



# Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

## NEWSletter

### From The New Chairperson

#### **Assets**

**T**HE SEA OF FAITH NETWORK has no assets but its members. Unlike some other voluntary organisations, we own no property, we use public communication systems, and we hold no shares in major corporations. Apart from a small reserve fund to tide us over years when Conference runs at a loss, we have little cash.

But we are rich in the worth that matters. A highlight of our recent Conference in Auckland was the moment when Lloyd Geering was awarded the first **Honorary Life Membership<sup>(1)</sup>** of the Network. It was made all the more significant with the knowledge that Elaine had died in the weeks leading up to the Conference.

Here is someone who, at an age when many in our society have done little more than play bowls or golf for the last twenty years, is still giving lectures<sup>(2)</sup> to a wide variety of audiences about the world in which we find ourselves, and in particular the connections between that world and the religious ideas of all the ages of history.

#### **A great combination**

And we have plenty more of the same vintage and similar quality. Over fifty years ago I was a secondary school student. We were challenged and inspired by a young teacher who expanded our horizons, demanded that we think clearly and deeply and produce solid results. Owen Lewis is still challenging and inspiring us.

He suggested the title for our Conference this year, drew together a wide range of leaders and subjects for the Workshops, and proposed another innovation which the Steering Committee is keeping for possible use next year.

And his wife Joy, who has a comparable reputation as a teacher, has shared all these contributions, because you never can tell where her work ends and his begins.

<sup>(1)</sup> see p8

<sup>(2)</sup> see pp. 6 and 9

#### **Thanks from all of us**

Our thanks are due to Joy and Owen, who retired from the Steering Committee at the AGM after serving their four year term, along with Alan Goss, Jean Holm, Noel Cheer and Suzi Thirlwall.

Fortunately Suzi and Noel are still working for us. Suzi runs our Resource Centre, and Noel edits this Newsletter and our website. Between them they continue to maintain two of the three services without which our Network would have no existence between Conferences.

This Network, then, is people. Your contribution at the local level is just as important as that of Owen and Joy, or other members of our Committee. I have found my local group a huge support over the years it has been in existence. But it requires a contribution from all of us to keep it that way.

We look forward to more challenges and inspiration from each other in 2002.

*Frank Gaze, Chairperson 2001-2002*

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## **Personal Spirituality v. Community Religion, or How I Stopped Worrying About Religion and Got a Life**

**Alison Cotes**

Excerpts from a paper delivered to the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Conference  
"You Make Community Makes You: Identity and Belonging" Auckland, 22 September 2001

The full paper is available from our website at <http://sof.wellington.net.nz> or from the Resource Centre (see p10)

**No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,  
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder  
wring.**

**Comforter, where, where is your comforting?**

**Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?**

**My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a  
chief**

**Woe, world-sorrow.**

**G**erard Manley Hopkins, one of his so-called dark sonnets, and I haven't been able to get it out of my head since the horrific events of last week.

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In times of major group trauma, where do individuals go for comfort, and how much to they have to conform to the prevailing societal ideology to be allowed to avail themselves of that comfort? And, to extend our theme further, how far is their self-identity defined by what their society is feeling and expressing?

As usual, it's the visual images that have been most revealing, rather than the words — as we in Sea of Faith know, words are totally inadequate when it comes to expressing the deepest things.

**... Words strain,  
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,  
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,  
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,  
Will not stay still.**

[TS Eliot]

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Those visual images are the ones that stay with me, and they're not the obvious ones. .... the pictures that stay with me are the people huddled together for comfort, for pure, physical wordless comfort; people gathering for massed religious services that can give a collective voice to their inexpressible grief; and, most tellingly for me, individual people in churches, kneeling alone, slumped on their knees, their face buried in their hands.

"These are the hard ribs of a body that our prayers have failed to animate," said R S Thomas in a poem called *In Church*. "There is no other sound in the darkness but the sound of a man breathing, testing his faith on emptiness, nailing his questions one by one to an untenanted cross."

