

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 116, January 2015

TRIBUTES TO JILL HARRIS

In the early evening of Christmas Day, Jill slipped quietly and peacefully from life into death. Her journey here had ended. And with the ending of her journey began all the other journeys that have brought us here this morning to this place. At some time and in some way Jill Harris touched our lives – and we touched hers. And in those experiences, no matter how great or small – she became part of us and we became part of her. And with her death a little bit of us dies too. And because we live on, a little bit of her lives on in us. We don't take the death of another human being lightly. Human life and human personality are important gifts which we value and cherish.

We lose something of immense worth and significance when someone dies. And we are given two great gifts to help us deal with that sense of loss. One is grief and the other is thanksgiving. That is what we are here to do today. To express our sadness and grief at the loss of Jill and to give thanks for her life and her achievements.

FROM THE FUNERAL SERVICE CONDUCTED BY
THE REV DR JIM CUNNINGHAM
AT ST ANDREWS ON THE TERRACE, 30 DECEMBER, 2014



FROM IAN'S TRIBUTE

When Jill was diagnosed just over a year ago with an incurable leukaemia, we were shattered. But she resolved to live as long and as positively as she could. She shed several kilos – and that proved an excellent reason to go out and buy a new wardrobe. Milestones over the past year were a memorable book launch in April and her birthday in May. Then she set about preparing a selection of her liturgies for publication next

month. At the last, in the hospice, she was present for the family for most of Christmas Day.

Stephen and Rodney have spoken of Jill's love of family. She shared deeply in all the joys and the anguish that are part and parcel of family life. And always her compass was set true north to love. Our grief at her passing testifies to that.

After fifty-four years of marriage, what shall I miss most about Jill? Her love, her smile, her probing mind, her drive, her conversation, her creativity, a companionship that grew ever deeper over the years. My heart aches.

But I shall nurture so many fond memories, for the life Jill and I shared was a thing of beauty, and

**A thing of beauty is a joy for ever:
Its loveliness increases; it will never
Pass into nothingness; but still will keep
A bower quiet for us, and a sleep
Full of sweet dreams, and health, and
quiet breathing.**

Haere ra, Jill, haere, haere, haere.

FROM JOCELYN'S TRIBUTE

Jocelyn Armstrong is a long-time friend, who knew Jill in both her Auckland and her Wellington days. They shared many interests, both with a feeling for literature, a background in teaching, and both with an ecumenical commitment.

Jill taught me to use words with care – as I do today! – no half sentences, no taking things for granted, – she would question me until I gave her the full picture. She wanted the larger context beyond the first context – of what I was telling her. In widening circles she moved – seeking to respond to the beyond – as well as to the near at hand.

Long ago in the 70s and 80s we women met weekly, challenged by the feminist movement. In our feminist theology group we gained self confidence, sought a new independence, a new way of being women in the world. We read the Bible with our newly-critical women's eyes, challenged a church shaped by men, questioned the male language that defined what we called God.

And Jill, you moved with sure tread and steady gaze into this outer layer of context, with your searching attitude, direct questions and challenges.

But the 70s and 80s provided a further context which Jill did not hesitate to confront – the context of anti-

racism and anti-apartheid activity. Her collection of anti-apartheid posters revealed her appreciation of the impact of images, metaphors, words and colour.

But the ever-widening circles of context Jill moved into were not only those provided by the world around her. She had the will and the courage to be part of creating a new context.

Impatient with the institutional church Ian and Jill moved into the Sea of Faith community and into the Ephesus Group. In this context, Jill's imagination, love of words, search for meaning and desire to explore the mystery of the beyond gave expression to her liturgies.

[Jill and Ian were on the first Sea of Faith Steering Committee, with Jill as Secretary, when the first Conference was held in Hamilton in 1993.]

That richness of dimension, that complex of ever widening circles of context, were central to Jill's approach to life.

It is clear in Jill's novel published this past year - *The Red Suitcase* – “a rattling good yarn” - to use Jill's own words. The main context, inspired by Jill's uncle's experience, is the flying of bombing raids in World War II Europe. But the inner context is that of a young girl living with her father in her grandmother's home in Jill's beloved Takapuna, with its beach, rocks and garden-surrounded villas.

And now Jill - rest in peace in the outermost context of our God given life.

JILL THE WRITER

This section and the copy on page 4 were provided by Makaro Press.

Jill Harris is the award-winning author of children's and young adult books: *The Red Suitcase* (2014), *At the Lake* (2011), *Missing Toby* (2007) and *Sil* (2005).

Jill grew up in Takapuna, Auckland, and worked as a teacher and a librarian, retiring to write children's novels, poetry and liturgies. She lived with her husband, Ian, in Eastbourne and, with him, is a founding member of the Ephesus Group [as well as of The Sea of Faith Network in New Zealand]. Writing the liturgies, as with all her books, grew out of a commitment to the power of story, music, science and the natural world.

