



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

NEWSletter

An Invitation from the Arrangements Committee

There's a warm welcome waiting for you in Taranaki when you come to the Sea of Faith Conference in September

Date: Friday to Sunday, 26-28 September

Venue: Inglewood High School

Theme: 'Making War -- Making Peace'

INGLEWOOD HIGH SCHOOL is on SH3, 20km south of New Plymouth. It's a small town but an attractive one, nestled on the slopes of Mount Taranaki/Egmont. The High School is in a delightful setting and has good facilities.

Because it's not a boarding school, we've investigated accommodation in the town, in New Plymouth and in Stratford, 20km further south, and we've found hotels, motels and B&Bs to suit all tastes and budgets, we hope! A list is included with this Newsletter, and we ask you to book as soon as possible. Aside from hosting film crews and oil exploration companies, Inglewood and New Plymouth are very busy places sports- and tourist-wise, and accommodation can quickly be taken up if there's a big event.

We have also included details of flights from Auckland and Wellington. Frank Gaze is eager to start the proceedings after lunch on the Friday, instead of in the early evening, so it would be best to plan for a morning arrival or even one the day before. Some of you may like to stay on afterwards and explore this beautiful area; spring in Taranaki is world-renowned, New Plymouth has many attractions and on a fine day the Inglewood golf course is one of the prettiest in the country.

On the theme of 'Making War — Making Peace', Steering Committee has booked our first keynote speaker, **Derek Evans** of the

Naramata Centre in British Columbia, who was part of the Amnesty International team negotiating the recent peace arrangements in Sri Lanka.

Registration forms will be sent out in June along with a detailed programme, but if you plan to come don't wait for them — book your flights and accommodation ASAP!

If you have any questions for the Arrangements Committee, please contact:

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Secretary: Margaret Gaze, 2 Telford Terrace, Oakura. ph 06-752-7447 gaze@clear.net.nz

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Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Newsletter

Number 50, February 2003

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SWEET BURDENS

The poet/writer Thomas Lynch has written two remarkable collections of essays loosely concerning his other occupation as a funeral director. The essays are for the most part reflections on life in general but return repeatedly to the transitoriness of life. His first collection, **The Undertaking** (1997), met with critical acclaim. In the second, **Bodies in Motion and at Rest** (2001), he devoted one essay ("Funerals-R-Us") to denouncing those funeral companies which buy-up family concerns and, by their marketing practices, convert "an essentially existential experience into an essentially retail one". He is particularly scathing about the telemarketeering of pay-in-advance ("pre-need") funeral services.

"You don't want to be a burden to your children, do you?" This is the telemarketeer's coup de grace, reaching deep into the parental psyche to tap the wellspring of guilt over not taking them to Disney World enough, or the therapist or dermatologist, for never spending enough quality time with them, for not buying them a pony or a new car or private schools.

Here is the chance to make it all up to them by pre-arranging my own funeral, saving them from all the difficult decisions that they'll eventually have to live with.

I see them now — my darling sons, my fierce daughter — heartsore and vulnerable at the news of my untimely and possibly heroic death. I think of them with their cell phones and gold cards and higher education and inheritance. And it occurs to me: *Why shouldn't I be a burden to my children?*

My children have been a burden to me. Lovely burdens, every one of them. Taking care of their earaches and heartaches and broken bones and disappointments, paying for their college and dance classes and car insurance — they've been a burden. I think they were supposed to be.

Over the years I've had to explain the death of their grandparents, the suicides of classmates, the divorce of their mother and father, the misbehaviour of our political leaders: how love hurts and life isn't fair. I've done carpools and bag-lunches and overwhelming questions; broken hearts, little league and PTA; difficult choices and the facts of life. Sometimes it got really heavy. Sometimes I had to tell them I don't know.

And bearing these burdens of love and grief has made me feel alive, involved, evolved in ways I never thought I would be; it's made me feel needed and necessary and part of the family. It has made me feel 'called' to be a parent. And if it has left me bald and near broke and fairly bewildered, it has likewise left me wondrous, blessed and thankful. After everything, being their father has brought more meaning to my life than any other thing I've ever done or been.

