



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

# NEWSletter

CONFERENCE 2005

## What Makes Us Human?

ART, RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN DIALOGUE

CHRISTCHURCH IS APTLY NAMED "THE GARDEN CITY" and St Andrew's College's 30 acre site reflects that — particularly in Spring. I attended a conference there on the same dates last year, and noted

- Everything is handy — no problems finding your way around.
- The Senior College lounge/cafeteria makes a great area for displays, morning teas, registrations, etc.
- A choice of boxed lunches was offered; the main meal in the big dining room was of excellent quality.
- The three boarding houses accommodate 171 people in single, twin share or quad share rooms — two are new houses, all are spacious.
- Lecture facilities are well equipped and very good.
- It's only 4 1/2 km to Cathedral Square on a major bus route; 15 minutes from the airport by shuttle, and has plenty of adjacent parking.
- Costs are moderate, and can be kept down as we negotiate with the facility hire person to only hire what we need when we need it.

The college website is at [www.stac.school.nz](http://www.stac.school.nz)

The following have been appointed to the local organizing committee: Ian Crumpton (Chair) Alison Eng (registration), Dawn Tilley & Miriel Jones (accommodation), Laurie Chisholm (database management), Wallace Thomson, Nancy Harris, George Ridley. Others will be co-opted as required!



**We look forward to hosting  
you in the Christchurch  
Spring!**

*Ian Crumpton  
Arrangements Committee  
Chairperson 2005*

Newsletter 61

May 2005

Subscription Renewal

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3. **A Decade Ago**  
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From the Chairperson

## The Keynote Speakers

**At the time of going to press we have engaged two of the three keynote speakers, each acknowledged experts in their field. We are actively persuing the third.**

### Art:

**Jonathan**

**Mane-Wheoki**

Director of Art and Visual Culture at Te Papa.



### Science:

**Richard Hall**

President of the Phoenix Astronomical Society, one of the Royal Society's Communicators, a member of the Astronomy Standing Committee of the Royal Society, and project manager of Stonehenge Aotearoa.



## Conference Workshops

**It is not too early to start** thinking about workshops for the 2005 Conference in Christchurch. If you are eager to share your interest in a particular topic with others; if you feel that others may be interested; and if you can present it in a way which is relevant to the theme of the conference, then a workshop will provide you with the opportunity to do this. Your content must be well researched and well presented, and as the workshop leader you need to be able to facilitate group discussion. If you are interested in presenting a workshop, please contact the 2005 Conference Workshop Co-ordinator:

**Derek Pringle, Tel. (09) 489 3589;  
9 Sylvan Park Avenue, Milford,  
Auckland 1309, or email  
annderek@actrix.co.nz**

## Annual Subscriptions

**THEY ARE DUE FOR RENEWAL BY JULY 1**

In recent years we have collected renewals for *national* membership at the same time as the Conference fees. As the expression goes, it seemed a good idea at the time.

But over the years we have found that this causes confusion, especially among members who do not attend Conference, and also in and between the Steering Committee Treasurer and the Arrangements Committee Treasurer.

**So, we have separated the two processes and this item is devoted to subscription renewal.**

Please look on the envelope that this Newsletter came in. If the number **2005** (or a lower number) appears under your address, then your subscription lapses soon and we ask you to forward \$15 (\$22 if overseas) in the pre-addressed envelope, to the Membership Secretary before July 1, to renew your membership. Just write your name and address on the back of the cheque. If your address has recently changed, then please write "NEW" also. In the past, some people have accidentally paid more than was needed and so they have been credited with extra subscription 'years'. So, if the number on your envelope is *greater than 2005* then you need do nothing at this time.

If you are a Life Member or if your copy of the Newsletter is gratis for any other reason, then you need take no action.

*Local* Sea of Faith Groups operate throughout New Zealand. There is an up-to-date list of them on the website at [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz). These groups meet typically monthly for discussion. They operate autonomously but share their reflections and notices of forthcoming events via this Newsletter, which is produced by the national Steering Committee. Some workshop material useful to Local Groups appears on the website.

While membership of a Local Group is *independent of* membership of the national organisation, we encourage you to subscribe to both. There is no hierarchical relationship between the national body and no levy on Local Groups by the national body. Local Groups typically make a small charge for coffee, bikkies and room hire.