Her last publication, *The Ephesus Liturgies*, grew out of the life of Ephesus, a group of about thirty people who have been meeting in Wellington since 1990 to explore new ways of understanding and expressing Christian faith in a secular world.

The four liturgies [there are more] in this volume reflect on making sense of our lives, love and selfishness, our obligations to the earth that nourishes us, and the celebration of Christmas. See more on page 4 of this Newsletter.

ALL ABOUT US

SEA OF FAITH: EXPLORING VALUES, SPIRITUALITY AND MEANING

We are an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint.

Our formal name is The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Inc.

We follow similar organisations in the UK and Australia in taking our name from the 1984 BBC TV series and book by the British religious academic, Don Cupitt.

"Sea of Faith" both traces the decline of traditional Christian influence in the West in the past 250 years and invites the viewer to consider what might replace it. **In New Zealand, Sea of Faith provides a forum for the continued exploration.**

The Sea of Faith Network itself has no creed. We draw our members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions.

Our national **Steering Committee** publishes a Newsletter six times each year, maintains a website at www.sof.org.nz, assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference.

We have five **Life Members**: Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK), Noel Cheer, Ian Harris and Fred Marshall. (The late Alan Goss was, for a time, a Life Member).

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Deadline dates for submitted Newsletter copy for 2015 are: 21/02/15, 21/04/15, 21/06/15, 21/08/15, 21/10/15.

Members may borrow books, CDs, and DVDs from the Resource Centre which is managed by Suzi Thirlwall phone (07) 578-2775 email susanthirlwall@yahoo.co.nz
Refer to the catalogue on the website.

Membership of the national organisation costs \$20 per household per year (\$30 if outside NZ). Both charges drop to \$15 if the Newsletter is emailed and not on paper.

To join, send remittance and details to The Membership Secretary (listed above) or Internet bank to 38 9000 0807809 00 and tell pcowley@paradise.net.nz your mailing details.

Bonus: If you already receive the paper version then you can receive the email version in addition, *at no charge*. Send an email requesting that to pcowley@paradise.net.nz

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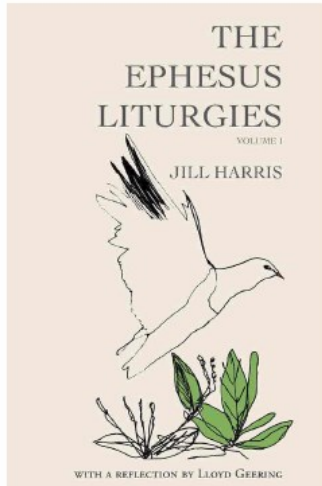
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- *Report on decisions made at the February 14th Steering Committee Conference planning meeting. Meanwhile, mark your diaries for October 2 to 4 and read the study guides at <http://www.sof.org.nz/2015studyguides.htm>*
- *The Charlie Hebdo massacre. Where do you stand? Are freedom of speech and murderous retaliation inalienable rights? Where to from here? Letters to The Editor at noel@cheer.org.nz by Feb 15 please.*

THE EPHEBUS LITURGIES

With deep affection for Jill and with thanks for her legacy, we invite you to respond to the following.

Become a friend of Makāro Press and support
the publication of one exciting new title:



ISBN 978-0-9941172-0-5

RETAIL PRICE: \$35

INTRODUCTION BY IAN HARRIS
A REFLECTION BY LLOYD GEERING

For \$35 plus postage
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- tick the box: 'Become a Makaro Friend to support *The Ephesus Liturgies*'
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The Ephesus Liturgies grew out of the life of Ephesus, a group of about thirty people who have been meeting in Wellington since 1990 to explore new ways of understanding and expressing Christian faith in a secular world.

Taking the original concept of 'liturgy' as meaning the work of the people (more below), the Ephesus community has worked to develop a form of worship that seeks to make sense of contemporary human experience while drawing on shared traditions of faith and worship.

The four liturgies in this volume reflect on making sense of our lives, love and selfishness (an Easter liturgy), our obligations to the earth that nourishes us, and the celebration of Christmas.

Extracts from 'A Reflection on the Ephesus Liturgies' by Lloyd Geering

Since 'liturgy' is not a word in common use, even by laypeople in the church, some explanation of its meaning is appropriate in reflecting on the liturgies written by Jill Harris for the Ephesus Group we both attend. I myself had never heard of the word until, as a young theological student over seventy years ago, I was required to take a course called 'Liturgics' and discovered the term referred to the various ways we were to conduct the whole array of church services from Sunday worship to funerals.

The word derived, I was told, from the Greek *leitourgia*, which in turn is made up of the words for 'people' (*laos*) and 'work' (*ergon*).

Etymologically, then, it means 'people work'. Later I discovered this word appears in the Greek New Testament and is variously translated as 'service' or 'ministry' (usually of a public nature).