And when I die, bearing the burden of burying me or burning me or blasting me into cyberspace should be theirs to do. My funeral will belong to them and they will be paying for it emotionally, financially, actually. Since they have to live with the decisions, why shouldn't they make them? If I've done my job, then they'll know what to do. If the burden of my death, borne honorably, makes them feel as capable as bearing the sweet burden of their births has made me feel, I can do them the favour of leaving well enough alone.

ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE

Get a Life!

"There's been a sudden and acute linguistic change. We talk now about trusting **life**, having faith in **life**, about the things **life** sends us and the lessons **life** teaches us, and so on. We have hundreds of these phrases. Instead of telling people that they ought to be converted, we nowadays tell them to '**Get a life**'. So it looks as if a new religion of **life** has been coming in."

Don Cupitt interviewed on ABC Radio 1/12/2002.

YO!

The history of the English language shows the reasons why we have a pragmatic rather than a formally-structured grammar and syntax. Some linguists go as far as suggesting that the English we now speak was originally a pidgin (the language of a defeated people) which was adopted by succeeding generations, a process known as creolisation.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a flowering of English expression but, in the twentieth the tide went out somewhat.

In their times, both the telegraph and the restaurant menu led to an inelegant, (though still workable) abbreviation of English.

Today, mobile phone text messaging may have brought us to the irreducible minimum.

Here are two versions of the **LRDS PRER** modified from the many swirling around the World Wide Web:

**R PA IN EVAN, RESPX 2U
MAY U RAIN EAR AS IN EVAN
GIV US R NEEDS
4GIV RSIN AS WE 4GIV R NMES.
RESQ US FRM TH EVIL1
4 UR ALWS TH MOST XLENT DUDE.
YO!**

**GOD@HVN.ORG,
U RULE UP & DN.
WE NEED GRUB & A BREAK.
KEEP US FOCUSD.
U TOTLY RULE, LONG TRM.
R MEN**

Contributions are solicited for a TXT version of the Creed of St Athanasius.

OTHER CONFERENCES

Here's some Conferences in addition to our own which you might enrol for:

A World of Difference.

The London Groups will hold a one-day Conference on March 29. It will deal with "conflict and accommodation (in Islam and Judaism)" and the effects of globalization

Taking a Stand: Radical Theology as Social and Cultural Critique.

The SoF in the UK will hold their 2003 Conference from 22 to 24 of July in Leicester.

Where is Fundamentalism Leading Us?

The Snowstar Institute will host a Conference at Niagara Falls, Canada, from March 11 to 15 which will ask that question. Lloyd Geering will be part of the star-studded caste!

Lloyd is also planning to present a series on **Fundamentalism** at St Andrews on The Terrace, Wellington, on July 1, 8, 15 and 22, 2003

Need To Know More?

Contact your editor.

CHEROKEE PHILOSOPHY

An old Cherokee is teaching his grandson about life:

"A fight is going on inside me," he said to the boy. "It is a terrible fight and it is between two wolves. One is evil — he is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, arrogance, self-pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority, and ego.

The other is good — he is joy, peace, love, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion, and faith.

This same fight is going on inside you — and inside every other person, too."

The grandson thought about it for a minute and then asked his grandfather, "Which wolf will win?"

The old Cherokee replied, "The one you feed."

MORAL MISCHIEF

Tom Paine in *The Age of Reason*: "Infidelity does not consist in believing, or in disbelieving; it consists in professing to believe what one does not believe. It is impossible to calculate the moral mischief that mental lying has produced in society."

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Dear Sir,

It was heartening and chastening to read a letter from Robert Anderson criticizing the Royal Commission [on Genetic Modification, Newsletter 49].

Dr Anderson might have been still more surprised to find that the Chairman of the Life Sciences Network, William Rolleston, had addressed the SoF Conference in Timaru. (But with no profession of ethics: 'biotechnology aims to make wealth' out of life.) Could we right the balance and invite Bob Anderson to speak next round?

I remain worried by the bland and blind comfort of Bishop Randerson's address. [The full text is on the website - ed].

