



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

# NEWSletter

## FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

**There is a wonderful Hasidic story about a rabbi who was asked whether it is ever proper to act as if God did not exist. He responded, "Yes, when you are asked to give to charity, you should give as if there were no God to help the object of the charity."**

**I think the same is true of morality and character: in deciding what course of action is moral, you should act as if there were no God. You should also act as if there were no threat of earthly punishment or reward. You should be a person of good character because it is right to be such a person.**

*Alan Dershowitz: Letters to a Young Lawyer (2001)*

**T**HE IDEA HERE EXPRESSED BY Alan Dershowitz has always interested me. Our local group is at present discussing where our ethical ideas come from, and how they are transmitted to younger generations. This is a response to the recent visit of Peter Vardy. He has been publicising the work of Dialogue Australasia, which you can find described on its website: [www.dialogueaustralasia.org](http://www.dialogueaustralasia.org)

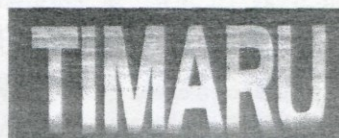
"Purposive change is indeed a risky enterprise. But whether we like it or not, the taking of risks in order to transform our lives and to transform ourselves is one of our most distinct human qualities." So said Frank Furedi recently, referring to the events of last 11 September in the USA. **Our Conference theme this year is "Creative Uncertainty".**

"We need to change our own lifestyles so that the affluence of the few becomes the livelihood of all." This from an address by **Richard Randerson** who, with **Don Cupitt** and **Stephen Batchelor**, will be a Keynote Speaker at Conference.

In another address, Randerson said: "In any endeavor we may be conducting our internal operations in an ethically scrupulous manner, but be quite blind to the larger issues at stake." He was talking to a group of professional people about the ethical basis of their working lives, and so contributing to the same discussion as Dershowitz above.

I hope you will join me in Timaru in September to continue this discussion with him.

*Frank Gaze, Chairperson 2001-2002*



If you did not receive a 2002 Conference Pack with this Newsletter and would like one, then please contact Hugh Gilman on (04)-934-8054 or at 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road Wellington.

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# Uncreative Certainty

Dr. Laura Schlessinger is a U.S. radio personality who dispenses advice to people who call in to her radio show. Recently, she said that, as an observant Orthodox Jew, homosexuality is an abomination according to Leviticus 18:22, and cannot be condoned under any circumstance.

The following is an open letter to Dr. Laura penned by a U.S. resident, which was posted on the Internet. It's funny, as well as informative:

Dear Dr. Laura:

Thank you for doing so much to educate people regarding God's Law. I have learned a great deal from your show, and try to share that knowledge with as many people as I can. When someone tries to defend the homosexual lifestyle, for example, I simply remind them that Leviticus 18:22 clearly states it to be an abomination. ... End of debate.

I do need some advice from you, however, regarding some of the other specific laws and how to follow them.

1. When I burn a bull on the altar as a sacrifice, I know it creates a pleasing odor for the Lord - Lev. 1:9. The problem is my neighbors. They claim the odor is not pleasing to them. Should I smite them?

2. I would like to sell my daughter into slavery, as sanctioned in Exodus 21:7. In this day and age, what do you think would be a fair price for her?

3. I know that I am allowed no contact with a woman while she is in her period of menstrual uncleanness - Lev. 15:19-24. The problem is, how do I tell? I have tried asking, but most women take offence.

4. Lev. 25:44 states that I may indeed possess slaves, both male and female, provided they are purchased from neighboring nations. A friend of mine claims that this applies to Mexicans, but not Canadians. Can you clarify? Why can't I own Canadians?

5. I have a neighbor who insists on working on the Sabbath. Exodus 35:2 clearly states he should be put to death. Am I morally obligated to kill him myself?

6. A friend of mine feels that even though eating shellfish is an abomination - Lev. 11:10, it is a lesser abomination than homosexuality. I don't agree. Can you settle this?