Actually, the word had been originally coined to describe the practice in ancient Greek city states whereby rich citizens voluntarily rendered public service to the state. As our terms 'public servant' and 'state services' clearly show, we still talk of rendering public service to the people – though of course it is no longer the rich, but paid employees who perform it, and they would be much surprised to be told that they are engaged in liturgy.

Not only did 'liturgy' originate as a purely secular term long before being adopted by the church, but as part of the Christian tradition it underwent a further change of meaning. Rather than 'service of the people by the wealthy' it came to denote 'the service of God by the people'. In the Eastern Orthodox churches the regular weekly (or daily) worship service has long been referred to as the Divine Liturgy, but in the Western churches it acquired such other names as Mass, Eucharist, and Holy Communion. From the Reformation onwards it was simply referred to in Protestant circles as the Church Service (or Divine service), thus demonstrating the persistence of the concept of service that was so basic to the original term *leitourgia*. The various liturgies used in the Presbyterian Church are gathered together in what is called the Book of Common Order, the Anglican counterpart of which is the Book of Common Prayer. The use of the word 'Common' is a reminder that any form of divine service is intended to be an activity performed by a community of people ...

... Just as the proof of the pudding is in the eating, liturgies can be evaluated only by putting them into use. Having personally participated in the liturgies collected here [in *The Ephesus Liturgies*] I can warmly recommend them for use by other groups. In addition, they may encourage others to create their own liturgies, simply by illustrating what can be achieved.

Lloyd Geering

What Would “The Call of God” Mean To Us In Today’s World?

A Personal Response from Dr Bob Stewart,
Editor-in-Chief, *Social Behaviour and
Personality: An International Journal*,
Entrepreneur, Rotarian and Previous University
Professor and Deputy Vice-Chancellor at The
University of the South Pacific, Suva, Fiji



If many of us in the Sea of Faith no longer believe in a personal God, is this question still meaningful?

My view is that it still is, dependent of course upon our conception of God.

In my own case I started off as an adult, with a very literal, fundamentalist type of Christian faith as a University student.

However for myself now “God” is all that underpins everything in our lives, that is authentic and worthwhile, such as love and compassion.

Theologian Paul Tillich’s concept of God as “The Ground of All Being” seems to speak to this.

As we learn more and more about the vastness of the universe, we gain a greater sense of humility about the significance (or lack of it) of our particular human species. Our planet is part of just one of the more outlying solar systems in the universe. The Bible asks “What are human beings that God should be mindful of us?”

As we search for the historical Jesus, we see the emphasis He laid on love and compassion. What He thought of the greatest importance was how we treated ourselves and other people. He enjoined us to love God, and love others as we love ourselves.

It is evident from the accounts of the life of Jesus that He would have been more interested in a Church of Love, than a Church of Law. Yet sadly we His followers, have sometimes emphasized the Church of Law, rather than the Church of Love. At times, we have found elaborate ways to reject each other, rather than to look for the signs of the grace of God in people around us.

I believe that Jesus wanted us to create “The Kingdom of God” right where we live. God came to our world that we should have life, and have it abundantly. This is the meaning of the incarnation, God becoming fully human, helping us to have reverence for life and to love the wonderful spinning blue planet that is our world.

We in the Church need to have the humility to value and recognise how much people outside its ranks also work to create the Kingdom of God in our world. A Church of Love would recognise all these efforts, whether it be the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child, people like Fred Hollows, of no religious faith, who has given sight back to millions of people around the world, or organisations such

as the Cancer Society, as well as other Community Service groups.

Jesus went out of his way to seek out people who were rejected – the Samaritans, the Tax Collector, the woman at the well. A Church of Love would do likewise. Sometimes indeed this has happened. But sometimes I believe Jesus would be saddened when the Church, acting in His name in the modern world, has not done this. In particular I am concerned about the continuing rear guard action of some parts of the church to deny people who are Gay from the rights that the rest of us have. I am concerned about the parts of the church that have turned a blind eye to sexual abuse of children by church personnel.

We all have the right to be proud of the way God has made us – in all our uniqueness. There will never be anyone exactly like each of us, and we need to have a confidence that we can know the Godhead within ourselves and can discern our particular role in creating the Kingdom of God here on earth.

So what would a “Call of God” still mean for us in today’s world? I believe it means that we each need to listen to our deepest self. I regarded this as a process of discerning what is authentic for one’s own self – and having the courage to explore this.

As we experience life, we begin to sense what seems to be natural for us. We don’t have to be good at everything, but to give ourselves permission to follow the road which, deep down, seems to be the best way we can contribute toward living the most fulfilling and fruitful life possible for us.

So what has been my particular Call from God? For me it has been a life dedicated to understanding the human spirit. I have been a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a grandfather and a friend. I have been particularly blessed in my work life, as I have been able to turn a passionate interest in “how people tick” into a career. I have had a fascinating university career in Psychology – as a researcher and professor in the study of human behaviour in four countries around the world. I have been an elected Local Body Councillor and business person, and now, at the age of seventy-four I am still very much involved in my third career as an International Publisher on the Internet of research in psychology.