Ethical issues are invoked and played with only to be brushed aside. By a possibly unconscious sleight of hand the last and determining issue of the five (after ecological and cultural concerns etc) is hollow of ethical content: globalization! If the market changes (to demand G.E.!) we must have the technology in place. Ecology is nowhere: market rules — or potential and fictive market! Our only security is that ERMA might sometimes decline a specific application on economic grounds. ERMA, it is asserted, is 'robust'.

Even without reminding Dr Anderson that ERMA has never found anything to outweigh the phantasmagoric benefits of G.E., it is plain from scrutinizing this address that ethics have been discarded for an "unprincipled pragmatism". Or at best that "robust noncommittal" which in the guardians of the guardians is a tragic evasion.

Sincerely
Joanna Margaret Paul
Wanganui



REVIEW:

"AFTER HEAVEN"

Wuthnow's
"ecclesiastical chaos theory"

by Joan Chittister

"Nothing is more repulsive," Carl Jung wrote, "than a furtively prurient spirituality; it is just as unsavory as gross sensuality." There are, in other words, some types of spirituality that themselves smother the spirit, that hold the heart in check, that substitute ritual, dogma, doctrine, and canonical hearsay for the real thing. All spirituality is not the same, the comment implies. Shop carefully.

In an age of massive spiritual eclecticism, scientific challenge to age-old truisms, permeable national boundaries, and major theological developments in every major religion unlike anything we have ever seen before, the warning sobers. Like ants let loose from an ant farm, the world has scattered in search of Truth: to the East, to New Age bookstores, to denominational fundamentalisms of the most rigid kind, to self-styled gurus, to the inner search.

Robert Wuthnow's *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* looks the phenomenon in the eye and explains it in a way that more than makes sense—it makes for a whole new way of dealing with it. Wuthnow, a professor of social sciences and director of the Center for the Study of American Religion at Princeton University, not only tells us what has happened to religion in America and why, he tells us what has happened as a result. And it is not what we may have thought. According to Wuthnow's analysis, all of which touched my own experience of religious reality, things are far better than we may realize.

Given our culture's high mobility and the breakdown of global boundaries, we have, Wuthnow contends, moved away from the spirituality of institutions—and their emphasis on laws, church-going, family, and social mores

that characterized the rural, small-town culture of the prewar period—to a place in the soul beyond the parochial. Left without the comfort and luxury of lifelong institutions to guide us as we moved from place to place, and confronted with institutional breakdown everywhere, we found ourselves with rules that did not apply and questions that had no answers. In search of spiritual meaning in a highly psychologized culture, we retreated to the exploration of the

After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s.

Robert Wuthnow. University of California Press, 1998.

self, Wuthnow explains, in a plethora of self-help exercises where personal analysis became its own end.

Finally, left with a concentration on inner impulses and a new consciousness of the self that, good as those things may have been, went nowhere beyond the self, a new tide swept the spiritual horizon.

The "spirituality of practice," with its consciousness of the sacred and the right-heartedness and right-living that flows from it, began to emerge everywhere. People remained, for the most part, in the traditions that had formed them, but sought a great deal more than the churches themselves had to give. Rather than the routines, rituals, services, and gatherings provided in every congregation, people began an eclectic search for those practices they felt brought them personally most in touch with the sacred. The results may look like the unchurching of America, and indeed to some extent they may be, but, Wuthnow argues, they indicate anything but the loss of spirituality. Rather, they explain the great resurgence in spiritual

values as well as the integration of the material and spiritual dimensions of life. The path is an impressive one indeed.

The spirituality of practice has brought people to a new level of personal spiritual responsibility. They impose on themselves the routines of sacred asceticisms. They recognize the value given by monastic traditions to the repetitive processes of search. They begin to see themselves and their place in the universe differently. They begin to see the world differently. Rather than being simply faithful members of any given denomination, they become spiritual citizens of the world, nourished by the spiritual history in which they function but not limited by it. A new spiritual person, Wuthnow implies, is beginning to emerge.

It is a very positive picture of ecclesiastical chaos theory. In this paradigm, people have not left religion; they have gone beyond it.