7. Lev. 21:20 states that I may not approach the altar of God if I have a defect in my sight. I have to admit that I wear reading glasses. Does my vision have to be 20/20, or is there some wiggle room here?

8. Most of my male friends get their hair trimmed, including the hair around their temples, even though this is expressly forbidden by Lev. 19:27. How should they die?

9. I know from Lev. 11:6-8 that touching the skin of a dead pig makes me unclean, but may I still play football if I wear gloves?

10. My uncle has a farm. He violates Lev. 19:19 by planting two different crops in the same field, as does his wife by wearing garments made of two different kinds of cotton/polyester blend thread. He also tends to curse and blaspheme a lot. Is it really necessary that we go to all the trouble of getting the whole town together to stone them? - Lev. 24:10-16. Couldn't we just burn them to death at a private family affair like we do with people who sleep with their in-laws? - Lev. 20:14.

**"a view of the world that my faith must reign supreme and can be affirmed and held passionately only if all others are negated"**

I know you have studied these things extensively, so I am confident you can help. Thank you again for reminding us that God's word is eternal and unchanging.

[John Spong in *Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism* (p24) wrote: "A literal Bible presents me with more problems than assets. It offer me a God I cannot respect, much less worship, a deity whose needs

and prejudices are at least as large as my own." Spong is recommending understanding the Bible, not rejecting it — ed.]

## Invitation to World War III?

"If September 11 [2001] was indeed the onset of World War III, the anti-terror coalition has to understand what this war is about. It is not fighting to eradicate "terrorism". Terrorism is just a tool. It is fighting to defeat an ideology: religious totalitarianism.

"World War II and the Cold War were fought to defeat secular totalitarianism — Nazism and Communism — and World War III is a battle against religious totalitarianism, a view of the world that my faith must reign supreme and can be affirmed and held passionately only if all others are negated. That's bin Ladenism.

"But, unlike Nazism, religious totalitarianism can't be fought by armies alone. It has to be fought in schools, mosques, churches and synagogues, and can be defeated only with the help of imams, rabbis and priests."

*excerpted from a longer article by Thomas L. Friedman, The New York Times and published in International Herald Tribune 28 November, 2001*

# Creative Uncertainty

## Life, The Universe ...

Elsie Montgomery of the South Auckland Group offered a piece by Stephen Hawking. At the end of his popular book *A Brief History of Time* (credited by some as the most unread best-seller of all time!) he summed-up the so far inconclusive attempts to come up with a complete theory. He ended with these words:

"However, if we do discover a complete theory, it should in time be understandable in broad principle by everyone, not just a few scientists. Then we shall all, philosophers, scientists, and just ordinary people, be able to take part in the discussion of the question of why it is that we and the universe exist. If we find the answer to that, it would be the ultimate triumph of human reason -- for then we would know the mind of God."

But *why* is it necessary that everyone, with the philosophers in the vanguard, be able to understand it? And is understanding to be thought of only in today's paradigms — today's maps of thought? Perhaps "understanding" is so long in coming that we might consider that we are looking in the wrong places? Any ideas about where we ought to be looking? — ed.

## Growing in Doubt

As part of a Keynote Address at the 1997 SoFN NZ Conference, Lloyd Geering discussed the benefits of doubt:

"The capacity to doubt plays a very important role in both personal growth and in cultural growth. When we are children we hold child-like beliefs — beliefs appropriate to our age, such as beliefs in fairies and elves, and, most commonly still, the belief about Santa Claus. But if we continue to hold these beyond the appropriate age we refer to them as childish. There comes a time when we should put them behind us and move on. As St. Paul rightly observed, 'When I was a child I thought like a child. I reasoned like a child. But when I became a man I gave up my childish ways'.

What enables us to put them behind us and grow

to maturity is the capacity to doubt. We have all seen this happening with a child of six or seven who begins to doubt whether Santa Claus can really get down the chimney or how he can be in so many different places at once. Then the very objective reality of this mysterious person comes to be doubted. It is the same capacity to doubt which comes into place during the often turbulent period we go through in adolescence. We begin to doubt, and then challenge, our parents' authority. We come to a full realization that these once authoritative, and almost divine, figures are quite human and fallible after all. This complex process in which we swither between doubting and obeying them is essential for our growth to adult maturity. If persons of fifty years of age are still relying on their parents to tell them what to do in

every situation, they are suffering from stunted growth.

