

# Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

[www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz)

Newsletter 138

November 2018

## Reflection on Conference 2018

The theme of the recently held annual Sea of Faith conference was “**Religion For a Sustainable Future**”. The conference, held at Silverstream Retreat in Lower Hutt, marked a significant point in our organisation: for the first time Noel Cheer, a founding member, guiding light and driving force was not with us, Sir Lloyd Geering, at the age of 100, gave his last Sea of Faith conference address, and Norm Ely, long a mainstay in organising national conferences, will now step away from that very taxing role. In choosing this year’s theme the Steering Committee had primarily intended to revisit the global ecological theme. However in the event our actual speakers chose their own individual approaches.

**Sir Lloyd Geering** again gathered strands of his thinking and writing of recent years and focussed them on the new values that will need to be lived in order to best deal with the disrupted ecological future that we face. In the past church doctrine has separated the human dimension from the rest of the living world. This will not do in the future. Action to preserve one must preserve both. As usual Lloyd drew out the strands of belief and value of past theology, and spoke about the changes we need to make to these inherited ideas for best survival into the future. He ended with an exhortation from Moses:

“I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse; therefore choose life that you and your descendants may live.”

**Dr. Byron Rangiwai** spoke about Maori spirituality, the first time we have had a keynote address on this at a Sea of Faith conference. He described a great contrast to the modern western (Christian) outlook, with its abstract history and theology. He first dealt with Maori origin stories, and then moved on to his major focus: Maori practice of spirituality illustrated through his own life and the lives of the community of his family. The instructional stories from his elders “This is what we do/you should do in ..... situation”, dealing with food, walking through the forest, the customs of a tangi or visiting an urupa. The core of the Maori view of ecology is summed up in the following: “Ko au ko te taiao, ko te taiao ko au” - “I am the environment and the environment is me”. Every thing and every action has its ‘tapu’ and/or ‘noa’ aspect. There is a deep awareness of the sacred and dangerous, the ordinary (profane) and safe, which suffuses every part of living and being. Every action is a reaffirmation of connection and dependency between a person, the community, the environment and the wairua. Where the environment is sick, the people embedded in it are also sick. To work to heal the environment is to work to heal yourself and the community, to acknowledge and honour your lineage (whakapapa), and their care for you, and care in turn for your mokopuna (grandchildren).

**Geoff Henderson**, a pioneering mechanical engineer, offered an engineer’s perspective on the state of the environment with respect to energy. He first spoke to us about the science of global warming and

then commented about the human blocks to responsible action - climate scepticism and denial, and our most powerful corrective tool - economic rearrangement. Although we are burning fossil fuels and adding carbon to our air, the global temperature is not rising because of the buffering effect of melting climate-stability protective ice. He spoke of the significant rise in the sea before the end of this century which could very likely threaten human civilisation. Any action except one involving the least change is blocked by powerful vested interests linked to the fossil fuel industry. The likelihood of the most optimistic scenario being the real one is only 30%. He pointed out that an engineer would be considered incompetent, if not criminal, to bring into use any system or machine that had only a 30% chance of safe outcomes! Our economic system, unlike our relationship to solar radiation, is not natural, but man-made and can be re-arranged for a more suitable outcome. We can and should bring in a "polluter pays" economy, the TAO system (Tradeable [carbon] Absorption Obligation - the polluter pays to have his carbon emissions absorbed by forest plantings etc, Our current path is creating a warm, wet CO2 - rich environment wonderfully suited to plants and insects, for mammals like ourselves not so much.

**Rev. Charles Waldegrave**, our fourth speaker, is a social activist currently focussing especially on the housing crisis. He drew his inspiration from the action and values of Jesus and the earliest church: look at our society and find the points of greatest pain and need, and work to correct those. If necessary work for alternative communities of solidarity, support and mutual aid, in opposition to the class, status and moneyed society that dominates our society and economy today. He called for churches to take note of recent Christian reactions to the Enlightenment: sterile biblical precision from fundamentalists, individual withdrawal into a private religious practice, and knee-jerk defensiveness of traditional doctrine, organisation and history of established churches, to consciously set these aside. God and the sacred are not dead. They are

located in those matters where people are in most pain. The highest value, the transcendence of modern organised religion, is in relieving this pain.