### Remember:

1. If your date shows '2005' or less, then your sub is due by July 1
2. Write your name and address on the back of the cheque (if the address has changed, write "NEW")
3. Send it to us in the pre-addressed envelope
4. Consider being a member of both a Local Group and the national Sea of Faith Network (NZ)

Thank you for continuing to be a national member of the Sea of Faith Network (NZ). We strongly encourage membership of both the national organisation and a Local Group.

*Noel Cheer, Chairperson*

### ANOTHER LOST SOUL?

Did someone change their address but not tell our Membership Secretary at Box 35651, Brown's Bay Auckland?

# A Decade Ago

*from Newsletter 7, May 1994*

## Sea of Faith and Humanism

Forty years the term 'humanist' was coming to be preferred to 'secularist' and 'rationalist'. *Humanist Manifesto II* was signed by 114 prominent people and endorsed by many others. This is longer and more critical of the word religion than was *Manifesto I*, saying that "dogmatic or authoritarian religions that place revelation, God, ritual, or creed above human needs and experience do a disservice to the human species". It acknowledges that some humanists "believe we should reinterpret traditional religions and reinvest them with meanings appropriate to the current situation". But it warns that "such redefinitions often perpetuate old dependencies and escapisms and easily become obscurantist" at a time when "we need radically new human purposes and goals".

It is useful to draw a distinction between humanism (as a general cultural trend) and Humanism (as an ideological label). The former is increasingly influencing the whole world today; it is a mark of the emerging global culture. Many people are humanist without knowing it. But Humanism, as an ideology and a self-chosen label, is more specific even though it covers a wide spectrum from Unitarians and other religious Humanists, at one end, to militantly secular Humanists, at the other. It is at the former end of this spectrum that the Sea of Faith most comfortably fits.

*Lloyd Geering (the then Editor)*

### THE SEA OF FAITH IN AUCKLAND invites you to a ONE DAY CONFERENCE

*Saturday, 21 May, from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.*

## RELIGION and POLITICS

### *First Address: Dr Marion Maddox*

Senior Lecturer Religious Studies, Victoria University, Wellington

### *The Rise of Faith-Based Politics*

A comparison between the politics of the religious right in the USA and Australia and the implications for New Zealand

### *Second Address: Dr John Hinchcliff, CNZOM*

Auckland City Councillor, Formerly Vice-Chancellor Auckland University of Technology

### *Balancing Christian Idealism and the Practicalities of Politics*

Group discussion will follow the addresses. The final session will be a Panel Discussion in which the principal speakers will be joined by:

- **Gordon McLauchlan**, writer, broadcaster and public affairs consultant
- **Raymond Miller**, Senior Lecturer Political Studies, Auckland University

Registration on the day from 9.00 a.m. Bookstall on site.

Location: Somervell Church, 497 Remuera Road, Auckland

Cost: \$15 (includes morning and afternoon tea). Bring your own lunch. Cafes at Upland Road five minutes away.

Limited Parking on site, but plenty on nearby streets.

Enquiries: phone (09) 413-8513 or (09) 486-6445

*Chair: Noel Cheer, Chairperson of Sea of Faith Network (NZ)*



Look on the website at [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz)  
for the complete list

## Local Groups

### AN INVITATION TO DIALOGUE

*Local Groups Coordinator, Peter Timmins, writes:*

At the February planning meeting of the Steering Committee, I volunteered to look into what could be done to improve the support network for Local Groups. I wanted to do this as I have been a member of the Hamilton/Waikato organising committee for some eight years now and was convenor for three years, and know at first hand the problems of continuing to provide interesting meeting topics.

Generally our group has functioned well, and over the years several different enthusiasts have taken a turn at the helm, which means undertaking to be responsible for the programme, which, for us, means a monthly 2 hour Friday evening meeting starting at 7pm, but preceded by an optional drinks/meal package which starts at 5:30pm. We have been operating for some 10 years now, but this year for the first time, have struggled to get a group willing to undertake responsibility for the year's programme. So, we are seeking to keep operational by limiting ourselves to quarterly whole group meetings and to establish a number of smaller house groups who will meet more informally and more frequently.

Noel has always been willing to publish in the national Newsletter reports from Local Groups but up until now no attempt has been made to establish a more formal link between the groups on the one hand, or between the groups and the national Steering Committee on the other.

So, if you are currently or have been previously responsible for organising a Local Group, I would welcome your thoughts on what could be done to improve communication between groups, share successful programme ideas etc. One of the attendees at the 2004 Conference, for instance, suggested in their evaluation form that there should be a time-slot set aside at Conference for Local Group organisers to meet. Is that an idea you would support?