It is the same in developing human culture. Without the capacity to doubt we cannot put away our childish beliefs and grow to the maturity of faith. Doubt is not the enemy of faith but the enemy of false beliefs.

All beliefs should be continually subjected to doubt and critical examination. When beliefs are found to be false or inadequate they should be discarded and be replaced by those which are more appropriate because they have the power to convince within that cultural setting. But it often takes a lot of courage to doubt. We may say it takes real faith to doubt."

## And Heresy Too ...

Arianism is a Christian heresy first proposed early in the 4th century by the Alexandrian presbyter Arius. It affirmed that Christ is not truly divine but a created being. Arius' basic premise was the uniqueness of God, who is alone self-existent and immutable; the Son, who is not self-existent, cannot be God. Because the Godhead is unique, it cannot be shared or communicated, so the Son cannot be God. Because the Godhead is immutable, the Son, who is mutable, being represented in the Gospels as subject to growth and change, cannot be God. The Son must, therefore, be deemed a creature who has been called into existence out of nothing and has had a beginning.

More? ... page 6

**Doubt is not the enemy of faith but the enemy of false beliefs. All beliefs should be continually subjected to doubt and critical examination.**



# BOOKS

## Reconciliation?

The following are extracts from a review which appeared in The London Review of Books dated 23 May 2002. The review is by Jerry Coyne (who teaches at the University of Chicago) and the book is ***Can a Darwinian Be a Christian?: The Relationship between Science and Religion*** by Michael Ruse. (Cambridge, 2001, 242pp.)

"... nearly all religions make claims about the real world — the domain of science — that don't stand up to scientific scrutiny. Faced with these difficulties, advocates resort to circumlocution, sophistry or absurd speculations that offend both scientists and believers." "Michael Ruse's book is an astonishing contribution to this literature. It astonishes because of the bravado of its thesis. Instead of espousing [the late Stephen Jay] Gould's tame view that religion and science are distinct but complementary, Ruse, a philosopher and historian of science, maintains that at least one form of science (Darwinism) and one form of religion (Christianity) are mutually reinforcing. They are reconcilable, he asserts, because virtually every tenet of conservative Christianity, including original sin, the immortality of the soul and moral choice, is immanent within Darwinism and an inevitable result of the evolutionary process. Religion and science are, to Ruse, merely two sides of the same coin."

"... in a chapter on 'Extraterrestrials', Ruse wrestles with the implications for Christianity of life having evolved elsewhere in the Universe. Would this life be human-like and blighted with original sin? If so, who would save the fallen aliens? Ruse floats the possibility of an 'X-Christ', who could redeem sinners throughout the Universe — an intergalactic Jesus shuttling between planets and suffering successive crucifixions. 'One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that,' George Orwell wrote (in a quite different context). 'No ordinary man could be such a fool.'"

"... if one applies the same empirical standards to Christianity as scientists do to Darwinism, religion suffers: we have far more evidence for the existence of dinosaurs than for the divinity of Christ. Ruse is inconsistent in his treatment of faith and science. He believes that religion (or at least Christianity) is amenable to logical and empirical exploration, but some religious questions elude such an approach. While admitting that 'assuming the existence of God really solves and explains nothing,' he tries to prove that existence by rhetorical fiat: 'God's existence and nature is not subject to or in need of the explanation

that the contingent objects of the world demand. God exists necessarily, and is immune to all acids, no matter how corrosive.' At moments like this, Ruse looks to be throwing in his lot with Gould and the idea of separate magisteria. But it turns out that the existence of God is a special case, and that the rest of Christian belief can happily cohabit with science in a single magisterium. As to why science must be reconciled with Christianity rather than, say, Islam, Ruse slyly suggests that 'one belief is better than others.' Alternatively, he proposes that 'one can argue that perhaps there is some common core to all religious belief, and that this is what counts.' But this cannot count, for most other religions do not subscribe to the key tenets of Christianity that concern Ruse."