To discover God’s Call to each of us, we need to be able to listen to ourselves, to respect the uniqueness of ourselves as creations of God, and to discover the ways that we can make our own special contributions to help create the Kingdom of God, right here where we live.

Wanna Pick a Fight?

As I try to hold a stable opinion about the relevance of Christianity in my life, I am constantly being tripped up by the words used in either promoting or denigrating it.

I will spare the reader yet another diatribe over the confusion that results from inconsistent usage of ‘religion’ and

'belief' and the sheer squishiness of 'incarnation' and 'salvation'. On this occasion, I will deal only with 'Jesus' and 'Christ'.

From time-to-time, Greg Jenk's otherwise magnificent book *Jesus Then and Jesus Now* [see Newsletter 114 p.11] interchanges these two key terms. That is a surprise because the book index has 200 (or so) references to 'Jesus' and none to 'Christ'. Yes, yes, 'Jesus' is a *name* (a Hellenised derivative of Joshua) while 'Christ' is a *title* (the Greek equivalent of 'Messiah') but even that cannot be credibly offered as an excuse because where the casual substitution is made, 'Christ' appears in the sentence as though it were a name.

The effect is that, if you are to go along with Jenk's substitution, then you are accepting the status implied by the word 'Christ'. If I were to address the Pope as 'Your Holiness', Hitler as 'Mein Fuhrer' and, regrettably, the Queen as 'Your Majesty' (she's too nice a person to be carrying that medieval baggage), then anyone seeing that would be entitled to conclude that I assent to those appellations. For the record I assent to none of the above. How many people **inadvertently** salute the Galilean sage, Jesus, as the 'Christ' invented decades after his death by the Apostle Paul?

That's where sloppy use of language gets you.

Noel Cheer

Future Directions of Rationalism and Humanism

**New Zealand Association of Rationalists &
Humanists Conference 13th, 14th and 15th
February 2015 at Duart House in Havelock
North, Hawkes Bay.**

Details at <http://futuresdirections.co/>

The Journey

*There are many paths up the mountain through
clouds of uncertainty, beliefs, myths and legends.*

*For those who make the summit there is a shared,
all-embracing experience.*

*On the descent the clouds have gone. In their place
an overwhelming sense of oneness.*

Death completes the journey.

Daniel Phillips, Invercargill

Hager Says That Churches Can Promote Ethical Politics

These excerpts come from an item, by Paul Titus, in the September 2014 edition of "Touchstone", the newspaper of the Methodist Church of New Zealand. It was published before the 2014 General Election.

**Churches should have the confidence to follow
their conscience and speak out on public issues,
says investigative journalist Nicky Hager.**

Touchstone spoke with Nicky ten days after the release of his book *Dirty Politics*, which exposed the close ties between some National Party leaders and the [self-confessed] toxic Internet blogger Cameron Slater.

The book caused a media uproar in the midst of the election. Nicky spoke about his reasons for writing it and what he has learned from the reaction it received.

Dirty Politics is the latest in a string of books Nicky has written about New Zealand politics and foreign policy. He says the reason he writes them is to expose unethical behaviour and change things for the better.

"The point is to inform people and get them thinking about what we could do differently as a society."

He says there were two notable responses to *Dirty Politics*. One is that many people have told him what a fantastic effort it was, even though they were sickened at what it revealed. He says he has never had a book sell so fast.

The second reaction Nicky identified was the somewhat surprising unwillingness of Prime Minister John Key to address the issues it raised.

"Nothing I have heard indicates the Prime Minister is prepared to admit anything was wrong or that he is willing to look beyond short term expediency toward the longer term good. The Government's response seemed to be driven by their public relations advisers. Their approach was diversion, attack the messenger, focus on minute detail, and rely on catchy one-liners."

Nicky says he does not want *Dirty Politics* to convey the notion that all politicians are greedy and vindictive, and he certainly does not want it to turn people off politics completely. In fact, he hopes it encourages more people to get involved.

The final chapter of the book has received little attention in the media. It lays out a number of things that could be done to improve the political tone in New Zealand.



One of the problems it identifies is the commercial nature of news, which forces journalists to rely on public relations companies for their news. The news media should give their audiences genuinely independent commentators, Nicky writes.

Another suggestion is to make government more transparent, and in particular to strengthen freedom of information laws and to open up leaders' budgets to the same scrutiny as MP's spending. Elections should also be publicly funded so that political parties aligned with business interests do not have an unfair advantage.

Nicky also suggests we need to improve New Zealand's political ethics. While it is valid to expose hidden influence and the abuse of power, it is not ethical to denigrate people or attack their personal lives.

This is where the churches have a role to play, he says.

"Churches are part of what I call the public interest infrastructure. They can talk about the public good and promote ethical behaviour."

Even though New Zealand is a largely secular society and a lot of people do not attend church, many still look to the churches for leadership.

"Just as Forest and Bird does not need to have huge numbers of people out rescuing endangered species to speak out on environmental issues, church leaders can speak out for the public good."