We also had three elective sessions: The first was given by two young women, **Megan Scott and Emily Calvert**, who presented perspectives of millenials on the topic. Their interaction with the world of family, work and economy and their own reactions to it was inspirational. **Megan** spoke about the sphere of professional architecture in Aotearoa. Her conclusion was that to get an architectural outcome that best served our ecological future, a client had best research their prospective architect and the systems they used, very carefully, because beyond the sales pitch and the greenwash, most architectural firms followed standard highest-profit oriented practices.

**Emily Calvert** - an energy analyst -looked at the consideration of bulk electricity supply pricing, the daily structure of consumer electricity use and the expected impacts on those two of future technical developments such as private solar generation and electric cars.

**Tom Hall** spoke about the historical change of doctrine in early Christian theology brought about by Paul, a change away from valuing religiously motivated action towards primarily valuing orthodox belief, a wrong move in his estimation.

Interestingly, Charles Waldegrave partly disagreed on the grounds that firstly Paul expanded the church to gentiles, beyond its confined Jewish roots. And secondly he thought that Paul was actually concerned much more with the basic and original theology of social action, than what the remains of his few surviving letters seems to show.

**Doug Sellman** facilitated a follow-up Fundamentalists' Recovery Sharing Group from Conference 2017, in which participants shared progress of their personal spiritual journeys to date.

Finally there was a panel discussion with the keynote speakers, responding to nine questions arising from core groups and individuals.

*Steve Collard*

## 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.

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.

“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 via annual Conference and Newsletter, 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](http://www.sof.org.nz), assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference.

We have the following **Life Members**: Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK) and Ian Harris. Also Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley (appointed at the 2017 AGM).

**Chairperson: Doug Sellman**

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**Other Steering Committee members:** Ian Crumpton, Brian Ellis, Steve Collard, Jan Calvert.

There is a team of **Copy Editors** (Shirley Dixon, Maria Cash, Barbara Purchas, and Jocelyn Kirkwood).

**Newsletter Distribution** is by Yvonne Curtis (paper copies) and Peter Cowley (emailed copies). Assistance is also provided by John Thornley ([john.gill@inspire.net.nz](mailto:john.gill@inspire.net.nz)) and Maria Cash.

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# Sea of Faith News

## Annual General Meeting

As usual, the AGM was held at our annual Conference. The meeting voted for a subcommittee to be formed to look into updating our Constitution and resolving unresolved matters. Andrew Calvert was co-opted onto the subcommittee.

Pete Cowley presented a re-vamped website that is in development. It moves away from the single-page website we currently have to provide drop-down menus that give access to a range of content. The new website will be reviewed by the Steering Committee before going live.

Norm Ely, Adrian Skelton and Rob McKay retired from the Steering Committee. Phil Grimmett was elected onto the Committee and it was decided to approach Natali Allen, who has since agreed.

The proposal for a non-residential 2-day Conference, as described in the last newsletter, was discussed and agreed to. This will almost certainly take place in Christchurch, with Ian and Trish Crumpton and Doug Sellman as the core of an organising committee.

## Steering Committee Meeting

Immediately after Conference, a brief Steering Committee meeting was held. The following roles were agreed unanimously:

Chairperson: Doug Sellman

Secretary: Steve Collard

Treasurer: Phil Grimmett

Local Groups Coordinator: Jan Calvert

## Remembering Andrew Meek

Andrew was recently diagnosed with lung cancer, in spite of not being a smoker. The cancer was well advanced and he only had weeks to live after hearing his diagnosis. Bob Geddes has been a long-time friend of Andrew and wrote this poem in response.

Do I have a dying wish?  
A poem for one who has been told they have weeks to live

## The Reality of Death

When the writing's on the wall,  
We know our end is nigh.  
The plans for days to come  
No longer mean a thing.  
But still I'll be myself.  
The anger, tears, regrets, not mine alone  
Will fade.

Do I have a dying wish?  
Only this for strength to take on board,  
The love behind the words,  
About the times of shared fun, excitement,  
And doing something to better all our lives.

This remains when I am gone.  
Full time declared, the play has ended,  
The furnace or the grave awaits.  
What do I care, my cares no more.  
The self I was becomes a memory,  
Held dear by you who love and care for me.

*Bob Geddes October 2018*

## Gretta Vosper Trial Process Ends

In September 2016, the Canadian United Church's Toronto Conference instituted a review of her ministry, stating that her atheism made her 'not suitable to continue in ordained ministry'.