Old habits die hard. Even unbelievers go to church in desperate times. They stood there in the National Cathedral in Washington, singing "Amazing Grace" and "God Bless America" ... But how quickly the mood and the hymns changed — "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; he is trampling out the harvest where the grapes of wrath are stored," and watch out when America, in the name of God, who cares more about them than any other nation, who have taken over Israel's role as the Chosen People, is on the warpath.

Religion. God. Faith in whatever. The ultimate security blanket. "What am I?," asked Tennyson in *In Memoriam*. ... William James said that the ultimate expression of religious faith was a single word. Not the childhood words that sum up most prayer — Please, thank you, and I'm sorry, but just a single word. **HELP!**

Oh God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come? Perhaps the first part of Kipling's line might have been true in the past, but not the second, not now.

We create our own mechanisms for coping, or hang on to those that have been created for us. We create the images that we need to sustain us and, in times of national crisis, often retreat to the group images that are part of our cultural heritage. Perhaps God is trampling out the grapes of wrath to avenge America. Perhaps, for Christians, it is as Hopkins said in "That Nature is a Heraclitean fire, and of the comfort of the resurrection". "O pity and indignation," says Hopkins, "manshape, that shone sheer off, dissevered, a star, death blots black out; nor mark of any of him at all so stark but vastness blurs and time beats level."

But "Enough!" says Hopkins, devout Jesuit even in the midst of his blackest despair. "The resurrection, a heart's clarion! Away grief's gasping, joyless days, dejection."

If only it were as easy as that! I wonder if it was for Hopkins, really. Can the Christian story of a man overcoming death really compensate for our chief woe, world sorrow? Not for me. Not for me. No church, no untenanted cross, no solidarity of suffering, can help me come to grips with this grief.

And I use myself as an example of millions of modern people, not as an individual whose reaction has any more importance than anyone else's.

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[When the news of the World Trade Center terrorism broke] I was away doing a travel story, in an eco-lodge in the Queensland rainforest. ... We had no visual images, no real details, just the news that thousands of people had been killed. There were the usual shock/horror responses, and then some people went off on the walk, and some went in for an early breakfast. But a few of us peeled off individually and found spots in the rainforest where we could be alone with our thoughts, which were intensely personal and individual. I didn't want to talk to anybody else about it just then — I needed time to absorb the enormity of it all. It was only later, when the manager brought in his personal television and rigged it up in the guest lounge, did the reaction become a group experience, people turning to each other in horror, for comfort, in solidarity, asking those questions that were being asked all over the world — Did you hear that ...? Did you see ... What about ...? We needed each other as a group to reinforce the validity of our individual reactions, to make sure that our initial responses were those of the group.

So was that a spiritual experience? For any of us? And if so, in what form? Did we, that disparate group of fifty or so strangers, form a community united in awe and terror?

For me, the answer is no, as it always is in any situation of group emotion, which I don't see as spiritual experience. ... at these seminal moments in international, national and personal history, I need the solidarity of the group for comfort and support, to feel that I am not alone in my distress. ... But are these spiritual occasions?

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Personal spirituality, community religion — they're all tied up for me in Mary Magdalene territory [in periodic visits to a shrine in France], but what really works is when I strike off the path and wander deep into the forest and sit under ancient beech trees and watch the full moon rising, and feel in touch with something — I don't know what it is, but something deep and gut-wrenchingly satisfying. And that's very different from anything I feel in the cave during the festal mass, no matter how moved I am by Didier's [the celebrant priest] hiking boots peeping out from under his 18th century cope, or by seeing all these simple people joined in joy and wonder at the homage being paid to their favourite saint.

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Context is so important. That's why we tend to remember where we were when we heard about JFK's assassination, for example, or Lady Diana's death, and now, of course, the suicide attack on the World Trade Towers.