Nicky says he spoke to a group of young unionists recently. He told them that, while unions are now smaller and weaker than they used to be, they still have a vital role to play as voices for social justice.

"Churches are just as vital. At the moment if any policy is proposed to reduce poverty, we are likely to hear in the media from the finance sector, landlords and business lobbyists. They are well organised.

"But we should also hear from church people. Churches should not be defensive. If they cannot speak out against poverty and injustice, what is the point? It seems that the churches are often reticent but their influence could spread far beyond their congregations because they can speak on behalf of everyone."

Where to for Values-Driven politics?

**Student Volunteer Army co-founder Sam Johnson recently made a call for "values-driven politics".
Doug Sellman considers what that might mean.**

Can any good come from the current 'Dirty Politics' saga? Or do we have to accept that politics in the new social media era is inevitably jungle warfare, eagerly watched as entertainment by some, while others despair and disengage?

Sam Johnson calls for a values-driven politics following his revulsion at the revelations in Nicky Hager's book, *Dirty Politics*.

In fact, a change to the way politics is conducted appears to be one of the book's aims.

Hager concludes the Preface: "Exposing dirty politics is an essential step in allowing reasonable people to understand and to choose other approaches."

But where do we go for a values-driven politics? Perhaps we need to look no further than ourselves and begin with the positive values expressed in the ideals of the three main political parties. Below, we will see that these reflect our own higher human character. However, commitment to a more grown-up political environment is necessary for these values to be discussed, prioritised and translated into astute public policy.

National stands primarily for individual freedom and personal responsibility. Labour has social fairness and collective responsibility at its core, and the Green party is primarily based on sustainability within a global context. A parallel can be drawn between these political values and the main constructs of human personality.

A compelling model of personality has been developed by US research psychiatrist Professor Robert Cloninger. Three dimensions of character described are self-directedness, co-operativeness and self-transcendence. These represent fundamental relationships we are each engaged in. Self-directedness is the relationship we have with ourselves, co-operativeness is the relationship we have with others, and self-transcendence is the relationship we have with the wider global world and beyond.

People who are high in self-directedness are individually focused and purposeful and perhaps naturally prefer political values of individual freedom and personal responsibility. Those high in co-operativeness are empathic, helpful and tolerant towards others and might therefore be drawn towards the values of social fairness and collective responsibility. Those high in self-transcendence appreciate the wider context in which the human world operates and therefore might tend to favour sustainability as a fundamental political value. Being high in one dimension doesn't preclude being high on one or other of the other two.

In a 21st century environmentally-stressed world a political system is needed that not only retains the enduring values of individual freedom and social fairness (rather than perpetuate an unnecessary conflict

between these two ideals), but also one that emphasises environmental sustainability.

These three value systems are now beginning to play out around the world as the central organising framework for political conceptualisation. A fourth – restoration of indigenous values through remediation of historical injustices – underpins all three. In New Zealand, this is politically expressed in both the Maori and Mana parties.

In summary, **there are three fundamental political ideals - individual freedom, social fairness and environmental sustainability - which reflect three constructs of human personality.** These provide a natural set of political values, to which historical justice can be added, to act as a safety valve for dealing with indigenous anger from the past.

A values-driven politics based on these will go a long way to preventing four evils threatening the happiness of citizens and peace within Aotearoa New Zealand - loss of personal autonomy, increasing rates of poverty, accelerating environmental degradation, and eruption of violence from historical injustices.

Johnson's and Hager's call for moral rejuvenation in politics is refreshing, but not necessarily easily achievable. A more civilised politics can't be taken for granted. However, just as teenagers mature into adults through a shift in brain functioning from limbic system to prefrontal cortex, dirty jungle politics can shift to a higher state as well. A values-driven politics requires mental and emotional energy to lift attitudes and behaviour from our reptilian depths to the elevated but fragile level of human rationality, empathy and wisdom.

Bullying attack politics motivated by power and greed can be trumped by value-driven politics with sufficient effort and leadership. However, two things are needed: Firstly, political champions across the political spectra dedicated to higher values and fostering a more mature political environment; and secondly, a voting public prepared to put time and energy into supporting and promoting such individuals. It is easy to drift apathetically or drool like infants over scandal and gossip. It is also easy to be taken in by the beauty contests and lolly scrambles of shallow election campaigns, or, to be influenced by attacks and smears of venal blogging.

Reorientation towards a values-driven politics is the best that could come out of this important "Dirty Politics" saga of 2014.

Doug Sellman is Professor of Psychiatry and Addiction Medicine at the University of Otago in Christchurch. He is also a member of the SoF (NZ) Steering Committee.

From *The Press*, Christchurch, 4 Sept. 2014

Scientists as Prophets

Lynda Walsh, writing for Oxford University Press (<http://ukcatalogue.oup.com>), has reviewed James Hansen's *Our Last Chance to Save Humanity*

Why did an atheist like Carl Sagan talk so much about God? Why does NASA climatologist James Hansen plead with us in his recent book not to waste "Our Last Chance to Save Humanity?"

