession of faith. Discussion may be permitted there, but only in the awareness that there is a right answer that must always win in the end. In this view of the Sea of Faith, individuals are free to act according to their own convictions, but the Sea of

Faith as such cannot act because that would mean taking an official position.

This view has a parallel in the counselling realm. In Carl Rogers' non-directive therapy, the counsellor does not provide answers or take a particular view of things. Instead, he or she reflects back what the client says, so establishing rapport. This provides a supportive space in which the client is free to explore options and come to their own decision about what action to take. Sea of Faith aims to provide a similar supportive space.

While this view has its strength, there are also dangers. One is that discussion will prematurely end and that particular views will be unquestioningly accepted. For example, the idea that religion is a human creation has almost become a Sea of Faith dogma. It is certainly helpful as a counter to the notion that Christians have privileged access to divinely revealed truth, but it could be understood trivially (mathematics, science, ethics, values and the theory of evolution can also be understood as human creations) or used to dismiss anything that suggests that religious experience might uncover truth. A groupthink can easily emerge that makes honest and open discussion difficult.

Another danger is that we get stuck exploring possibilities or options and never get to action, either individually or as a group. This is something that Kierkegaard was concerned about in his book *Either/Or*. For him, what he called the aesthetic approach to life was inherently unstable and needed to progress on to an ethical view through an existential leap rather than a logical argument. In the Sea of Faith, we find communal support in discussion, but are left on our own when it comes to action, so are in danger of actually doing nothing.

Your Steering Committee is well aware of the tension between these two views and will be discussing this matter at its face-to-face meeting on February 27th. You are welcome to make your views known to our secretary, Jock Crawford (jockcrawford@actrix.co.nz)

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson 2015-2016