Wuthnow takes us into people's lives as well as into ideas. He helps us to recognize ourselves and gives us hope that our own confusions might really be a new kind of clarity. Most of all, he gives us faith in the future of faith and shows a spirituality that calls us beyond ourselves. In my opinion, this book is not only worth reading, it is worth meditating upon. It makes sense out of life, even mine and yours.

JOAN CHITTISTER, O.S.B., a Sojourners contributing editor, is an author and lecturer, and founder and executive director of Benetvision: A Resource and Research Center for Contemporary Spirituality, in Erie, Pennsylvania.

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So ... you don't know? well then, admit it!

This excerpt comes from the paper **Deep Agnosticism: A secular vision of Dharma Practice** by Stephen Batchelor. It was published in **Buddhism in America**, ed. Brian D. Hotchkiss, publ. Charles E. Tuttle Co. 1998

MOST OF YOU ARE PROBABLY UNAWARE

that the term ["agnostic"] is only very recently coined. It didn't exist before about 1888 and it was coined by ... T. H. Huxley the biologist, who was a very staunch defender of Darwin in the latter part of the nineteenth century and a very radical critic of the church and religion. Also, we note that Huxley coined this term somewhat as a joke, tongue-in-cheek.

He belonged to a philosophical circle in London and found that he was unable to identify as all the other members of the circle were able, with an -ism, with an identity — as a Christian, as a materialist, as a whatever, a thingamabob. So he thought about this and said, "Well, what generic term would best describe where I stand?" And he came up with the term agnostic, "in order that," he rather jokingly says in his essay on the subject, "I could have a tail like all the other foxes." So we don't want to take this term agnosticism too seriously. There's already an irony at the beginnings of its usage.

Of course, we can trace historically way before Huxley something that we might now call an agnostic position. It would go back, in fact, to the Greek Protagoras, I think is how it's normally traced, and it would go through people like David Hume and so on. But Huxley is the person who coined the term.

Now, once he'd somewhat jokingly come up with this idea, he recognized, "Ah, this seems to actually have some mileage." And he started to define it, to really look into what it meant for him. Agnosis is constructed from the Greek — "not knowing," "not know," a *gnosis* — which Huxley contrasted to *gnosis*, not in the sense of the early Gnostics, but *gnosis* in the sense of those traditions that claimed that they have some kind of privileged knowledge and then declaim that as their religion or their philosophical position.

Now, interestingly Huxley describes agnosticism as being as demanding as any religious,

philosophical, or moral creed. In other words, it requires the same degree of commitment, the same degree of integrity to take that kind of stance. But he distinguishes it from a creed and describes it as a method. The kind of method he had in mind in many ways underpins the kind of attitude that would underpin what he saw as the scientific approach. He saw it in two ways: On the one hand, this method requires taking one's reason as far as it will go; and on the other hand, it requires not accepting something as true unless it can somehow be demonstrated. In other words, it's a commitment to reason but also a refusal to accept anything as true unless it is somehow demonstrable in one's own experience, either empirically (I think that's probably what he had in mind), or perhaps experientially.

Huxley even described agnosticism as the agnostic faith, in other words, giving the kind of seriousness and commitment that you would normally reserve for religion. It's also striking that, within fifteen years of Huxley coining the term agnosticism, it was already being applied to Buddhism.

... modern agnosticism has kind of degraded into a skepticism, a cynicism that we find so much in the world today. It's certainly lost the kind of confidence, what Huxley called the "faith," that underpinned it initially.

**"THE SHEER BABYHOOD OF THE
HUMAN RACE AGAINST THE
BACKGROUND OF INCALCULABLE
TIME MAKES ANYTHING BUT A
QUESTION AGNOSTICISM
ABSURDLY PRESUMPTIOUS"**

L.E. JONES

**"WHEREOF ONE CANNOT SPEAK,
THEREOF ONE MUST BE SILENT".**

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

"MYTHS" ABOUT THE MIND

In an interview, the author Stephen Pinker was asked about his claim that there are at least three "myths" ("fallacies" would be more accurate) regarding the nature of the mind. If his charge is correct then we might need to make some adjustments to our understanding of religion.