Send your thoughts/ideas to me at 272 Pencarrow Rd, Tamahere, Hamilton RD3, or email me at [c.a.oconnell@xtra.co.nz](mailto:c.a.oconnell@xtra.co.nz).

I will try to provide feedback both through the Newsletter and by an email circular.

*Peter Timmins.*

## THE BOOKLET: RIP

Your Steering Committee has had to give up on the project to print all the Keynote speeches and some of the Electives from the last Conference in a booklet. We just couldn't bring it all together.

But you would have received shortened versions of two of the Keynotes along with the November Newsletter and the full texts of those are on the website.

Dr Anwar's paper is available from the Resource Centre (see page 10) for \$5, postage included. For personal reasons she has published it under a pen-name.

## Book Noted

**FROM THE MIDDLE EAST 2700 YEARS AGO** comes a tale of intrigue, sex and battle that will thrill and enthrall you.

Can a tiny nation dependent on trade with all its neighbours, stand up to a superpower? Judah faces being swallowed up by the Mesopotamian superpower, Asshur. As one by one their neighbours fall under Asshur's heel Judah and Jerusalem suffer both trade restrictions and the subversion of their distinctive culture.

Isaiah saw the looming disaster and tried to alert his people to their danger. Despite his powerful position and his influence over younger rulers, he failed. That's history.

The new release from Beulah Press,

### **Isaiah: A man of sorrows**

traces the story of Isaiah and his family.

Conflicting visions torment him and he is helpless to avert coming tragedy. As crisis succeeds crisis you see through the eyes of Assyrian emperors, an orphaned princess, and the Great Lady of Jerusalem. You hear from her king, her priests, her general and, in the midst of all, from the Virgin Daughter of Zion herself.

Dr. Reinken reads Hebrew and other West Semitic languages fluently. From Isaiah's writings she has woven a fantastic biography of the prophet. Isaiah is one of the world's greatest poets, and the problems he faced are pertinent to us.

"The dialogue is sharp and contemporary and yet the reader is never in doubt that this is a story of people from another age. The people come sparklingly alive from the pages."

**Check out more details on [www.beulah.co.nz](http://www.beulah.co.nz) .**



# Books Reviewed

## By and About Don Cupitt

- Don Cupitt, *The Way to Happiness*, Polebridge Press, 2005,
- Gavin Hyman (Ed.), *New Directions in Philosophical Theology*, Ashgate, 2004.

One could hardly imagine that two books could be so closely connected as these and yet be so different.

The first is Don Cupitt's most recent book, sub-titled 'A Theory of Religion'.

As he explains, he is not talking about a scholar's theory of what religion is but a way of looking at religion which makes it a live option for highly-secularized people.

In some respects it is a sequel to his three little books about the way in which our common daily expressions betray the unconscious changes taking place in our religious thinking.

He says, 'We should now see religion, not as a way for preparing for a better world, but as a symbolic language with which we voice our joy in and love for the world, life and each other'.

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**"We should not draw cheques upon the past, or the future, or tradition, or authority, because they will not be honoured."**

***The Way to Happiness* p6**

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Some eighty pages of reflections, set out in unheaded paragraphs rather than chapters, lead us to reflect on our own life today. They are more like disconnected jottings than a sustained argument leading to a final conclusion. Yet the insights all contribute in one way or another to the theme quoted above. They cannot be readily summarized but are all worth thinking through in the light of one's own experience.

At a time when (as he says) 'the old faiths are crumbling fast', what we need is 'simple, clear and honest religious thinking in the everyday vocabulary of ordinary people'.

That is exactly what we do not find in the second book, one intended to be a festschrift to honour Don Cupitt on his 70th birthday. In gratitude to Don for having, according to the editor, revitalised the study of theology, eleven scholars discuss his work.

Their essays are all very academic and, with the exception of that by Linda Woodhead, they are so dense that (speaking for myself) I find life too short to persevere with them. In this respect the contributors do not appear to have been paying attention to what Don has been saying.

The day of traditional metaphysics and philosophical theology is over. Don himself may not always have been as lucid in the past as one would like, but he has always been worth persevering with. Linda Woodhead acknowledges that theology is in deep trouble and it is doubtful if the other contributors have recognised this yet. She does, however, raise some good points as to why Cupitt has not reached a wider readership than he has; these are points that the SoF movement should consider, for they may apply to it as well.