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In times of major crisis like this, people need to be together. All over the western world this week, people have been flocking to church services. I didn't do that ... Instead, last Sunday afternoon, I went to a huge peace rally in the city square ... because I felt at least it would be a change from the constant barrage of emails and phone calls ... and because I felt that if I was going to fall about crying, at least there would be a friendly shoulder somewhere to lean on.

\*\*\*

It was a heartening experience, but not, I think, a spiritual one. There was a real sense of community, and I hugged a lot of people I'd never seen before and wouldn't know again if I saw them on the bus, and there was certainly a sharing of moral strength, but it wasn't spiritual. It was emotional, and psychological, but I don't think that's the same as spiritual. I don't think I even know what a spiritual experience is. Is it the goose-bumps on the back of your neck when hear the alto aria at the end of Bach's John passion? Is it that frozen moment when you see the person you love best in the world after a long absence, and throw yourself into their arms and neither move nor speak? Is it in that gasp of wonder when you suddenly notice the full moon in such overwhelming beauty that your heart stops for a moment as you look at it? Is it the rush of love that you feel when a baby smiles at you for the first time? Or the painful joy of rereading a letter from a friend or lover long dead? I don't know if these are spiritual moments. They're certainly the moments when I wish I could believe in some kind of higher power, some creative intelligence behind the universe, because at such moments, all I want to do is say Thank you, thank you, thank you — and as Meister Eckhart said, if that's the only prayer you ever utter, that's enough.

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Can you be a spiritual person without something to focus on, somebody or thing to talk to, communicate with?

I just don't know. What I do know is that at these times when, however briefly, you reach what T S Eliot calls the still centre of the turning world, it's precisely at these times that you are completely and utterly alone, and that you cannot share the fullness of that experience with anyone. "We live, as we dream, alone." (Joseph Conrad, in *Heart of Darkness*).

**the existential dilemma — the tension  
between two great and irreconcilable truths,  
that to the world we matter not at all, but to  
ourselves we are the only thing that matters.**

*Alison Cotes*



## Books

### **Lloyd's Trilogy**

Polebridge Press, the publishing arm of the Westar Institute (of which the Jesus Seminar is a part) have published three of Lloyd Geering's books as a trilogy. They are:

- *Christian Faith at the Crossroads: A Map of Modern Religious History* (an updated edition of *Faith's New Age*)
- *Tomorrow's God*
- *The World To Come: From Christian Past to Global Future.*

### **Spong's New Book (see also page 10)**

John Spong recently spoke about his new work, due out soon, titled *A New Christianity for a New World: Why Traditional Faith Is Dying and What Should Take Its Place* (Harper San Francisco, Sept 2002) The book, he says, will ..

"... spell out my concept of the Christian faith separated from the mythological framework of the first century, but not separated from the experience that caused that mythological framework to be created in the first place. It will be my attempt to escape the defensiveness of traditional Christians who feel under attack by the expanding world of knowledge. I will portray a God who is beyond the definition of theism but not beyond that erupting sense of transcendence, otherness and spiritual power that seems to dwell in the heart of life and which postmodern people seem to know so deeply.

"I will speak of a Christ who is beyond classical definitions of incarnation and atonement, but not beyond a sense of the divine. I will speak of prayer without resorting to the claims of magic that so often accompany that activity. I will develop a basis for ethics that is not inscribed on unchanging tablets of stone but rather is grounded in the very heart of life as it struggles to evolve into a deeper humanity.

"Finally, I will attempt to root this new Christianity in a truth that touches eternity and makes a reality the ancient claim that we are destined for eternal life."

*from Sea of Faith in Australia Bulletin October 2001*

### **Laurence Malcolm**

**28 August 1913 — 9 October 2001**

*We note with sadness the passing of Laurence Malcolm, the founder of the Kaikohe SoFN Group. For most of his professional career Laurence was a physiologist and was Regius Professor of Physiology at the University of Aberdeen from 1958 to 1975. From 1977 to 2001 he was an orchardist at Waimate. The following was contributed by Mary Johnson of Kaikohe.*

We first met him when he moved to Waimate North in 1977, officially in retirement but starting a new occupation as he planted a small orchard of kiwifruit vines and apple trees. He designed and built his own electronic kiwifruit grading machine which unfortunately saw light of day just as the kiwifruit boom collapsed so was never put to commercial use by him but has since been sold.