"Ruse's preferred method of reconciling Christianity with Darwinism is theistic evolutionism, or the view that evolution was God's way of creating humans and other species. He started the process, presumably with the Big Bang, and, foreseeing the eventual evolution of *H.sapiens*, did not interfere further ... Ruse, however, takes it much further by claiming that

much of Christian belief, such as the existence of the soul and the sinful nature of humans, arises naturally from evolution, and not supernaturally by God's intervention."

"Ruse also brings the soul under the Darwinian umbrella:

"We can assert that the soul of man was something which was transmitted, not just from the first man, but up from the animals. The soul, in other words, evolved along with everything else.' Ruse sees it as 'intelligence ... linked with freedom of moral choice'. Since he sees moral choice as a product of evolution, the problem of the soul's origin seems to have been solved. But one important difficulty remains. Ruse's soul is a material construct residing in the human brain. As such, it dies with its owner and cannot be immortal. Ruse maintains a judicious silence on this issue."

"Perhaps aware of the weakness of his arguments, Ruse makes a final evolutionary plea to sceptics: 'We are middle-range primates with the adaptations to get down out of the trees, and to live on the plains in social groups. We do not have powers which will necessarily allow us to peer into the ultimate mysteries. If nothing else, these reflections should give us a little modesty about what we can and cannot know, and a little humility before the unknown.' One can only wish that Ruse had heeded his own advice. In the words of the physicist Richard Feynman: 'I think it's much more interesting to live not knowing than to have answers which might be wrong.'"

**'One has to belong to the intelligentsia to believe things like that.  
No ordinary man could be such a fool.'**

## NEW PUBLICATION

### "The Twenty-Nine Theses"

by Keith F. Fuller.

A list of theses, with commentary, exploring Christian faith from a human oriented initiative, arising out of the author's professional and personal experience — completed during a recent study leave at Westminster College, Cambridge.

40 000 words

**\$9.95, including postage and packing.**

***Published by the author.***

*Send prepaid orders to Keith F Fuller,  
73 Morris Spence Ave., Napier 4001.  
e-mail enquiries jeanluc@xtra.co.nz*

#### **Review**

"Do not be confused by Keith's explanation of his cover design of 'The Twenty-Nine Theses'. This booklet, sensitively written and sprinkled with humour tells how the concept 'God' can be found in other people, in everyday happenings and in the unexpected. Keith has the gift of telling it simply, though his scholarship is evident.

The chapter on space and time is educational. (This is especially for his rabbit - 'I'm late, I'm late for a most important date...')

His remarks on suicide are very helpful. (This is especially for his cat of nine lives.)

This booklet deserves wider coverage. 'The Twenty-Nine Theses' set out where many of us are today in our lives."

*Shirley Goss, Napier.*

## In Brief

### **Resource Centre**

*A plea from the Resource Centre curator, Suzi Thirwall (address page 10)*

Could members who have outstanding copies of videos and books please return them. I have the book list from the conference but have mislaid my notebook which also includes the video loans. If it doesn't turn up I have to trust to your honesty. The following are the outstanding videos whose location is a problem: V3 - UK conference 1995; V 7 God: For and Against (incl Karen Armstrong) Landscape and Memory. So if you have these or know where they are could you organise the return? (If you have videos other than these I know where they are).

I also have a stray video marked '74' which has Don Cupitt in 1984 on BBC and Paul Holmes with Barbara Thiering. If anyone knows which library collection this comes from please let me know so I can return it.

In response to the number of enquiries I have had about *Who Owns the Holy Land* Lloyd Geering I have got a couple of copies which are available at \$10 each. These are St. Andrew's Trust books and on the whole it is more efficient to order from them direct. (See panel page 10). However, if you are ordering a video or similar an order for this particular book could be added on.