Lloyd Geering

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Nigel Leaves, *Surfing on the Sea of Faith: The Ethics and Religion of Don Cupitt*  
Polebridge Press, Ca, 2005

This is the companion volume to the author's *Odyssey on the Sea of Faith* which was reviewed by Hugh Gilman in Newsletter 57. Both volumes were derived from the author's 2001 Ph.D thesis at Murdoch University. Nigel Leaves is Director and Dean of Studies of Woolaston College in Perth and is the chair of the Perth branch of Sea of Faith in Australia.

The first volume takes us more or less chronologically on a trip through Don's work: from the Negative Theology starting in 1967, via Non-realism, Postmodernism and Anti-realism, Expressionism, Be-ing, Ordinary Language theology, culminating (for the time being, for Don is an evolving creature!) with today's Religion of the Future.

This second volume deals with three major themes that emerge out of the first volume: ethics, religion and the SoF Networks.

Under "ethics" the author (who shares with this reviewer a passion for categorisation) sees Cupitt passing through five "phases". The first, Moral Asceticism, dismisses the five styles of moral argument that depend upon external criteria; in his *New Christian Ethics* Cupitt referred to the

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**"ethics, religion and the SoF Networks"**

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cosmic-protection-racket version of Christianity' in the 1950s; the third phase gave three objective grounds for ethical theory despite there being nothing more substantial than a 'democratically evolving consensus'. Phase Four — Solar (personal) Ethics — introduced us to ways to handle our transience (in six pointers); while the last Phase "Humanitarian (social) Ethics asks for a clear distinction between Church theology and Kingdom theology so that (page 45)

"Postmodernity, has 'realised' the religious humanism espoused by Jesus in his kingdom theology."

Still categorising, we are taken through Cupitt's "Four ideas of the essence of religion" which developed over the last 25 years. At the time of the TV series 20 years ago, he defined religion as "a way of affirming the value of human life from the first breath to the very last." Then a three-year period of the 'discipline of the void' — there is no metaphysical world, our world is 'outsideless' (as he elsewhere writes, so too are our lives).

The two approaches to religion in the last decade are Religious Humanism wherein "the divine comes down into the human world ... [and] ... theology is translated into anthropology ..") and Post-Christianity, "a natural development of the tradition ... [which has] ... a radical tradition of self-transcendence ...").

For those still agonising over whether to leave the church or whether to remain and try to fix it, Chapter 4 sets out the issues among which we find these two neat expressions: "Churches are intellect-free zones" and "Christianity isn't about saving one's soul, but about losing oneself in the work of love."

The last section is an overview of the developments of the Networks in the UK, New Zealand and Australia. The author helpfully points out that there is no hierarchical relationship between them. By medium of the Internet there is a free exchange of opinions, ideas and Newsletter material throughout this "network of Networks". He writes of Don's special affection for organisations that came into being to discuss the ramifications of the TV series. Nigel doesn't mention that, in the case of New Zealand, our Network was well underway before our cautious government TV organisation got round to broadcasting it. Though Don did not set up the Networks, he retains a strong involvement in their activities — he is (along with Lloyd Geering) a Life Member of the NZ Network.

It is usual, once an organisation is well established, to eulogise its founder and at first glance these books might appear to do so. But that would be only incidental. For many in SoF, Don Cupitt has been a bit enigmatic — changing his orientation every few years. On page 9 of *Odyssey* Nigel wrote "Cupitt has declined to write his own autobiography, insisting many times that his writings are his autobiography because they reflect a string of selves that have grappled with an ever-changing religious faith."

The first book of this pair is a sort of roadmap, tracing the development of Don's thoughts. The second volume teases out the ramifications in what is (in this context at least) paradoxically called "the real world", though still at one remove. Perhaps that slight distancing is a characteristic of the democratic nature of the Sea of Faith in general. It (and Don) don't provide answers — but they wonderfully sharpen up the questions.

Availability may be a matter of some difficulty. Although both books deserve attention among liberal/rational post-Christian, religious-humanist readers, retailers could easily form the opinion that there might be only small number of readers. That not need be the case because as the malaise that Don writes of spreads over the already declining mainline denominations, there is a detectable thirst for ideas among people who are looking for alternatives. Don's large output of material and Nigel's two-volume survey of it should help such people. Both books are available from [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

Noel Cheer

## The Pagan Christ

- Tom Harpur, *The Pagan Christ*, Allen & Unwin, 2005 (Australasian edition)

Some may have heard the author on Radio New Zealand recently when he was here to promote this book. He comes with good credentials, being a Canadian ex-Anglican priest and one time professor of New Testament studies at Toronto. Some who heard him (as I did not) urged me to read it.