Our paths regularly crossed at Rotary activities and for years he was a keen member of the local music appreciation group.

What became our SOF group started in June 1993 when he invited a group of six friends to meet with him for philosophical discussion. He challenged our thinking and helped us expand our horizons. As editor of the Anglican parish newsletter "Rongopai" his challenges reached into the wider community and were always keenly read and sometimes hotly debated.

As secretary of the Anglican Vestry Resource Committee he was the driving force behind their last three biennial environmental conferences and nominated 'energy' as the theme for the next in April 2002.

I think he attended all the SOF Conferences and fully expected to be at the last one but was prevented from doing so by poor health.

It is impossible in a short space to do justice to the memory such a vital individual who lived life to the full.

*Mary Johnson*

## Alison's Poems

*Offered by Keynote Speaker, Alison Cotes*

### ***From In Memoriam A.H.H.* by Alfred, Lord Tennyson**

LIV

Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
    Will be the final goal of ill,  
    To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;  
  
That nothing walks with aimless feet;  
    That not one life will be destroyed,  
    Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete;  
  
That not a worm is cloven in vain;  
    That not a moth with vain desire  
    Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,  
Or but subserves another's gain.  
  
Behold, we know not anything;  
    I can but trust that good shall fall  
    At last — far off — at last, to all,  
And every winter change to spring.  
  
So runs my dream: but what am I?  
    An infant crying in the night:  
    An infant crying for the light:  
And with no language but a sigh.

LV

The wish, that of the living whole  
    No life may fail beyond the grave,  
    Derives it not from what we have  
The likest God within the soul?  
  
Are God and Nature then at strife,  
    That Nature lends such evil dreams?  
    So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life;  
  
That I, considering everywhere  
    Her secret meaning in her deeds,  
    And finding that of fifty seeds  
She often brings but one to bear,  
  
I falter where I firmly trod,  
    And falling with my weight of cares  
    Upon the great world's altar-stairs,  
That slope through darkness up to God.  
  
I stretch lame hands of faith, and grope,  
    And gather dust and chaff, and call  
    To what I feel is Lord of all,  
And faintly trust the larger hope.

### ***by Gerard Manley Hopkins***

No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,  
More pangs will, schooled at forepangs, wilder  
    wring.  
Comforter, where, where is your comforting?  
Mary, mother of us, where is your relief?  
My cries heave, herds-long; huddle in a main, a  
    chief  
Woe, world-sorrow; on an age-old anvil wince and  
    sing —  
Then lull, then leave off. Fury had shrieked  
    "No lingering! Let me be fell; force I must be  
    brief."  
  
O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall  
Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them  
    cheap  
May who ne'er hung there. Nor does long our  
    small  
Durance deal with that steep or deep. Here!  
Creep,  
Wretch, under a comfort serves in a whirlwind: all  
Life death doth end and each day ends with sleep.

### ***In Church by R S Thomas***

Often I try  
To analyse the quality  
Of its silence. Is this where God hides  
From my searching? I have stopped to listen,  
After the few people have gone,  
To the air recomposing itself  
For vigil. It has waited like this  
Since the stones grouped themselves about it.  
  
These are the hard ribs  
Of a body that our prayers have failed  
To animate. Shadows advance  
From their corners to take possession  
Of places the light held  
For an hour. The bats resume  
Their business. The uneasiness of the pews  
Ceases. There is no other sound  
In the darkness but the sound of a man  
Breathing, testing his faith  
On emptiness, nailing his questions  
One by one to an untenanted cross.