### **Paedophilia**

The New York Review of Books, dated May 23, 2002 contains an article with the title "Scandal". These are some of the observations made:

"Priestly paedophilia is also set apart from other varieties by the fact that the seduction technique employs religion. Almost always some form of prayer has been used as foreplay. The very places where the molestation occurs are redolent of religion — the sacristy, the confessional, the rectory, Catholic schools and clubs with sacred pictures on the walls."

"The special tie of the priest to his mother was part of that infantilizing of the priesthood that has much to answer for in the current



scandals — an infantilizing process that was encouraged by the old custom of beginning training for the priesthood as soon as boys could be induced to desire it, with the permission of the parents, which often meant with the encouragement of the mothers."

**"A man without a wife to puncture his pomposity, without children to challenge his authority, in relations carefully structured to make him continuously eminent, easily becomes convinced of his superior wisdom. Since many priests have been only sketchily educated outside their formal subjects, they feel that the source of their wisdom must be their supernatural powers, not their intellectual development. It is generally easy for religion to move from the numinous to the antinomian, to the idea that believers are above the rules that bind others."**

## FROM THE ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE

"An enthusiastic Arrangements Committee in Dunedin and Timaru have been putting together an exciting programme with challenging speakers lined up for Conference 2002. Be sure to be there.

Register early as places are limited and you don't want to miss out.

If you are flying then you might make sure that your flights fit in with the arranged bus service to and from Timaru (see the Registration Pack for details).

We know that some North Islanders will be taking the opportunity of making the Conference part of a great South Island touring holiday. Will you be including in your itinerary Lake Tekapo, Mt Cook/Aoraki (the new attraction is a boat trip on the now large Tasman Glacier lake), Queenstown, Te Anau, Fiordland, the Catlins, Stewart Island?"

See you in Timaru!

*Ian Fleming, Chairperson Arrangements Committee*

## Notes on The Unitarian Church

*by Dawn Elvidge excerpted from the May 2002 Newsletter of the Auckland Central Group.*

A Church which is refused membership in the World Council of Churches — a church which throws out bridges to the ostracized.

The main difference [is] between Trinitarian beliefs — Father, Son and Holy Ghost, versus the Unitarian One God — accepting the human nature of Jesus Christ rather than divine.

Early Unitarians suffered for their beliefs and in 1612 those anti-Trinitarians in the U.K. were put to death.

An 1813 public statement held that Unitarian belief was illegal, any Unitarians had to marry in the Anglican Church.

[In the 4th century] Arias was banished for arguing against the idea of the Trinity. His followers were called "Arians" [see page 3 - ed] and that name was used for centuries.

Unitarian is not 'anything goes', doctrinal beliefs are given careful deliberation. A record of men, times and culture is how Unitarians view the Bible.

Worship which is informal, includes organ music, candles, meditation, readings from a wide variety of sources, (rarely the Bible) and an address.

Hope and new beginnings, justice, equity and compassion, spiritual growth are fostered.

Faith is a forest in which doubts seek and hide.

Today [in Auckland] there is a social justice committee, women's refuge and food bank and two refugee families established. Cupitt is even discussed.

The flaming chalice is their symbol and during services candles are lit and there is an opportunity for people to individually light one and speak briefly whether for illness, a memorial or celebration. 'God' has a wide range of titles.

Humans are not looked upon as miserable sinners, but regarded as having an innate capacity for good.

Services in N.Z. began in 1863 and in 1898 the Ponsonby Road Gothic wooden church was built.

### The Covenant - Unitarian Universalist

Love is the doctrine of this church,

The quest for truth is its sacrament

and service is its prayer to dwell together in peace

To seek knowledge in freedom,

To serve humankind in fellowship

To the end that all souls shall grow in harmony,

Thus do we covenant, with each other and with our God.

# Lessons from Joseph Campbell

The following is an excerpt from a review of **The Power of Myth: Lessons from Joseph Campbell** by Belden C. Lane, professor of theological studies and American studies at Saint Louis University, St. Louis, Missouri.