'After three-and-a-half years of preparation and internal controversy, the United Church swallowed its theological opposition, last week announcing that Vosper is free to continue her ministry without any sanctions or restrictions, thus aborting a much-anticipated "trial" that had been scheduled to begin next Monday.'

*The Toronto Star Nov. 11, 2018*

## Dunedin Sea of Faith says farewell in its current form

The Dunedin Sea of Faith group was started in 1989 by Ian and May Cairns, with encouragement from Lloyd Geering. Many who joined did so because they had read Lloyd Geering's books and, in some cases, those of Don Cupitt too. It was a vigorous group for over twenty years, bringing friendship, acceptance, release and relief to its members.

More recently our group has been getting smaller and, inevitably, older with a number of members less able to hear. One of our most able supporters - Don Feist - brought in a new tranche of members about ten years ago, with a 12-hour series for Dunedin U3A 'Beyond Theism'. Since his untimely death, and that of his wife Margaret some years later, we have found ourselves unable to bring new members into our group in sufficient numbers.

We have wondered whether the work of enquiring into a world without God, or having a 'safe place to say unsafe things', are not so urgent these days. Whatever the reasons, the Dunedin SoF Committee decided that we would no longer continue the group in its current form. There is a plan to have a 'house group', which could use a DVD as a discussion starter for each meeting.

We decided to celebrate Dunedin SoF's nearly thirty years by accepting Bruce and Marjorie Spittle's invitation to have a meal at their home. We had a very pleasant evening, with all our active members able to come and including much-respected and long-standing member Nora Calvert. After the meal we each spoke briefly about our time with Sea of Faith.

Lloyd Geering's influence has been significant from the beginning - his books, lectures, an early seminar at First Church, as well as his presence and presentations at national conferences. Many have valued the space he set up - a place to express doubts, the freedom to think honestly, and to discuss the big issues in life without needing to be part of a belief system.

People have enjoyed the welcoming, friendly atmosphere of the group, a place that was accepting and without judgement. The discussions were often profound, allowing us to examine our own thoughts, and discover new things about ourselves in this place of trust.

Some members also belong to a church community. Several noted their relief that SoF has no commitments, no baggage, no dogma ('I believe ...'), a reduction in theism and no need for a personal god.

There were some disappointments. One person thought the word 'faith' in our title misrepresented SoF to the extent that people were put off even coming to see what we were about. Another has, for many years, been sad that SoF maintained itself as a 'talkfest' and didn't choose to respond more actively to the challenges we all face.

We have been grateful to stand on the shoulders of giants - our SoF founders, and many both nationally and locally. We remember with great fondness the people we have travelled with and who are no longer with us. We say 'Kia kaha' to our national body. Now we pass the Dunedin baton to another generation who will have their own questions to explore. *Gretchen Kiwell, Chair, Dunedin SoF Nov 2018*



# Book Review

## Past Perfect by Stephen Mitchell

This sixty three page booklet published 2018 by Christian Alternative Books aims to liberate the reader “*from perfection in life and faith*”. Its thesis is a sustained attack on the idea of absolute perfection.

Our present understanding of perfection is very different from that of the past where a shift in our thinking renders the term perfect redundant and demands a revision of our theology.

The booklet starts with the idea that perfection permeates everywhere: films, advertising, conversations and even language itself. It has deep roots in the beginnings of our civilization. The booklet goes on to look at the notions of the perfect day, beauty, the world and humanity. From there it looks at goodness, love and place or utopia ending with the perfect death.

Mitchel points out that the exclamation “Wow that’s simply Perfect!” at the point when one receives a gift derives from the Greek word *telieos*. The act is complete and achieves its goal. It’s the complete package we won’t find better. But the idea of perfection is relative and while something may be perfect for one it might be totally inappropriate for another.

Indeed if we apply ourselves to this thoughtful and thorough look at the concept of *perfection* even for a few hours, for that’s all it might take to read, it will satisfy the intellect and allow us to sigh deeply and immerse ourselves in our humanity awhile. Our demands for perfection may have increased and we’ve suffered as a result from regret, missed opportunities and feelings of inadequacy but this booklet will free us to go gently....

This is a booklet which would provide a satisfying read in the sun during the forthcoming Christmas holiday and if you want, a starting point for a thoroughly good sermon or two.