## Reshaping the Christian Culture Which Shaped Us

Lloyd Geering

Excerpts from a paper delivered to the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Conference Auckland, 21 September 2001.  
The full paper is available on our website at <http://sof.wellington.net.nz> or from the Resource Centre (see p10)

The genetic code we inherit from our ancestors determines our physical structure as animal organisms, but it is the culture into which we have been born which shapes the way we see reality, which determines what we believe we know, and which provides us with our basic identity. It is by our culture that we develop our potential to become human. Then, it is our personal experience within that culture which makes us who we are as personal individuals. We humans live in a symbiotic relationship with culture. It shapes us and we in turn shape it.

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Today ... we have become aware of cultural relativity. Just as there is no centre to the universe and no earthly species that is biologically superior to all others, so no particular human culture provides the norm to which all cultures should conform. All human cultures are relative to time, place and experience.

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Our new awareness of cultural relativity ... leads us to the painful conclusion that no culture can ever be absolute or permanent. The attempt to halt all cultural change simply creates living fossils, which together become a living museum of the past.

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The great changes taking place in all human cultures today may be described under two terms: secularization and globalization. ... Globalization is the great new phenomenon of our time. It is the process by which all human activity ... Globalization was promoted, in part, by the Christian mission to go out into the world and make disciples of all nations.

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But along with globalization has gone secularization. By this I mean the growing recognition that there is only one real world. ... This physical universe was not created for us. Indeed, it exists for no obvious purpose at all. The universe is amoral and religiously neutral. It is we humans, looking through our various sets of cultural spectacles, who see purpose and meaning in the universe in general, and in human existence in particular.

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The realisation of this is all very new to us humans. ... Mediaeval Christians, for example, were completely unaware they were wearing Christian spectacles.

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... it is really only from the sixteenth century that people

began to talk about something they called Christianity. Before that time Christians talked about the church, about faith or about religion (by which they meant devotion), but never about something called Christianity. ...

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This growing practice of treating Christianity as an objective entity then gave rise to the problem of defining it. What does one have to believe and do to be a Christian? Does it mean belonging to an institution, such as the church? Does it mean holding a clearly defined set of beliefs? If so, what are these beliefs?

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Alfred Loisy (1858-1940). In his book 'L'Évangile et L'Église (The Church and the Gospel), 1902, ... was saying, in effect, 'there is no baby; its all bath water'. Loisy had put his finger upon a new and important mode of understanding, not only Christianity but also every religious tradition.

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Those who try to discern the essence of Christianity are on the wrong track. Christianity has no essence. The fundamentals so beloved by fundamentalists are not Christianity, for Christianity is not a thing.

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In spite of many rival spiritual influences the Christian stream was so vigorous, as it penetrated the Graeco-Roman streams and moved even further afield, that it eventually created the culture which came to be known as Christendom. We call it Christian culture because dominant within this cultural stream were the ideas, values, myths and goals, which had come to be associated with the name Jesus Christ. Although many of these concepts, ideas, and beliefs had originated both before and after the man Jesus they became part of the very complex developing stream and were stamped with the Christian label.

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During the last four hundred years, as a result of the new thinking of the Enlightenment, the rise of empirical science and the development of new technology, the Judeo-Christian cultural stream has entered a radically new phase. Out of it there has emerged the modern secular and globalizing world.

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The modern secular world is therefore not the anti-Christian enemy it is often made out to be by church officials; it is the natural continuation of the Judeo-Christian cultural stream.

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As people have increasingly questioned and abandoned specific Christian beliefs and practices of the past they have been slowly disengaging themselves from the organization of the church. Although they have not established a new organization to replace the church, they have been, often unknowingly, helping to build a new kind of society — a global secular society.

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This emerging secular world is not Christian in the way the mediaeval 'Christian world' was. But neither is it anti-Christian. It can be rightly called 'post-Christian', a word which acknowledges that it owes much to the Christian past out of which it has come, but it is post-Christian in much the same way as the newly emerging Christian stream of the ancient world was post-Jewish.