I approached it with an open mind and read it reasonably carefully; but I became increasingly disappointed. On the surface the book appears to reflect breadth of research but on closer examination it shows no depth of understanding.

The author lacks a critical mind and resorts to much emotive language. While strongly critical of Christian fundamentalists for reading the Bible literally, he betrays a fundamentalist mind-set himself by blindly accepting his new position as a dogma.

He became convinced that there was no historical

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### he betrays a fundamentalist mind-set himself by blindly accepting his new position as a dogma.

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Jesus and the Christian story is a fabrication based on an ancient Egyptian myth. (He believes it is none the worse for that, calling upon the support of Joseph Campbell to emphasize the essential truth to be found in myth.)

He confesses that he is greatly dependent on the works of Alvin Boyd Kuhn and Gerald Massey but does not realise how mesmerised he has become by them. These two expound the theosophical theories (better classed as dogmas), which originated with Madame Blavatsky in the 19th century.

Theosophy, starting from a Hindu base that it still reflects, contends that the essential truth in all religions is basically the same. It has little interest in history, for it believes ultimate reality to be non-material and essentially spiritual.

Harpur draws upon modern biblical scholarship when it suits his cause (and this gives his book a faint air of respectability) but ignores it when it doesn't. Many of his quotes are taken out of context and made to support a viewpoint their authors would not agree with. He quotes some of the scholars of the Jesus Seminar and then criticises them for clinging to the traditional view that there was an historical Jesus.

None of his arguments stand up to close examination and some of them, particularly in the field of linguistics, are unadulterated rubbish.

One wonders how such reputable publishers as Allen and Unwin allowed themselves to be so taken in by this book, or did they simply see the profit to be made from a gullible public, which has been turned off by traditional Christianity?

Lloyd Geering

# Freedom, Religion and Spirit

*A Review by Alan M Goss*

**Over the period March-April 2004** Dr Albert Moore, who headed Religious Studies at the University of Otago 1967-1992, led a Dunedin U3A Course on the topic "Freedom, Religion and Spirit" which is now available in booklet form. These published lectures, suggested and approved by the Dunedin U3A Board, are wide-ranging, from primal cultures and ancient religions to modern and post-modern forms of spirituality.

They are not brief summaries of ancient religions. The material is ideal for study groups or for the individual reader willing to have new doors opened and new connections suggested to them. In short they are intended to stimulate thinking, to take "soundings" on the chosen topic, and they do the job admirably. The lectures are written in a clear conversational style — they are not without the renowned Moore-ish humour — and reflect

the author's distinguished 40 years experience in the religious studies field.

Those who shared in the Dunedin U3A Course found them lively and challenging, readers of this booklet will no doubt feel the same. Copies available from Secretary, U3A Dunedin Charitable Trust, 5A Fifield Street, Roslyn, Dunedin. Cost \$10 plus postage, cheques made out to Rodgers and Associates (for U3A).

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## Faith in Cyberspace

BYTE-SIZED MORSELS



### Faith Organizations: Compiled by the Rockridge Institute

#### *Progressive Faith Organizations*

- Centre for Progressive Religious Thought:  
<http://www.progressivereligion.org.au>
- Zion's Herald: <http://zionsherald.org>
- Sojourners: <http://www.sojo.net>
- Preaching Peace: <http://www.preachingpeace.org>
- North American Coalition for Christianity and Ecology: <http://www.nacce.org>
- Every Voice Network: <http://www.everyvoice.net>
- Future Church: <http://www.futurechurch.org.nz>
- Common Sense Christianity:  
<http://www.commonsensechristianity.org>
- Equal Partners in Faith: <http://www.us.net/epf>
- Sightings, Martin Marty Center:  
<https://listhost.uchicago.edu/mailman/listinfo/sightings>
- The Center for Progressive Christianity:  
[www.tpc.org](http://www.tpc.org)
- Progressive Christians Uniting:  
<http://progressivechristiansuniting.org>
- Snowstar Institute – Canada:  
<http://www.snowstarinstitute.org/>
- The World Union for Progressive Judaism:  
<http://wupj.org>
- The Westar Institute:  
<http://www.westarinstitute.org/>