PS I would also recommend “The Paradox of Choice: why more is less” by Barry Schwartz which deals with the issue of perfection in a different but no less satisfying manner.

*Kasia Waldegrave*

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I have usually found it difficult to respond to some of the things that conservative evangelicals are likely to say. I remember being asked if I had had an experience of Jesus as my Lord and Saviour. Another earnest young theology student was so proud that he experienced Jesus accompanying him and being right behind his shoulder. In contrast, he felt that my sermon hadn’t shown much evidence of belief. Perhaps the best response when challenged by arguments designed to manipulate you into accepting their view of things is humour, as in the following:



I could also mention Tom Waite’s dry satirical song “Chocolate Jesus.”

“Well it’s got to be a Chocolate Jesus, makes me feel good inside. Got to be a Chocolate Jesus, to keep me satisfied.

You might find it hard to believe that chocolate Jesuses actually exist, but it’s true- just google it!

*Editor*

# Interesting Texts

## Carols for Aotearoa

The two texts below were sung in Palmerston North at a Celebration of the Diversity of Faiths in our Community, Friday 30 November 2018. Organised by the Palmerston North Interfaith Group, it brought together eleven faith groups, including Asian and Western faiths, Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Church of the Latter Day Saints, Baha'i and Pasifika, presenting songs, prayers and reflections on stage in the assembly hall of Queen Elizabeth College. Over 200 attended.

A singing group from Wesley Methodists presented the two carols, which are found in *Carol our Christmas*, containing 52 carols with original words and music by New Zealanders.

In choosing these two carols, the singers wanted to offer an alternative to the Northern Hemisphere muzak selections of secular ditties to Santa, snowbells and Xmas trees or reruns of ancient Christmas carols now encrusted in cliché and boring sentiments. They hoped tunes and texts from Aotearoa would offer something new for the Advent 'down-under' that was underway in the weeks leading up to Christmas Day.

Shirley Erena Murray, whose carol 'All Over Creation' featured, is the author of 17 of the 52 carols found in *Carol our Christmas*<sup>1</sup>. In interviews this writer carried out with Shirley in 2004<sup>2</sup>, the hymnwriter makes these comments:

(On 'Peace' as the central motif in her hymnwriting):

'Whenever I write a carol, hope and justice are the two enduring themes. 'Peace' is such a 'bland word', all-encompassing...it needs teasing out. Peace is inextricably linked to human rights and justice. There's a trinity there: peace, justice and hope, and in that order. In my hymn 'O Christ who by a cross' (No.

105 Alleluia Aotearoa), I quote words by Albert J. Muste, which I saw on a peace movement banner: 'There is no way to peace: peace is the Way.'

(Why do you write so much about peace?)

'Oh, that's simple. Because I think at the heart of what Jesus came to do is peace. That's at the heart of every message he ever gave out. Closely allied with justice because we can't have one without the other, and so I suppose you'll find that most of the things I write about have some concept of justice as well. It seems so obvious that we should have singing peace hymns forever and forgetting the rubbishy hymns that are very much 'Jesus and me' sort of stuff, and thinking more deeply about how our relationships contribute or not to peace-making.'

(Why is Christmas so important to you?)

'Birth is much more important than death. Christmas is the important thing we can celebrate. Perhaps that is why we don't have so many Easter hymns. New Zealanders aren't writing Easter hymns. People round the world are not writing Easter hymns. I think the huge theological questions about Easter have changed our perceptions about what we can actually say. But about Christmas, there are so many true things we can say, because it's the beginning of this amazing life that we go on celebrating. So I guess that's what I'd say. Life is more important than death, and there's more to Christmas than I can ever find out and most of us will ever find out.'

John Thornley

The values of sustainability are important to all of us here and I enthusiastically include myself. We therefore might hope that these too are built into us by natural selection. I shall tell you today that this is not so. On the contrary, there is something profoundly anti-Darwinian about the very idea of sustainability.

Richard Dawkins

<sup>1</sup> Philip Garside Publishing, email [books@pgpl.co.nz](mailto:books@pgpl.co.nz).

<sup>2</sup> *Music in the Air*, Winter 2004. Enquiries to John Thornley, [johngill@inspire.net.nz](mailto:johngill@inspire.net.nz)

## A Child Was Born

A child was born in Bethlehem, Alleluia!  
In ev'ry birth he's born again, Alleluia!  
A blade of grass, a seed, a rose, a baby girl or boy...  
a million times a day the Christ is born.