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The great and impressive cultures of the past may have been inspired in part by some individuals but they were created by communities. It is what we all do that counts, as casting our vote in a modern democratic election reminds us. No matter what we do or fail to do, we are contributing our infinitesimal addition to the world's future, for better or for worse. The future of the world and humankind is more in human hands than ever before in the history of this planet. So the question is: how can we try to make sure it is for the better rather than for the worse?

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The first thing to do is to attempt to understand as clearly as we can the cultural situation in which we find ourselves. The universe in general, and human culture in particular, constitute the 'god in whom we live and move and have our being'. In this new secular and global age the understanding of the cultural situation in which we live constitutes the new form of spiritual knowledge.

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The mental exercise of trying to understand the cultural situation of today's world leads us down a middle path between two extremes, both of which are unfortunately altogether too prevalent. Both extremes can cause us to waste too much energy and time in fruitless debate, which achieves nothing for a worthwhile future and even militates against it.

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The first extreme is to regard the new era as so entirely different from the ages of faith which preceded it, that we can forget the past and concentrate wholly on exploiting for our benefit all the new tools, powers, institutions which we moderns and post-moderns have created, supposedly, by our own unaided efforts. ... At the other extreme are the institutions, which have survived from the past — ethnic institutions, social institutions like monarchies, and, especially, religious institutions like the churches. They deplore the rapid cultural changes. They

feel rightly alarmed that some of the great social and spiritual values of the past are being lost.

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There is a middle way between the two polar extremes. This is to acknowledge the reality of the modern world but also to understand where it came from. The middle way affirms the human values in the secularization and the globalisation of human culture. It does so because it sees the roots of these in the Judeo-Christian stream of culture, out of which the modern world came to birth. The middle way also acknowledges that so many of the Christian beliefs, forms and practices of the past are no longer relevant; they must be discarded and be replaced by others yet to be created. The Sea of Faith Network is simply one tiny manifestation of the middle way, exploring and engaging in the new creations.

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What we are being led to put out faith in are these:

First, there is this self-evolving physical universe itself, which as we understand it, encompasses the whole of reality. It is truly awe-inspiring. Secondly, there is the human species that has evolved out of this creative universe and which, by its own evolving cultures, has brought us into existence as personal human beings. Thirdly, there is that which the collective consciousness of humankind has in turn brought forth — the body of cultural knowledge and values, without which we could not be human. These three constitute the God in whom we 'live and move and have our being'.

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Yet these three are so essentially one reality that they cannot exist in separation from one another. The self-creating universe, the self-evolving human species and the emerging global consciousness are all one because of the cosmic creativity which permeates all three.

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There is much in the modern secular world to praise — the growth of democracy, the affirmation of basic human rights, the abolition of slavery, the rejection of racism, the emancipation of women, the acceptance of homosexuals. These have all evolved out of Christian matrix and today are even sometimes referred to as Christian values. Yet at each of these innovations the developing secular world has found itself in conflict with the entrenched dogmas of conventional Christianity.

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Sadly and paradoxically, it is often the case today that humanist and secular leaders in society are doing more to promote the human values of justice, peace and goodwill than many of the church's officials. The faith dimension of the emerging global future is already taking shape around us and is often more to be found outside of the churches than within them. It is faith in what may be called the secular trinity — faith in the world, humanity and global consciousness.



## Ian Harris' Tribute To Lloyd Geering

*Ian was the first Chairperson of the Steering Committee of the Sea of Faith Network (NZ). This is the tribute that he gave to Lloyd at the AGM where the SoFN awarded Lloyd Life Membership.*

WITHOUT LLOYD'S INITIATIVE back in 1992-93, we wouldn't be meeting here today. Or, if someone else had taken the lead from the UK SOF, it would not be quite the same network as the one that has emerged in New Zealand.

I well remember at one of Lloyd's seminars his passing around a piece of paper, and inviting us to fill in our names and addresses if we were interested in joining with others from around NZ to explore further the kind of thinking he was encouraging.