Q: You talk about three modern "myths" ...

- the blank slate,
- the noble savage
- the ghost in the machine.

A: The **blank slate** is the doctrine that the mind has no unique structure and that its entire organization comes from the environment via socialization and learning. The blank slate mentality is popular with people who believe that any human trait can be altered with the right changes in social institutions. It's popular in the more radical branches of feminism, although not with the original core of feminism that stressed the drive for equity between the sexes. I think it allies to some degree with Marxist approaches to society. Not that Marx literally believed in a blank slate, but he certainly believed that you could not intelligently discuss human nature separate from its ever-changing interaction with the social environment.

The doctrine of the **noble savage** is that people have no evil impulses, that all malice is a product of social institutions. The noble savage myth is behind the sensibility that violence is learned behavior, a slogan that is repeated endlessly whenever violence is chronicled in the news. It's also behind the Romantic idea that violent nonconformists are actually seeing the hypocrisy of society and challenging social institutions from a marginalized viewpoint, as opposed to the idea that such people are psychopaths and that we should prevent them from wreaking havoc on everyone else.

The doctrine of the **ghost in the machine** is that people are inhabited by an immaterial soul that is the locus of free will and choice and which can't be reduced to a function of the brain. The ghost in the machine [idea] lies behind the religious and cultural right — literally in the case of people who want to couch the stem cell debate in terms of when ensoulment occurs.

But it's there in a vaguer way, too, among others who fear that a materialist viewpoint — the idea that human experience and choice are products of a physical organ called the brain — is corrosive of morality, meaning, and ultimate purpose.

source: <http://reason.com/0210/fe.rb.biology.shtml>

WHENCE DOGMA?

Don Cupitt was interviewed on ABC Radio on December 1st, 2002. He said ...

Why did dogma ever begin in Christianity? Because Christ had *not* returned, this world was *not* being improved, the better world was above, and *not* yet below. So the church was a disciplinary organisation waiting for the return of Christ.

However we are now in the last world we'll ever see. We've got to make this world the Kingdom of God, we've got to see this world as the last world so we should have a world affirming and positive outlook. The church was too negative. It saw itself as an army marching through the wilderness with its eyes fixed on a very distant goal, but I say that era has now come to an end, we've passed the church era, we're now in the age of the Kingdom of God. So the church has got to catch up with a much more this-worldly outlook of secular society.

[interviewer] So what's the role of Jesus Christ in all of this?

Well my claim is that we can rediscover his teaching. He is a morally self-commitment to life, and to the labour in the present age. He's not a churchman, he didn't come to earth in order to make Popes important or Bishops important.

THE REPUBLIC OF HEAVEN

UK author **Philip Pullman** is winner of the 2002 Whitbread Book of the Year prize for his children's novel *The Amber Spyglass*. Pullman is of the view that English literature since William Golding and Graham Greene has failed to engage moral and metaphysical questions; these issues feature largely in the His Dark Materials trilogy which has won him recent acclaim.

In that series, [which starts with *Northern Lights* and continues with *The Subtle Knife*] two children battle the forces of the Church through many worlds and become part of an audacious bid to overthrow the Authority, the 'Ancient of Days', and thus help establish a Republic of Heaven.

The Guardian Unlimited (www.guardian.co.uk/) tells us that Pullman's grandfather was an Anglican priest, and that Pullman himself has declared, "I am all for the death of God."

"[W]hat I am against," he told the Guardian, "[is] not Christianity, but every religion and fundamental organisation where there is one truth and they will kill you if you don't believe it."

from SoFiA "Bulletin" September 2002

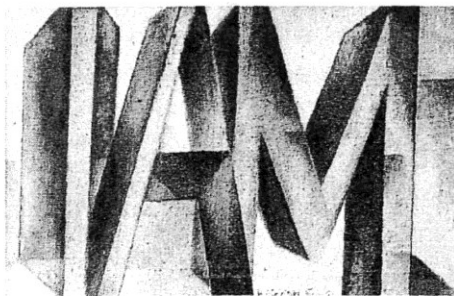
COLIN MCCAHON AND 'A QUESTION OF FAITH'

An Address by Lloyd Geering at the opening of an exhibition of the Paintings of Colin McCahon, Wellington Art Gallery, 7th December 2002

I WELCOME THIS OPPORTUNITY TO EXPRESS my intense admiration for Colin McCahon and his work, though it is only in the last twenty years that I have discovered this strong affinity I have with him.