Because science advisors are our new prophets as this book argues. It does not claim that these public scientists push scientism as a replacement for religion. Rather, the book puts forth the argument that prophetic ethos is a flexible type of charismatic authority whose function is to manufacture certainty.

Scientists are not our only prophets but science advisors predictably perform prophetic ethos whenever they need to persuade their publics to take action or fund basic research.

The book first charts the genealogy of this hybrid scientific-prophetic ethos back to its roots in ancient oracles before exploring its flourishing in seventeenth-century Europe. It then tracks its performances and mutations through several important late-modern events in America: Robert Oppenheimer's role in the opening of the atomic age; Rachel Carson's interventions in pesticide use; the mass-media polemics of science popularizers such as Carl Sagan, Stephen Hawking, and Stephen Jay Gould; and finally the UN's climate change panel and their role in Climategate.

Along the way, the book highlights the special ethical and political defects embedded in the genealogy of the scientist-prophet, and it finishes by evaluating proposed remedies. It concludes that without a radical shift in our style of deliberative policy-making, there is little chance of remedying the dysfunctions in our current science-advising system.

Beyond Beliefs: Religions Bind Individuals into Moral Communities

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From *Personality and Social Psychology Review*
http://faculty.virginia.edu/haidtlab/articles/graham_haidt.2010.beyond-beliefs.pub080.pdf

In this paper we suggest that religion should be studied as a complex system with many social functions, one of which is to bind people together into cooperative communities organised around deities.

Beliefs in gods are important, and it is understandable that so many cognitively-oriented psychologists have examined the nature and causes of such beliefs. But we argue that focusing on these beliefs is like focusing on the football: It seems to be where the action is, but if you stare too long at it, you miss the deeper purpose of the game, which is the strengthening of a community. We take a social-functionalist approach to the study of religion, concentrating on the relationship between religion and morality, which many religious people believe are inseparable.

We apply moral foundations theory ... to this end, examining the special role in religious morality played by the three 'binding' foundations:

- Ingroup/loyalty
- Authority/respect
- Purity/sanctity.

We use this theoretical perspective to help explain three mysteries about religiosity, including why religious people are happier, why they are more charitable, and why most people are religious.

Alain de Botton makes a similar point on page 50 of his *Religion for Atheists*:

‘Christianity, Judaism and Buddhism have all made significant contributions to mainstream politics, but their relevance to the problems of community are arguably never greater than when they depart from the modern political script and remind us that there is also value to be had in standing in a hall with a hundred acquaintances and singing a hymn together, or in ceremoniously washing a stranger's feet, or in sitting at a table with neighbours and partaking of lamb stew and conversation; the kinds of rituals which, as much as the deliberations inside parliaments and law courts, are what help to hold our fractious and fragile societies together.’

When God Becomes Love

<http://leavingyourreligion.com/2014/08/god-becomes-love/>

Jim Mulholland was raised in the conservative Christian evangelical tradition of altar calls and revivals. Seminary trained, he pastored Methodist and Quaker congregations in the Indianapolis area for over twenty-five years. He wrote three best-selling books on practical theology - Praying Like Jesus, If God Is Love, and If Grace Is True - and has been a popular public speaker. In 2008, Jim resigned his pastorate and began walking away from religion. He presently works in neighborhood

development in Southeast Indianapolis. He also hosts a website and blog at LeavingYourReligion.com

When hearing of my disbelief in god, progressive religious people often respond, “For me, God is love.” They usually say this as if equating god with love removes any grounds for discussion or critique. After all, who can argue with love? They’re often surprised when I ask, “Can you value, uphold and practice love without the concept of god?” Since this is a deep question – one I avoided for almost fifty years – I understand why it usually goes unanswered. Abandoning a personal god isn’t easy.

In fairness, I was once a proponent of god as love. By equating god and love, I’d hoped to salvage something from the ruins of my religious faith. No longer a personality with emotions, god became a force for good, gently prodding humanity toward maturity and kindness. When love occurred, whether in a religious or non-religious setting, I claimed the presence of god. In the book, *If God I Love*, I wrote, “I believe God is love and that everything God does, God does because of love. “

Looking back, **defining god as love was probably my last stop before completely abandoning a belief in god.** I’d grown increasingly uncomfortable with a god whose love competed with attributes like jealousy, anger and wrath. Stripped of all the peculiarities of a divine personality, god became a metaphor for what seemed good and noble; namely, love.

Many modern religious folk hold this metaphorical view of god. It allows them to remain connected with their religious tradition while disconnecting from that religion’s uglier manifestations. When people do all sorts of bigoted, hateful acts in the name of god, they can say, “That’s not of god.” I made such proclamations for years. In so doing, I thought I’d sanitized my faith. In truth, as I eventually realized, the more you move toward the metaphor, the less you need god.