Then suddenly I found myself invited to be part of a group in Wellington to talk about holding a conference based on something in England called the Sea of Faith, with participation based on, and building from, that initial list. The conference was held in Hamilton in 1993, and the SOF Network was born.

Since then Lloyd has been the anchor in so many ways — serving on the national steering committee, delivering keynote addresses at successive conferences, contacting many speakers from overseas to attend conferences in NZ, writing the statement of what the SOFN is (which is different from the UK statement), being the movement's benign father figure, and more than that, always a stimulator and challenger.

It is fitting that at this juncture the network, meeting in its AGM, should acknowledge Lloyd's contribution by making him a Life Member. I hope he will see the value of this to lie not in his being able to save his annual membership fee, but as a symbol — he's big on symbols — of our warm appreciation of his pivotal contribution to every aspect of the SOF. It's not quite on the level of being made a Grand Companion of the Order of New Zealand, but it is our way of saying: "Thank you, Lloyd, for being a grand companion on all of our faith journeys".

Our only regret is that Elaine is not present, as she was when the national honour was conferred, to see Lloyd honoured here, because she, too, has been part of the movement from the outset.

I ask you now to endorse the Steering Committee's decision to make Lloyd a Life Member of the SOF Network, and to carry it with acclamation.

### Editorial

I'll be on an overseas trip until mid-February and so the next Newsletter will be out in March and will carry material left over from this one — including Conference Reports.

There'll also be a summary of the deliberations of the new Steering Committee at their February meeting when they start serious preparations for the 2002 Conference.

Have a relaxed holiday season!

Noel Cheer, Editor

## Fearless Leadership

**Merepeka  
Raukawa-Tait**

**Impressions of a paper delivered to the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Conference Auckland, 23 September 2001.**

*Merepeka Raukawa-Tait is the Chief Executive of Women's Refuges of New Zealand. Her's was the third Keynote speech. She left us no notes of the speech.*

Merepeka opened by telling is that, each year in New Zealand, 10 to 12 children die at the hands of abusive parents. Our country has no future unless we get violence out of the home. Being Maori she felt no difficulty (although some shame) in accusing Maori in positions of leadership of failure of leadership.

Merepeka has been "on the road" for the past year speaking out on matters of domestic violence — a tragedy that affects 10,000 children and 7,000 women each year in this country. The direct cost to the country is about \$1.2 billion and the indirect cost in lost opportunities for those abused is beyond calculation.

With the economic "reforms" of the last 15 years there is now a need for "social entrepreneurs" working outside "the system", critiquing it and looking for opportunities to bring help to the marginalised.

She ended with a plea for "village behaviour" — caring for our neighbors.

Noel Cheer



## Religious Studies in Secondary Schools

*This item was submitted by Jean Holm of Auckland, a member of the 2000-2001 Steering Committee*

The possibility of Religious Studies in NZ schools has been raised at several SOFN conferences. It is good to be able to report that last year there was a major breakthrough, when the University of Auckland School of Education included RS as one of its optional subjects in the postgraduate secondary school teaching diploma. This was a first for any university in NZ.

Religious Studies has as its aim helping students to understand the nature of religion, and its expression and influence in the lives of individuals and societies.

It involves learning about a number of religions — and comments in the media after the September 11 tragedy have revealed how little the public knows about Islam.

The course aims to equip students either for specialist teaching in schools which recognise the subject, or to be able to make use of the many opportunities in the curriculum for including aspects of religions — especially in Social Studies — and to be a resource person for colleagues who have no religious studies background.

The course at the University of Auckland was made available at short notice for the 2000 academic year as an experiment. The Secondary Postgraduate Department wants to include it permanently, but because of the universities' concern with small numbers the subject is to be offered in alternate years, depending of course on whether enough students enrol for it.

It is important, therefore, that the possibility of including Religious Studies in the postgraduate secondary school teaching diploma should be made known as widely as possible.