#### *Interfaith Organizations*

- National Council of Churches:  
<http://www.nccusa.org/>
- United Religions Initiative  
<http://www.uri.org/>
- North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) :  
[www.nain.org](http://www.nain.org)
- Council for a Parliament of the World Religions:  
<http://www.cpwr.org/>

#### *Activist Organizations*

- Soulforce:  
<http://www.soulforce.org/main/mission.shtml>

#### *Resources*

- Religious Tolerance:  
<http://www.religioustolerance.org/>
- The Pluralism Project – Harvard University:  
[http://www.pluralism.org/about/eck\\_cv.php](http://www.pluralism.org/about/eck_cv.php)
- Religion On-Line: <http://www.religion-online.org/>
- Liberal Christian Parenting:  
<http://messageboards.ivillage.com>
- Radical Faith: <http://radicalfaith.org/>
- Faith and Values Media:  
<http://www.faithandvalues.com/>

#### *Blogs and Boards*

- Buzzflash <http://www.buzzflash.com/>
- Daily Kos [www.dailykos.com](http://www.dailykos.com)
- Common Dreams <http://www.commondreams.org/>
- A Religious Liberal Blog  
<http://religiousliberal.blogspot.com>
- Christian Dems <http://christiandems.blogspot.com/>
- Progressive Christians  
<http://www.progressive-christian.blogspot.com/>
- Abundancetrek  
<http://www.abundancetrek.com/blog>
- Catholics for Kerry  
[catholicsforkerry@yahoo.com](mailto:catholicsforkerry@yahoo.com)
- Cross <http://cross.fortt.com>
- Faithful Progress  
<http://faithfulprogressive.blogspot.com>  
[www.rockridgeinstitute.org](http://www.rockridgeinstitute.org)

#### *For The Flipside*

A Skeptic's Guide to Christianity: a detailed and well-argued dissent:  
<http://www.geocities.com/paulintobin/index.html>

## What Jesus Wouldn't Do

*The following extracts came from Sojourner's Magazine March 9, 2005 and it describes this book:*

*God's Politics: Why the Right Gets It Wrong and the Left Doesn't Get It*  
Jim Wallis, (Harper San Francisco).

### **The politics of Jesus is a problem for the religious right.**

In Matthew's 25th chapter, Jesus speaks of the hungry, the homeless, the stranger, prisoners, and the sick and promises he will challenge all his followers on the judgment day with these words, "As you have done to the least of these, you have done to me."

The hardest saying of Jesus and perhaps the most controversial in our post-Sept. 11 world must be: "Love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you." Let's be honest: How many churches in the United States have heard sermons preached from either of these Jesus texts in the years since America was viciously attacked on that world-changing September morning in 2001? Shouldn't we at least have a debate about what the words of Jesus mean in the new world of terrorist threats and pre-emptive wars?

Christ commands us to not only see the splinter in our adversary's eye but also the beams in our own, which often obstruct our own vision. To name the face of evil in the brutality of terrorist attacks is good theology, but to say they are evil and we are good is bad theology that can lead to dangerous foreign policy. Christ instructs us to love our enemies, which does not mean a submission to their hostile agendas or domination, but does mean treating them as human beings also created in the image of God and respecting their human rights as adversaries and even as prisoners. The words of Jesus are either authoritative for Christians, or they are not. And they are not set aside by the very real threats of terrorism. The threat of terrorism does not overturn Christian ethics.

...

Many people of faith have grown weary of the religious right's attempts to narrow the moral litmus test to abortion and gay marriage. ... Any serious reading of the Bible points toward poverty as a religious issue, and candidates should always be asked by Christian voters how they will treat "the least of these." Stewardship of God's earth is clearly a question of Christian ethics. Truth telling is also a religious issue that should be applied to a candidate's rationales for war, tax cuts, or any other policy, as is



humility in avoiding the language of "righteous empire," which too easily confuses the roles of God, church, and nation.

War, of course, is also a deeply theological matter. The near unanimous opinion of religious leaders worldwide that the Iraq war failed to fit "just war" criteria is an issue for many Christians, especially as the warnings from religious leaders have proved prophetically and tragically accurate. The "plagues of war," as the pope has referred to the continuing problems in Iraq, are in part a consequence of a "Christian president" simply not listening to the counsel of religious leaders who tried to speak to the White House. What has happened to the "consistent ethic of life," suggested by Catholic social teaching, which speaks against abortion, capital punishment, poverty, war, and a range of human rights abuses too often selectively respected by pro-life advocates?