"Raised a Roman Catholic and continually drawn to the image world of medieval Christianity as symbolised in the cathedral of Chartres, Campbell recognised the force of Christian myth. Yet he also harshly criticised Western theology and carefully distanced himself from the church. He saw in Christianity a deep distrust of nature and creation, an overemphasis on fall and redemption, and particularly a tendency to be bound within a cultural prison. Christian theology, in his view, needs the intensive and universalising influences of mythology. Campbell frequently would contrast the priest, who serves as a custodian of facts, with the shaman, who functions as a sharer of experience. He was uneasy with theology because of its penchant for codes and creeds and its abandonment of poetic language. He cited Jung's warning that religion can easily become a defence against the experience of God."

## Joseph Campbell's Ten Commandments For Reading Mythology

1. Read myths with the eyes of wonder: the myths transparent to their universal meaning, their meaning transparent to its mysterious source.
2. Read myths in the present tense: Eternity is now.
3. Read myths in the first person plural: the Gods and Goddesses of ancient mythology still live within you.
4. Any myth worth its salt exerts a powerful magnetism. Notice the images and stories that you are drawn to and repelled by. Investigate the field of associated images and stories
5. Look for patterns; don't get lost in the details. What is needed is not more specialized scholarship, but more interdisciplinary vision. Make connections; break old patterns of parochial thought.
6. Resacralize the secular: even a dollar bill reveals the imprint of Eternity.
7. If God is everywhere, then myths can be generated anywhere, anytime, by anything. Don't let your Romantic aversion to science blind you to the Buddha in the computer chip.
8. Know your tribe! Myths never arise in a vacuum; they are the connective tissue of the social body which enjoys synergistic relations with dreams (private myths) and rituals (the enactment of myth).
9. Expand your horizons! Any mythology worth remembering will be global in scope. The earth is our home and humankind is our family.
10. Read between the lines! Literalism kills; Imagination quickens

*from the Newsletter of the Nelson SoF Group*

# PRAYER — 1738 AND 2002

## The Universal Prayer

Alexander Pope 1738

**FATHER of All! in ev'ry Age,  
In ev'ry Clime ador'd,  
By Saint, by Savage, and by Sage,  
Jehovah, Jove, or Lord!**

Thou Great First Cause, least understood:  
Who all my Sense confin'd  
To know but this, that Thou art Good,  
And that myself am blind;

Yet gave me, in this dark Estate,  
To see the Good from Ill;  
And binding Nature fast in Fate,  
Left free the Human Will.

[Can sins of moments claim the rod  
Of everlasting fires?  
And that offend great Nature's God  
Which Nature's self inspires?]<sup>(1)</sup>

What Conscience dictates to be done,  
Or warns me not to do,  
This, teach me more than Hell to shun,  
That, more than Heav'n pursue.

What Blessings thy free Bounty gives,  
Let me not cast away;  
For God is pay'd when Man receives,  
T' enjoy is to obey.

Yet not to Earth's contracted Span  
Thy Goodness led me bound,  
Or think Thee Lord alone of Man,  
When thousand Worlds are round:

Let not this weak, unknowing hand  
Presume thy bolts to throw,  
And deal damnation round the land,  
On each I judge thy Foe.

If I am right, thy grace impart,  
Still in the right to stay;  
If I am wrong, oh teach my heart  
To find that better way.

Save me alike from foolish Pride,  
Or impious Discontent,  
At aught thy Wisdom has deny'd,  
Or aught thy Goodness lent.

Teach me to feel another's Woe,  
To hide the Fault I see;  
That Mercy I to others show,  
That Mercy show to me.

Mean tho' I am, not wholly so,  
Since quick'ned by thy Breath;  
Oh lead me wheresoe'er I go,  
Thro' this day's Life or Death.

This day, be Bread and Peace my Lot:  
All else beneath the Sun,  
Thou know'st if best bestow'd or not;  
And let Thy Will 'be done.