In ev'ry place, on ev'ry day, Alleluia!  
We celebrate the gift of life, Alleluia!  
But oh, my friends, what have we done  
to life on planet earth?  
So where can Jesus Christ now come to birth?

The light on Earth is often dim, we know too well,  
but still in ev'ry eye we see Emmanuel.  
With rev'rence for all people and for every living thing  
a ray of healing peace to earth we'll bring.

In Aotearoa now, Alleluia!  
The Christ is born in ev'ry child, Alleluia!  
Our land is green, the oceans clean,  
can hope still find a place  
for Jesus Christ in ev'ry little face?  
Words and music © Cecily Sheehy

## All Over Creation

All over creation  
joy spills into light,  
stars, candles ablaze this Christmas night;  
where Jesus is sleeping,  
peace kisses the earth,  
O that we could know who Mary has brought to birth!

This child will bring freedom,  
this child will release  
wellsprings of compassion, ways to peace,  
this child will bring healing,  
this child will inspire  
love answering love, and spirit to Spirit's fire.

This child will befriend us,  
this child will invite  
all children to share his world's delight:  
this child will confront us  
when, children no more,  
we plunder our planet, crying from want and war.

Let there be a moment  
held, as in one breath,  
when all the earth turns away from death,  
peace nursing creation,  
peace spreading her wing,  
O that we could know what Christmas is meant to  
bring!

Music © Jillian Bray  
Words © Shirley Erena Murray

## Amazing Grace *redux*

New Zealand Sofers may be interested to know that this proposal to replace the lyrics of a traditional but theologically anachronistic hymn is the result of preparing my lecture for this year's conference. It was prompted by Don Cupitt's thesis that religious traditions are always to renewal, for I immediately thought of John Newton's "Amazing Grace" as an example of the sort of reactionary Calvinism we would do well to be rid of. I therefore put together a bit of verse that seemed to express the spirit of progressive religious thinking, and herewith offer an alternative that contemporary followers of The Way might find not only free from embarrassment but expressive of the central message of Jesus.

Acute observers may find in stanzas two, three, and four respectively echoes of Cupitt, Lloyd Geering, and the Galilean himself.

*Tom Hall*

Amazing grace that we might find  
In serving others' needs  
A glow of hope and peace of mind  
Not drawn from ancient creeds

For when our lives give forth both light  
And warmth as does the sun,  
An end to mankind's ancient plight  
Will have at last begun.

Howe'er we name the Power supreme  
That rules the cosmos vast,  
'Tis we alone who must redeem  
The sins of ages past.

Our lives we therefore dedicate  
To those with whom we live:  
Not to destroy, but to create;  
No more to get, but give.



# Turning the Tide

## (on the Sea of Faith)

A startling statistic revealed by the 2017 national survey of the Sea of Faith was the average age of members. It was 79 years! One year on it could very well now be 80 years. This is one of a number of sobering statistics we as a new Steering Committee have been thinking about as we consider the year ahead. There are three more worrying trends. The number of members has fallen from 441 in 2007/8 to 303 in 2017/18. The number of active local groups has been steadily falling over recent years so that in 2017 there were 16 in total and in 2018 this had fallen to 11, including both Christchurch and Dunedin groups going into recession. Finally, the number of registrants at national conferences has fallen from over 200 25 years ago to below 100 in recent years. The registrant number at Silverstream over the past three years has fallen from about 90 to below 70. These figures paint a picture of an organisation in decline. The Sea of Faith could very well be a thing of the past within the next ten years if the status quo continues. The tide will have gone out, as Matthew Arnold's poem rather bleakly describes.

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore  
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.  
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.

As your incoming Steering Committee, we think it is timely to review our organisation's position in the light of these statistics above and formulate strategies to adapt to changing times. Clearly a key challenge is becoming more relevant to a greater number of people, in particular younger people (under the age of 50 years) – sound familiar ☺.

Along with a review of Constitutional matters as discussed at the recent AGM, we have identified five potential areas to focus

work on with the aim of reversing our declining membership numbers, as follows:

1. The nature of our conferences
2. The connection between local groups and the national network
3. The name "Sea of Faith"
4. Social media presence
5. Public profile in mainstream media.