We never met personally – in spite of the fact that we were born only a year apart – we went to the same High school – our formative years were spent in Dunedin and we had many friends in common. But we moved in rather different circles. At the very time he was abandoning Presbyterianism, I was embracing it. More than sixty years later, I see we have been travelling in the same direction, he outside institutional religion and I within it. We were both involved in the quest for authentic faith in a world where the traditional dogmas and symbols are becoming obsolete.

We first made some sort of contact about 30 years ago at Victoria University. I arrived to establish a department of Religious Studies. Colin was there to meet me – in the form of his enormous painting known as Gate III. There was something oddly significant about this. Victoria Uni-



versity, because of its founding figures, had long had the reputation of being the most secular university in New Zealand. Yet it was the first to establish a Chair in Religious Studies. Moreover, it proudly displayed in the foyer of its new lecture block the dominating words of great I AM.

Colin had got there before me and, like an early explorer, had planted his flag in the heartland of what may be called New Zealand's spiritual void. This was the void opening up between the religious institutions and the modern secular world as they increasingly rejected each other.

McCahon lived in this void. Yet he turned back to the Bible and became fascinated with such phrases as the great I AM. These words originated as a divine self-declaration. Then the author of the Fourth Gospel put them into the mouth of Jesus Christ to affirm how the divine was becoming enfleshed in the human condition. McCahon, in turn, applied them to himself, as he struggled to achieve his own personal self-affirmation in the face of hostile opposition to his work.

McCahon said that all of his work was autobiographical

and it is entirely fitting that this exhibition is set out chronologically. The greatness of McCahon is that, in depicting where he was at any particular time, he was also revealing to us fellow humans just where we are in the life story of our species.

During the 20th century a radical change was taking place in the human quest for meaning and fulfilment, for that is what religion and spirituality are all about. The truths, myths and symbols of the past were losing their absolute force and were coming to be seen as human in origin and relative to time and place. In this new and rapidly changing world we have to create new models of reality and new expressions of meaning.

As McCahon became passionately engrossed in this undertaking, he not only shocked the religious community but he even offended many in art circles. Some critics insisted that his work be removed from galleries.

Decades later we can salute McCahon as a true prophet. A prophet does not so much foretell the future as interpret the present, but he can be so far ahead of his time that it is only posthumously that his work will be widely appreciated.

Not all who come to this exhibition will be immediately impressed by it. Life is not transparently meaningful. Behind these paintings lies much hard work and agony of

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soul. To do justice to the creative insight they embody, viewers must take time to ponder and share some of the personal experience which produced these works.

Near the end of his career McCahon turned increasingly to Ecclesiastes, the most neglected book in the Bible. Ecclesiastes' expressions of disillusionment with life fitted McCahon's own mood at the time, downcast as he was because of so much hostility to his work and already suffering from the mental condition which brought his painting career to an end.

I too am drawn to Ecclesiastes but I see him in a more positive light. Ecclesiastes is the Greek translation of the Hebrew word *Qoheleth*, which means 'the one who calls or summons'. *Qoheleth* was a Jewish thinker who lived in a rapidly changing world where his own Jewish traditions seemed to be dissolving into unreality. He summoned his readers to face reality, to accept that nothing lasts for ever, and to learn how to make the most of life while it lasted.

McCahon has been a modern *Qoheleth*, summoning us to have the faith to see the world as it really is, so that we too can get the best out of life.

LOCAL GROUPS

New Year

Most of the Local Groups go into recess over the Christmas/January holiday break. We hope to be able to report on more activity in later Newsletters.

Contact Names and Addresses

On the website at <http://sof.wellington.net.nz> you can find the most up-to-date list that we have

Auckland Central

In November they had a member of the Baha'i faith talk to them.