Jean Holm

## In Brief

### From SATRS

The St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society is arranging to print Lloyd Geering's lecture series *Who Owns the Holy Land?*

It's a calm and balanced assessment of the claims made by the disputant parties in the Middle East and is especially necessary at this time. It provides a background too, to militant Muslim hatred of the West and the USA in particular.

Wellington people should make a point of attending the book launch at Unity Books Willis St at 6pm on Thursday December 6th.

Others may wish to order from SATRS — see details on page 10.

### May The Force Be With You

**Thousands of Britons devoted to the Star Wars movies have claimed the fictional faith Jedi as their preferred religion and have forced the category on to the next national census.**

### UK SoFN

Their new Steering Committee Chairperson is Patti Whaley. Many of you will remember her keynote address to our Conference in 1998.

### dad@hvn

**God, it seems, has bought himself a mobile phone and can receive text messages up 160 characters in length. The Lord's Prayer can be sent by that medium:**

dad@hvn, ur spshl. we want wot u want&urth2b like hvn. giv us food&4giv r sins lyk we 4giv uvaz. don't test us! save us! bcos we kno ur boss, ur tuf&ur cool 4 eva! ok?

<http://ship-of-fools.com/Features/RFather.html>

## Faith in Cyberspace

**A show of hands at this year's Conference indicated that about 95% of attendees had Internet access.**

**If you are able, have a look at the growing repository of backnumber papers and reviews on our website at**

<http://sof.wellington.net.nz>

**Take a look at the first item in the menu — and refer enquirers to it — it's a quick tour of SoF ideas.**

## The Sea of Faith Network (NZ)

The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) is an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint. The Sea of Faith Network itself has no creed. It draws its members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions.

Its WWW home page is at  
<http://sof.wellington.net.nz>

It publishes a regular Newsletter, assists in setting up of local discussion groups, and holds an annual Conference.

Members may obtain tapes, books etc from the SoF Resource Centre at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga. A catalogue appears on our website.

For the address of your nearest local group, contact the Membership Secretary, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Northland, Wellington.

To offer a comment on any material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact the Editor: Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay, Phone 04-236-7533, Fax 04-236-7534, email: [noel.chear@attglobal.net](mailto:noel.chear@attglobal.net)

*The only copy appearing in this Newsletter that may be construed as reflecting Sea of Faith policy is that which is accompanied by a by-line of a member of the Steering Committee.*

"SoF" is 28 page A4, six-times-a-year magazine produced by the UK Sea of Faith Network. They offer it to New Zealand Sea of Faith members currently at \$NZ59 for a year's subscription.

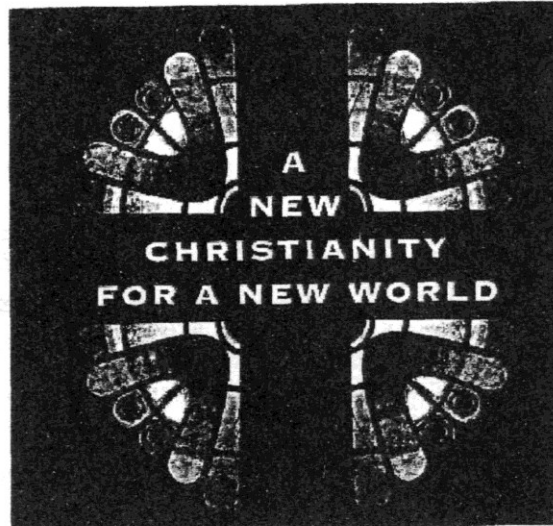
To subscribe for a year, send \$59 to "The Membership Secretary, SoF, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Wellington". Write your cheque to "SoF (NZ)".

Many of the study booklets referred to throughout this Newsletter are available from The St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society:  
<http://satsr.wellington.net.nz>  
Phone 04-472-9211

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(NB. Many orders have already been received by Whirlwind Distribution since John Spong's visit here in July. If you are unsure whether you have placed an order, please send one now. On cross-checking it can be discarded if we have already received one.  
Thank you.)

✂.....  
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