The religious right's grip on public debates about values has been driven in part by a media that continues to give airtime to the loudest religious voices, rather than the most representative, leaving millions of Christians and other people of faith without a say in the values debate.

But this is starting to change as progressive and prophetic faith voices are speaking out with a confidence and moral urgency not seen for 25 years. Mobilized by human suffering in many places, groups motivated by religious social conscience (including many evangelicals not defined by the religious right) have hit a new stride in efforts to combat poverty, destructive wars, human rights violations, pandemics like HIV/AIDS, and genocide in places like Sudan.

In politics, the best interest of the country is served when the prophetic voice of religion is heard — challenging both right and left from consistent moral ground. The evangelical Christians of the 19th century combined revivalism with social reform and helped lead movements for abolition and women's suffrage — not to mention the faith-based movement that directly preceded the rise of the religious right, namely the American civil rights movement led by the black churches.

The truth is that most of the important movements for social change in America have been fueled by religion — progressive religion. The stark moral challenges of our time have once again begun to awaken this prophetic tradition.

**As the religious Right loses influence, nothing could be better for the health of both church and society than a return of the moral center that anchors our nation in a common humanity. If you listen, these voices can be heard rising again.**

*Jim Wallis is the editor of Sojourners magazine.*



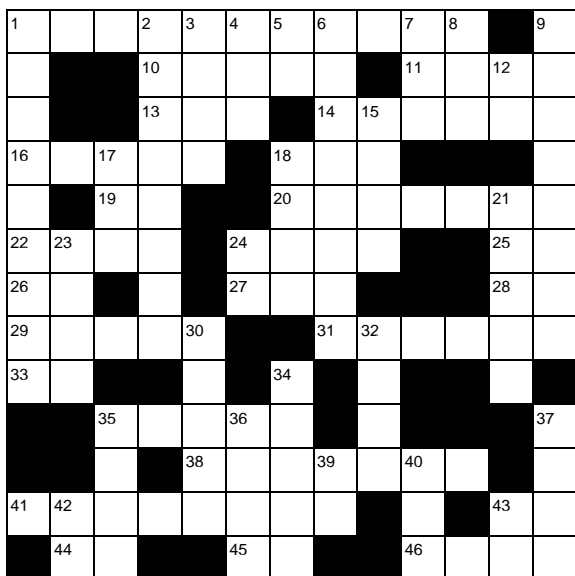
# SofWord N<sup>o</sup> 2

## Across

1. The study of how we use language
10. Concur
11. Hunted animal seeking water
13. Dr. Jekyll's creator
14. Excessively well-shod lady
16. Fall arrested by elastic
18. What water was to Adam
19. Secret Maori deity
20. Nature of the cup in which Omar drowned his reputation
22. Stringy but thicker
24. An automobile with authority
25. He shone for the Egyptians
26. Truncated editor
27. Stick yours in to get heard
28. Government Rail
29. A place where belief was codified
31. They each have their day!
33. Between em and oh
35. Over, and out!
38. Take a good look at.
41. Where Don says Its All at 4-4.
43. You'd say this twice to a black sheep
44. Old French
45. Isle of Man race
46. Might's partner.

## Down

1. Where Schweitzer healed
2. Waterspout repelling evil
3. Can be said of 2 down
4. IRD in USA
5. Compass point
6. Fossil hunter with cosmic vision
7. Fidel's friend, what?
8. Roman soldier's reduced pay?
9. Cosmic battles 4-4
12. Your cheque bounced
15. Flesh in an edible way
17. Small swig
18. Paul visited the lesser version of this
21. It makes music, sometimes biological
23. He names mid-week day
24. Small folio
30. Pre-TXT messenger
32. Suffix of totality
34. Boat, work
35. Jazzy refrain
36. Take this way out.
37. Riddle not susceptible to logic
39. Most excellent
40. Nickname for Charlie's country
42. Moon of Jupiter
43. Versatility in sexuality.



# In Brief

## ⇒ To Be Plural

"The question is how they are to be related in such a way as to maintain the pluralism that has served this country [USA] so well. Again, the core of that pluralism is not the dogma that no value is to be preferred over another, but the conviction that civility and public peace are important, that respect for opponents and minorities and their opinions is a crucial element of the democratic society, and that however persuaded I am of the rightness of my position, I may still, after all, be wrong."