### 1. The nature of our conferences

Sea of Faith conferences have, with no exception, been excellent. They have been annual events when many in the national organisation have come together to meet with others of like-mind, and through high quality keynote addresses, core group discussions and conference panel discussions have stimulated us in our ongoing spiritual journeys. However, perhaps our conferences have become a little too inward looking in a way that may have inadvertently made newcomers feel they are not immediately part of the in-crowd of people who have known each other for decades. We are pleased about the AGM endorsement of a trial to run an alternative 2-day format in Christchurch next year. The conference will begin with a public lecture (with no better profile than a "Lloyd Geering Lecture"), and we want to explore ways in which new-comers, especially younger people, can be made to feel very welcomed and as important to the group as anyone else. We also want to explore new ways of projecting the conference out to the public.

### 2. The connection between local groups and the national network

It is concerning that the number of active local groups is diminishing. However, there are quite a few informal members of the Sea of Faith, members of local groups who have not chosen to become members of the national network, as well as members of the

national network who don't belong to a local group. While we think it is very important for local groups to flourish as semi-autonomous entities within the overall network, we need to understand the dynamics better and perhaps derive new mechanisms and structures that help everyone feel part of the larger organisation, as well as attract new members to local groups. The rejuvenation of the Dunedin and Christchurch groups, which have gone into recession leaving only two active groups in the South Island - Ephesus/Sea of Faith in Timaru and Unitarian/Sea of Faith in Blenheim - perhaps needs some special attention.

### 3. The name "Sea of Faith"

In terms of making the organisation more relevant to younger people and create a more inviting public image in general this could very well be the most important element to review. We recognize this is perhaps the most contentious issue; however, the name "Sea of Faith" has connotations which are counterproductive to projecting a positive impression of what we are about. The word "faith" means "belief" for many people, especially in the context of the name of a group like ours. We think that people are inclined to react negatively these days to seeing the word "faith" in the name of an organisation with a capital F such as in Sea of Faith and therefore be discounting before they know anything about us; suspicious perhaps we are a religious sect with dogmatic supernatural beliefs – the very opposite of what we are as an organisation!

### 4. Social media presence

We, the current membership of the Sea of Faith, were not brought up on social media such as Facebook and Twitter. Many younger people view these new electronic communication platforms as the normal way of sharing information and communicating with others. Currently we have zero presence in this world, and it is this new world we need to grasp as an organisation if we are to survive into the future.

## 5. Public profile in mainstream media

Currently the Sea of Faith has very little public profile in New Zealand, which means that the vast majority of New Zealanders don't know about us as a national religious discussion network. Publicity through the mainstream media is likely to continue to be important in this new era of social media. But up until now, the Sea of Faith has been rather tentative as an organisation to enter this public space. This is perhaps understandable from the point of view that we deliberately don't have any defined doctrine or specific policy. However, our aim to provide safe adult spaces to discuss and explore religious ideas particularly as a foil to fundamentalist dogmatic belief is special. The new Committee will explore the costs and benefits, and potential mechanisms by which more public media profile could usefully be achieved.

Each of these five areas are informed by what the purpose of the Sea of Faith is. A clarification about the ongoing purpose will be the starting point for our Committee discussions. We propose to begin this review work immediately and we will report progress on each of the five key areas here in the newsletter during 2019 through to the AGM at the Christchurch conference. At that time there could very well be several key remits for us all to consider.

In the meantime, we welcome comments and suggestions from members on any of these five strategic areas or any other matters that relate to the continuing survival of the Sea of Faith.

Steering Committee 2019

Doug Sellman – Christchurch (Chair)

Steve Collard – Auckland (Secretary)

Phil Grimmett – Wellington (Treasurer)

Jan Calvert – Hamilton (Local Groups)

Ian Crumpton – Christchurch

Brian Ellis – Auckland

Andrew Calvert – Hamilton (co-opted)

Natali Allen – Wellington (co-opted)

Pete Cowley – Gisborne (ex-officio)

Laurie Chisholm – Christchurch (ex-officio)

# Panel Discussion

In recent years, Conference's closing panel discussion has often been the highlight of Conference. There's a lively interchange between panel members, who also often manage to clarify or deepen points that they have made in their keynote speeches. Noel Cheer has been a dynamic and stimulating chair for these discussions and he has been replaced for the last two conferences by Adrian Skelton, who has successfully continued this tradition, with clear and penetrating questions that went to the heart of the Conference theme. What follows is a summary of (some of) the discussion. For more on the keynote speeches, see [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz).