During January, Auckland Central SoF members responded to a questionnaire seeking their views on the content and nature of the Group's monthly meetings programme. A high response rate was achieved and this has enabled the incoming committee to plan a programme more attuned to members' preferences.

About 70% of respondents were satisfied that the previous programme had met the SoF objective of "exploring religious thought and expression" and 65% were happy to have mainly invited speakers to address meetings. However there was almost unanimous support for more involvement in the programme by members themselves, and 25% of respondents expressed a willingness to make a presentation to a meeting. There was also support for meetings comprising group discussion on a given topic notified in advance.

In the interests of getting to know one another better, there was strong support for having a shared meal prior to some of the evening meetings, while just under half liked the idea of a SoF "weekend away" together.

They plan a one-day conference on June 7th with Lloyd Geering talking about his book *Christianity Without God* and with John Salmond responding.

Contact: Derek Pringle phone (09) 489 3589



"Your generous contribution helps fund these solicitations."

Dunedin Group

We are grateful to the Dunedin group for drawing our attention to a UK website called "God-u-Like" — the only site where you can find

- **The God You Like**
- **And The God You Don't**
- **And The God You Never Wanted**
- **And the God You Never Knew Existed**
- **And The Really Stupid One**
- **And The Really Scary One**

You can find them at <http://www.godulike.co.uk> One of your members with web access might copy some of the material and offer it as group discussion material.

"Nanny, do you know Jesus?" is a concrete way of getting to grips with questions about Jesus — is he relevant? unique? accessible through Church language?

That's the question proposed for their meeting of February 27th.

Perhaps its worth asking yourself?

**Dunedin Group Contact: Marjorie Spittle
phone (03)482-1418**

The Female Divine

Travelling With Sophia, encountering the female divine by Catherine Crisp, (\$20 +\$1 p&p)
published by the Women's Resource Centre,
Auckland phone (09)571-9158
www.womanspirit.org.nz

Catherine Crisp is a Gisborne grandmother with Presbyterian roots. Sophia-God has been her travelling companion for many years, having come alive for her at a time when she was feeling diminished by over-exposure to an all-male God. As a wife and mother she became aware of the importance of being female and being a woman. As a spiritual person she longed to connect in a deeper way with a God in whose image she was made.

For much of her life Catherine failed to recognise the Feminine Divine because words like 'pagan' and 'heathen' kept her at a distance. Discovering the biblical image of God as Sophia became a pathway of discovery — this book is the story of that unfolding journey, which Catherine invites you to enter into.

Send your remittance, and your name and address to "WRC Private Bag 11903 Ellerslie"

IN BRIEF

Evangelical

Many evangelical Christians in the UK are "biblically illiterate" and are in danger of becoming "a mile wide and an inch deep".

Those are the views of the Scripture Union's Director of Bible Ministries, John Graystone

Options?

In <http://slate.msn.com/id/2075653/> in December 2002 Jim Holt, wrote "there would appear to be three theological options.

1) You can believe, as I do, that the universe is presided over by a being that is 100 percent malevolent but only 80 percent effective (which explains pretty much everything).

2) You can agree with logical positivists, who claimed that "God exists" is cognitively meaningless and hence neither true nor false, or.

3) you can become a Unitarian".

He might have added "member of SoF" as another option!

FAITH IN CYBERSPACE

Membership Bonus: Internet Discussion

For several years the Sea of Faith Network in the UK has facilitated an Internet discussion list. (The idea, like so many other brilliant ideas, actually started in NZ!)

There's a floating population of 50 to 100 subscribers (its free!) who, at infrequent intervals send and receive emails on the current topics under discussion. Many people merely read and enjoy the debate (they're affectionately known as "lurkers") while others join in with their ideas.

If you would like to be added as a subscriber then send an email to noel@cheer.org.nz with the word **JISCMAIL** in the subject line. You need not add any text. If you look like a genuine paid-up member of SoF (NZ) then I'll arrange for you to become a subscriber.

A recent comment by one subscriber: 'And "God is dead" is sooooo 19th century!'