If god and love are synonymous, the idea of god becomes unnecessary. Indeed, in a world where god’s name is taken in vain so often, equating god and love tarnishes the concept of love.

**If god and love are synonymous,
the idea of god becomes unnecessary.**

In a world short on love, promoting love is difficult enough without confusing ourselves and others with god language. Without god, an agent of love is freed to

relate and engage with other people without the complications of a religious agenda. Eventually, I grew tired of carrying all the divine baggage. Love, as a universal human value, was far more appealing.

For me, love is love. It is a mysterious human attribute and practice. It is also complicated and difficult to define. Is love merely a chemical, biological response? Is it a temporary emotion or a rational decision? Are there different kinds and levels of love? Is there such a thing as tough love? For me, the answer to all of these questions is “yes,” but I recognize that emphasizing love instead of god doesn’t eliminate the need for debate and discussion. What it does eliminate is the need for worship. For many years, defining god as love allowed me to continue to worship god. I was deeply attached to the idea of a divine parent who loved and cared for me.

In the midst of an often difficult world, it was comforting to believe the creator of the universe had a special place in his heart for me. It took me nearly fifty years to accept my responsibility to love and care for myself, to engage the world in collaboration with other human beings. I no longer needed or wanted to worship anyone. Much of that realization came with finally understanding the nature of love.

Love, at its very best, always involves mutuality, a shared respect and concern for another. Its goal is the self-actualization of the other person. Paternalism is not love, but the need to forever control and subjugate. The best parents are those who raise children capable of complete independence from them. Based on these realizations, I finally concluded, that if a divine parent existed, that god would be most pleased not by my worship, but by my independence. If my ability to love was dependent upon a relationship to that god, I was forever co-dependent.

**Jesus was non-religious.
He left god out of it.**

In writing this post, I’ve realized I’m more apathetic than atheist about the existence of god. In the end, the best analogy for god – the divine parent – led me away from god. The best god I could imagine – a god synonymous with love – made the idea of god unnecessary. I can value, uphold and practice love without god or the idea of god. I’m free to focus my energy on fully exploring what it means to be a loving person, to dream and work for a world where love empowers and transforms. In becoming non-religious,

what has changed is my expectation that some omnipotent personality or power will make that happen.

There are still passages of Christian scripture I find valuable. Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself” is one such passage. I like the implication that we must first love ourselves before we can love others. I like the ambiguity of who we define as neighbor. I like the emphasis on moving beyond self-love. Most of all, I like that when it came to love, Jesus was non-religious. He left god out of it.

New Year's Resolutions By the numbers

In case you haven’t collected together your intentions for this year, you might find some inspiration below

ATHEISTS' TEN COMMANDMENTS

This item was brought to our attention by Natali Allen from Northland. It has appeared in several places and you can read more about it at <http://www.inquisitr.com/1692212/atheists-rewrite-ten-commandments-mythbusters-adam-savage-judged-new-commands/#jeFCPFtPCf8K5Djt.99>

- **Be open-minded and be willing to alter your beliefs with new evidence.**
- **Strive to understand what is most likely to be true, not to believe what you wish to be true.**
- **The scientific method is the most reliable way of understanding the natural world.**
- **Every person has the right of control over their body.**
- **God is not necessary to be a good person or to live a full and meaningful life.**
- **Be mindful of the consequences of all your actions and recognize that you must take responsibility for them.**
- **Treat others as you would want them to treat you, and can reasonably expect them to want to be treated. Think about their perspective.**
- **We have the responsibility to consider others, including future generations.**
- **There is no one right way to live.**
- **Leave the world a better place than you found it**

HOW TO LIVE WITH YOURSELF

The author, Dr Murray Banks, was both a therapist and an inspirational speaker in the 1960s. The following are the headings that he used in his LP **How to Live with Yourself, or, What to Do Until the Psychiatrist Comes**

1. **Are you happy?** We all want to be happy but few of us seem to know that happiness cannot be obtained directly. Happiness is a by-product of effective life adjustment. Prolonged unhappiness is a sign of illness – mental illness. It may even lead to physical illness as well.
2. **Do you have zest or enthusiasm for living?** Do you invite yourself to celebrate life? Can you enjoy the epiphany of the moment?
3. **Are you socially adjusted?** Being with others and sharing and otherwise interacting successfully with others is a very important part of a sound adjustment. A loss of interest in others may be the beginning of apathy (a lack of feeling) or depression. You reduce your chances of mental illness by saying 'YES!' to life.
4. **Do you have unity and balance?** Are you relatively 'together' in what you think and do? Reach out to others. Get involved. Get your mind off yourself. Develop many interests. Try not to wrap your life around any one thing, no matter how important that is to you. We need many supports and interests in life.
5. **Can you live with each problem as it arises?** Do you worry about things that never happen? We need to learn to live in the NOW. Now is the only moment that we will ever be sure of. The past is a cancelled cheque; the future is an IOU.
6. **Do you have insight into your own conduct?** Do you know the real, underlying reasons behind what you do? There is always a reason for any human behaviour, and the task of a psychiatrist or psychology is to help you help yourself. For example, a psychiatrist or psychologist helps you understand and attack your fears and your other maladjustments to life, that is, to challenge your 'stinkin' thinkin'' (to use an AA turn of phrase).
7. **Do you have a confidential relationship with some other person?** Can you talk to, and share your feelings and thoughts with, intimate others? Many who have no trusted intimate friends find themselves in need of 'renting' an empathetic ear in the form of a psychotherapist of some kind.
8. **Do you have a sense of the ridiculous?** Can you laugh? Easily? And at yourself? Laughter is the sunshine of the soul. It can heal illness. A sense of humour gets us through many tough times. You must learn to laugh!