Q: Define Sustainability.

Geoff: "Development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." I would like to make the definition more specific by providing numbers, as engineers do. What population size of future generations do we use in our definition of sustainability?

Lloyd: Sustainability is not in my ordinary working vocabulary. Let's examine religious concepts for sustainability.

Charles: Usually, sustainability refers to the environment. Let me focus on the social side.

We have a systemic housing crisis. Are houses housing products or homes? There are people who use mortgage financing to own 10 homes and others living in garages or overcrowded spaces. In NZ, you can evict tenants with three month's notice. In other countries you can't, even if you sell the house.

Byron: In the Maori creation story, the flora and fauna are created through sexual relations. This occurred before the creation of humans, so they are our senior relatives; treat them with respect.

Q: Religions tend to have an overarching story, a metanarrative. We know that things need to change and yet we aren't changing. Is there a metanarrative that can help us?

Lloyd: We have a new story. We are becoming a global community. 100 years ago, we thought nationally. The result: two world wars. There won't be a third world war because now we think globally.

Charles: The Government aims to make wellbeing instead of GDP the basis of economic thinking. It forgot the cultural aspect, but now Maori and Pacific people are saying that spirituality is an important part of wellbeing. If you ignore this, it becomes just another colonial process. *The Editor*



## Last Word

It was a great privilege to be nominated Chairperson of the Steering Committee last November. I have enjoyed working with other members of the committee, who have brought considerable skills and experience to their roles.

This year has been **a time of transition**. Members of the committee stepped in to fill the huge gaps left by Noel Cheer's absence. Noel has been Chairperson of Sea of Faith, Editor of the Newsletter for 22 years, Webmaster, a member of the Conference Committee and chaired 20 Panels. Following his death in August, his life was celebrated by family and friends. Margaret Rushbrook spoke on behalf of SoF and Ephesus, and you can read part of her tribute in the September Newsletter.

The future of SoF has been on our minds.

**Where to from here?** Our membership is ageing and numbers are declining. The number of functioning local groups has declined from 16 in 2017 to 11 in 2018. Is the role of the Steering Committee to support current members and local groups or to reach out and encourage new and younger people to join? I think we need to do both. I look forward to the role of Local Group Convenor this year.

**How do we publicize Sea of Faith?** Work is underway to freshen up our Website. Facebook is being discussed as another possibility. I wish we had videotaped this year's Panel. The Speakers provided a wonderful blueprint for values and actions that will lead to Spirituality for a Sustainable Future, in line with our aim of exploring values, spirituality and meaning.

One of the tasks of the Steering Committee has been to choose a theme and speakers for Conference. We agreed to go back to Silverstream this year and look for NZ Keynote Speakers. In 2017 Gretchen Kivell said that 'our Conference Committee and Conference itself cannot continue forever unaided... we may need to revamp our activities to 'cut our coat according to our cloth'. We discussed changing the

Conference Programme, so that it is more accessible to people who are working and less expensive. Members agreed that we adopt the Two Day Proposal (outlined in the September Newsletter). Conference 2019 will be held in Christchurch.

Sir Lloyd Geering indicated his address to Conference 2018 would be his last public lecture. He has spoken at 18 Conferences since 1994. Single-handedly he has influenced our thoughts on so many topics. When introducing him at Conference I said 'Lloyd, we stand in awe of your breadth of understanding across many disciplines and the clarity with which you express your ideas, making them accessible to people'.

This Advent may light shine in places of darkness bringing hope and renewal, love dwell in our hearts promoting reconciliation and joy, and justice reign in the world ending poverty and war.

*Jan Calvert.*

### A Final Note from Don Cupitt

I'm living very quietly at home now, with rails and walking frames to help me get around. With extra lighting and magnification I can read a sentence or two, but no more, and it's odd to be cut off from the paper self, made of words, whom I spent 40 or 50 years creating. Happily, I get a steady trickle of visitors with whom I can talk and so push on my thinking a little further yet.

I also see my five grandchildren, a great comfort, and still try to practice solar living. Once a week or so, I get into College on my electric buggy, which gives me a feeling of independence. So I'm content enough. My version of 'eternal life' involves saying an unqualified Yes to transience, especially one's own transience, and I'm happy with that.

*Don Cupitt*