Borg Study Guide

SoF in Australia reports that a new study guide is available from the FaithFutures Foundation (www.faithfutures.org). The study guide, useful for both group discussion and private reflection, is by FFF Director Gregory Jenks. Its subject is Marcus J. Borg's

book *Reading the Bible Again for the First Time: Taking the Bible Seriously but Not Literally* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2001).

Ultra-Environmentalism

Fed up with the way that we humans are spoiling the earth? There is an answer and you can read all about it at the website of The Voluntary Human Extinction Movement at www.vhemt.org/

For those who take it seriously, goodbye!

Celebrity Atheists

A Web site of "atheist celebrities" lists, among others, Woody Allen, Richard Avedon, Marlon Brando, Jodie Foster, Jack Germond, Christopher Hitchens, Jack Nicholson, Penn and Teller, and Gore Vidal.

Its at www.celebatheists.com/

Ethics Updates

is designed primarily to be used by ethics instructors and their students. It is intended to provide updates on current literature, both popular and professional, that relates to ethics. Its at ethics.acusd.edu/

Enquiring Minds

Wellington's Epworth books have sponsored a website of interesting and provocative article. NZ Softies, especially, will recognise some of the contributors.

Its at www.enquiringminds.co.nz

Shopping Around?

Here's a comprehensive list of religious organizations in NZ — both conventional and unconventional.

Its at www.piperpat.co.nz/nz/religion/

Want To Jump The Queue?

Get ordained on-line and for free! Its at www.spiritualhumanism.org/

I AM Colin McCahon

Visit the website devoted to his works at

www.mccahon.co.nz All the images seem to be downloadable.

SATRS

The St Andrews Trust for the Study of Religion and Society — an excellent source of study material — have moved their website to

www.standrews.org.nz/satrs/

Wired

This is a magazine which specializes in technology-with-attitude. In their December 2002 edition they feature "The New Convergence — After centuries of battle, scientists and theologians are finally forging ahead forming a grand unified theory". We'll leave it to the reader to decide whether there is sound theology or sound science in the articles.

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

ALL ABOUT US

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, maintains a website, assists in setting up 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

For membership requests and for the address of your nearest local group, contact the **Membership Secretary**, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Northland, Wellington phone 04-934-8054.

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

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.org.nz

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 in this Newsletter are available from The St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society:

www.standrews.org.nz/satrs/

LAST WORD FROM THE (CHAIRPERSON)

Fifty years ago a full Auckland Town Hall listened to an address by Martin Niemoller, the World War I submarine captain and Lutheran Pastor who had stood up to Hitler and been imprisoned for his opposition.

I remember as a student listening to this man who had survived the lion's den a few months before.

The part of his address I remember had to do with Hitler's attitude to other people. Niemoller described Hitler as using other people like objects. Niemoller understood **Martin Buber's** idea in *I and Thou*. Buber was one of those who struggled to find ways for Jews and Arabs to live together in peace in the Holy Land.

Abba Eban said, "The exercise of permanent rule over a foreign nation can only be defended by an ideology and rhetoric of self-worship and exclusiveness that are incompatible with the ethical legacy of prophetic Judaism and classical Zionism."

The "ideology and rhetoric of self-worship and exclusiveness" seems to be afflicting more than one culture and more than one religious system at present, and leading us to the brink of disaster.

There is a current discussion among members of Sea of Faith Networks [see p9 - ed] about the relative primacy of the religious drive in the make-up of the human psyche. Some say there is an inherent "itch" which is religious in nature, others see religion as a creation of the human mind, like other aspects of human culture.

The "ideology of self-worship" certainly seems to have deep links to a drive to exercise power over other people.

Richard Rorty has described morals as the effort to find mutually acceptable ways of protecting the weak from the strong. Somehow we need to encourage the discussion necessary to come up with these "mutually acceptable" ways of peace, both in individual behaviour and national policies.

The Sea of Faith is one such forum for discussion. Our Conference this year on "**Making War - Making Peace**" will, we can all hope, encourage us to do the hard work of peace-making. I invite you to join us.

Frank Gaze, Chairperson 2002-2003