*William Martin Chavanne,  
author of "With God on Our Side"*

## ⇒ To Be Radical

"At a fundamental level, to be Christian is to be radical. It follows that the expression "radical Christian" is redundant. So also, a "non-radical Christian" is as great a nonsense as a 'non-political socialist'. Indeed for the church to be non-political is also a nonsense. The Church professes commitment to a new world and to new life. Thus she is by her own definition radical. Christian theology itself is inherently radical. But it harbours major differences about how that radical transformation comes about or should come about. A literalistic approach to the New Testament will not, however, reveal the radicalism which goes back directly to Jesus, because within the NT canon there are non-Pauline, inauthentic Pauline and anti-Paul letters which are designed to make Christianity palatable to the empire."

*Alan Webster*

## ⇒ To Be Inclusive

"You can safely assume that you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do."

*Anne Lamott*

## ⇒ To Be Noticed

SoF(NZ) have arranged for small advertisements to appear as follows:

- The Listener: May 7, July 2, Oct 1, Dec 3, Feb 4
- sPanz: May, August, November February
- Touchstone: June, August, October, February

## Answers to SofWord No.1

**Across:** 1:contingent 6:DC 8:Nee 10:Titus 11:Nos  
14:Rum 15:Petrine 16:Lie 18:Reli 19:Tao 20:is  
21:CA 23:UT 24:Bygone 25:Idolize 28:PTO 29:ie  
30:nate 33:os 35:bis 37:GOP 38:amen 40:nonrealist  
41:tu

**Down:** 1:catholicity 2:native 3:inspiration 4:ne 5:gentile  
7:comatose 9:creationism 12:or 13:sin 17:is 21:cult  
22:myth 26:opt in 27:extol 31:aga 32:epi 33:oat  
34:gnu 35:Bo 36:sr 39:ET

## 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 national Steering Committee publishes a regular Newsletter, maintains a website, assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference.

We have two **Life Members**: Lloyd Geering (since 2001) and Don Cupitt (since 2002).

The current **Chairperson** is Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper St, Titahi Bay, phone 04-236-7533

Membership of the national organisation costs \$15 per household per year (\$22 if outside NZ). Write your cheque to "SoF (NZ)" and mail to **The Membership Secretary**, P.O. Box 35651, Browns Bay, Auckland. (Phone 09-478-2490).

Members may borrow tapes, books etc from the **SoF Resource Centre** at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga — Suzi Thirlwall (07)578-2775

Further details on all of the above can be found on our website at **www.sof.org.nz**

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 SoF policy is that which is accompanied by a by-line of a member of the Steering Committee.

### Optional Extras ...

"SoF" is 28 page A4, 6-times-a-year magazine produced by the UK SoF Network. To start your subscription, send \$53 to the SoF(NZ) Membership Secretary (address above). Renewal rates will be advised from the UK. Note that this is additional to membership of Sea of Faith (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

**Your Steering Committee** spent a long time in debate in order to come up with the theme for this year's Conference and, in a flash of inspiration, we settled on the humanising effects of "art, science and religion". They are three important cornerstones of modern society.

Yes, there are other cornerstones: "money, technology and advertising", as an example, but they don't have quite the ennobling ring of the first three. Indeed, Don Cupitt [in Newsletter 36] has suggested that we might be in for "a trash future" based on "technology, entertainment, fundamentalism".

We have engaged two first-class keynote speakers (see page 2) and were in negotiations with a third when this Newsletter went to print.

**Several items in this Newsletter** touch on, in one way or another, the dangers of religion competing with the political process. We must acknowledge that there are sincerely-held views on all sides of all major issues, moral and political. The democratic process is the best forum that our society has yet come up with to debate such issues and where necessary, to arbitrate on them.

That is why it is disappointing that the religious right wants to settle issues by a literalist reading of the Bible. They preach *certainty* where life can provide only uncertainty; *stability* where there can only be change; *uniformity* where diversity would be kinder and more just.

Our modern world is more complex and it contains a richer diversity of cultures than at any time in the past. Politics is complex and ambiguous and is not clarified by slogans from the religious right, however well-intentioned they may be.

Religious-fantasy notions abound, such as: divine election; of being 'saved'; of the expectation of being airlifted to eternity in The Rapture. These skew the believer's relationship with others and with reality in general.

Let's keep our feet on the ground!

Noel Cheer,  
Steering Committee Chairperson,  
2004-2005



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cut around the dotted line and pin on your lapel !