**To thee, whose Temple is all Space,  
Whose Altar Earth, Sea, Skies,  
One Chorus let all Being raise,  
All Nature's Incense rise!**

## A New Story PRAYER

*to remind myself of the presence of God*

By Sydney SoFiA member **Kevin Aryeh Hatikvah Smith**. Kevin has borrowed vocabulary here from Micah 6:8 and from the works of Paul Tillich, Michael Morwood, Diarmuid O'Murchu, Richard Rohr and John Shelby Spong.

Yahweh Elohim al-Lah God is the sustaining Presence

in whom my being comes alive  
the core and ground of my existence  
the infinite and inexhaustible ground of all being  
the source of life and goodness  
the fount of holiness  
the source of unconditional love and  
the initiator of the big bang - our *sine qua non*.

This gracious Presence calls me to fullness of being

to praise and thanksgiving  
to trust and devotion  
to integrity and wholeness and  
to courageous vulnerable love.

As I walk humbly with this Presence Jesus of Nazareth teaches me

to live fully  
to act justly and compassionately  
to love tenderly  
to forgive freely and  
to lose graciously.



## LOCAL GROUPS

### **Christchurch**

They have twice-monthly programme (June 14, 28; July 12, 26; August 9, 23; and September 13) that will set members up well for the Conference.

As are many other groups, they are studying Lloyd Geering's *Who Owns The Holy Land?*. They're also planning to look at **Believing Without Belonging** (June 28) and **Crumbling Certainties** (Sept 13).

**Contact: John Goffin, Phone 03-348-3479**

### **Auckland Central**

In April, Dawn Elvidge talked about the Unitarian Church — some of her talk is reproduced on page 6.

On Saturday May 11, the Auckland Central group held a one-day conference, on the theme: **Christianity in Transition — From Supernaturalism to Humanism**. Professor Lloyd Geering spoke first, with his usual enthusiasm, erudition and clarity. He traced changes in our understanding of religious experience since the "enlightenment", but showed that the changes are in part not innovation, but a recovery of traditional tracing (incarnation and the trinity) and of Biblical understanding (especially from the "wisdom" tradition).

The second speaker was Reverend Darryl Milner, who spoke from the point of view of a parish minister, applying the conference theme to how we retain and live by the lasting Christian values from the past, in a very different world. He spoke about how we change our interpretation of those values as we develop, and how a particular parish changed over a period of 20 years. He provided an excellent complement to Lloyd's talk, being personal, local and practical — to Lloyd's historical and conceptual treatment. Group studies followed each address.

Over 130 people attended the conference, both SOF members from around the province, and others. Their response was warm and appreciative — evident during the

sessions and in comments afterward. The day seems to have filled a need, and to have stirred interest in the Sea of Faith.

Their June Meeting dealt with **"Science and Spirit: Two Worlds or One"** by Leo Hobbs. He writes: "I suggest that debate about this issue is being conducted on the wrong ground. My contention is that neither science nor theology is taking sufficient account of the place of mind in its formulation, and that if each were to do so the discussion could move to more fertile ground."

Darryl Milner plans to run two study courses this year. The first will run on Tuesday evenings from 2nd July to 6th August, 2002, the second from Tuesday evenings 10th September to 15th October, 2002. Darryl is the Vicar at St. John's Anglican Church, 47 Church Street, Northcote.

Darryl says: "In the first course I plan to share with you some of the ideas in a recently published book edited by Robert Funk, the founder of the Jesus Seminar, called *The Once and Future Faith* published by Pleridge Press, Santa Rosa, California in 2001. It is a collection of papers contributed to a meeting of Jesus Seminar Fellows to a conference in March 2001. Among those contributing are Karen Armstrong, Lloyd Geering, Don Cupitt and John Shelby Spong.

The second course will probably be based on a book which was very well reviewed and which I've only just begun to read. It is called *When Jesus Became God* by Richard E. Rubenstein. With vivid detail and meticulous research, Rubenstein recreates the political intrigue, riots and power struggles on one of the most critical moments in history — one with startling parallels to our own time.

**Contact: Jim Feist Phone (09) 579 3225**

reserved for information about what your Group is up to!

## 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. We draw our members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions.

Our home page is at

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

Our Steering Committee publishes a regular Newsletter, assists in setting up of local discussion groups, and organises an annual Conference.

The current **Chairperson** is Frank Gaze, 2 Telford Tce, Oakura (New Plymouth) 4650, Phone 06-752-7447

Members may obtain tapes, books etc from the **SoF Resource Centre** at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga (catalogue on the website).

For membership details and 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.cheer@attglobal.net](mailto:noel.cheer@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.*

### In addition ....

"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 \$NZ65 for a year's subscription.

To subscribe for a year, send \$65 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>

## Ian Maxwell Crabtree

13.12.1928 – 28.5.2002.

One of Ian Crabtree's regrets was that he wouldn't live long enough to read Lloyd Geering's about-to-be-published *Christianity Without God*.

I don't know how long Ian had been a member of the Sea of Faith Network. But he had subscribed to the Sea of Faith (UK) magazine since its inception, and regularly attended the NZ Sea of Faith Conferences.

Sea of Faith, and Ephesus in Wellington, were important communities for Ian. They stood alongside, but did not replace, his participation in the Methodist community at Wesley Church, Taranaki Street, also in Wellington. He was an ecumenical person, and frequently attended services, discussions, and lectures at other inner city churches in Wellington.

Ian brought rigorous intellectual enquiry to his practice and understanding of Christianity. You could say that religion was his hobby. In his travels, both within and outside of, New Zealand, he made a point of checking out the current trends and practices, and brought back all manner of informative and instructive literature for his friends. He was particularly interested in how churches presented themselves in this post-modern era, and I was often the recipient of pamphlets that he had picked up, as well as his thoughtful reflection.

If Ian's theology had to be labelled, he would have called himself a non-realist. Towards the end of his life he came to the conclusion that 'God', real or constructed was irrelevant. What mattered most to him was the question "how shall we live?" particularly in light of Jesus' reported statement that he came that all might have abundant life.

Having a terminal illness enlarged rather than diminished Ian's theological enquiry. He considered that some of the literature about death and dying, and stages of grief, might need to be rewritten in the light of a non-realist position. For example, he said in one conversation with me, there's the question of anger, which, apparently, people direct at God. As God is not real, what is the point of being angry either with a non-existent God, or with other human beings who were not in anyway responsible for his illness? And there is the question of appropriate pastoral care and ritual for the dying person who is both a non-realist and connected with a Christian community.

From time to time, Ian asked himself the question, and was undoubtedly asked by others, why he remained actively involved at Wesley, given his divergent views. His answer always was that it was the community rather than the beliefs of individuals that mattered. He was firmly convinced that the one thing that churches could still offer to the wider community is a meaningful, caring community, where human beings can have thoughtful, meaningful interactions with each other. He considered that churches could do much more to provide space for conversation about meaning and values, and that the Christian framework is a useful one for such conversation.

Ian was reading and thinking theology until the last few days before his death. Two months ago we read together and discussed *Proverbs of Ashes* (Rita Nakashima Brock and Rebecca Ann Parker, Beacon Press, 2001). The one fault that he found with this work, as with much other contemporary theology, was that it assumed a real and present God. He continued to read and discuss Ian Harris' weekly 'Honest to God' column in the Dominion, and at the time of his death was up to date, and disagreeing, with Ian's approach to the subject of the week.

Ian Crabtree's life was not confined to religion and theology. He was senior consultant with Transpower, and made an immense contribution to safety standards in the electricity supply industry.

Ian enjoyed movie-going, with a particular interest in the 'rich and strange'. He was a familiar face at lectures of every kind in Wellington — religion, art, literature, science, politics, and anything that caught his interest. He took great pleasure in sharing his knowledge with other people, especially if he was introducing them to something new. A great many people will miss Ian Crabtree. He had a wide circle of friends and acquaintances, a measure, perhaps of his abiding interest in people, and his capacity for friendship.

Lynne Frith 10 June, 2002.