When did your stomach muscles [last] hurt from extended laughing?

9. **Are you engaged in satisfying work?** We don't seem to 'break down' from over-work as much as we do from over-stress and over-worry. (Banks would often make the point that 'nerves do not break down'). How can we turn a distressful situation into something we can live with?

10. **Do you know how to worry effectively? There's only one thing to do about worry – do something active about the cause of your worry.** As Dr Norman Vincent Peale used to say, we are not born with the worry habit. We acquire it through experience. And because we can change any habit and any acquired mental attitude, we can always do something about worry, including casting it from our mind.

FROM BAD TO WORSE?

In his Inaugural Professorial Lecture at Victoria University of Wellington on 25 March 2014, Professor of Restorative Justice Chris Marshall quoted from the recent book *Crime, Punishment, and Restorative Justice*, by American author Ross London in which the author found himself asking the question: "Is this the best we can do?" On page 1 he wrote:

Despite the efforts of many brilliant minds and the expenditure of vast sums, we have managed to create a criminal justice system that transforms innumerable personal misfortunes into yet other calamities.

Victims, who have suffered the trauma of crime, enter the portals of this system with high expectations of justice, only to find themselves wandering its halls feeling bewildered, unfulfilled, and used. For those accused of a crime, entry into the system portends the beginning of a personal nightmare of dehumanization, ruinous financial losses, and unending suspicion ... As a criminal justice professional, I came in contact with hundreds of human beings caught up in this labyrinth. Time and again, I saw the same look of despair on those who emerged from the process, embittered, exhausted, and defeated.

The full lecture, which deals extensively with restorative justice, can be read at

http://www.rethinking.org.nz/assets/Newsletter_PD_F/Issue_116/03_Restoring_What_Marshall_Inaugural_lecture.pdf

THE LAST WORD

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson



BOTH DON CUPITT AND DAVID TACEY are fond of a quotation from the poet Matthew Arnold: “We are wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born.” The old, dead world is presumably the world of traditional Christianity. The new world has not arrived, so we don’t yet know what it will look like.

What killed the old world? A possibly simplistic answer is “the Enlightenment,” a movement that rejected ecclesiastical dogma and authority and asserted the primacy of reason and the independence and adulthood of the individual.

Alternatively, you could think in terms of the dynamics of religious change: religious themes become old and begin to lose their intrinsic persuasive power. Those attached to them endeavour to prop them up with rational arguments. That may work for a while, but only delays the inevitable.

To us, it seems that we are in a unique situation but, in reality, similar upheavals have happened before.

The ancient Greeks understood their world in terms of myth: stories of the gods. But then came the philosophers who questioned all that in what is called the Greek Enlightenment. Protagoras said:

“About the gods I cannot know whether they exist or not or what form they have; for there are many barriers to such knowledge, among them the obscurity of the subject and the shortness of human life.”

At the time of Jesus, a kind of religious nationalism was central to Jewish faith. Israel was God’s chosen people and his will was to see the Messiah come and establish a theocratic state. In 66 AD, as an expression of that nationalism, Jews revolted against the Roman Empire and enjoyed a few years of freedom. But then, Roman soldiers besieged Jerusalem. The Zealots forbade anyone to leave the city or to surrender. Johanan ben Zakkai, a Jewish leader, had an idea. He had his disciples put him in a coffin and carry him out of the city. (We have to assume that, even during a siege, the dead were taken outside the city gates.) Once behind Roman lines, he climbed out and asked to be taken to Vespasian, the general in charge of the siege. He asked him for permission to set up a school in the nearby town of Jabneh. The result was the formation of a famous school and the beginning of Judaism as we know it, a world religion centred on the interpretation of the Torah.

Whatever the historical truth of this story, its theme is the collapse of the old. The old faith was tied to Israel as a nation with Jerusalem as its centre and to a priestly group of religious specialists at the temple. With the failed revolt against Rome, all this came to an end. The temple was destroyed and Jews were not allowed to enter Jerusalem on pain of death. All that emerged from the old, to bring about the new, was an old man in a coffin.

Knowing that venerable religious institutions and well-established religious ideas have collapsed before may help us

to feel that our situation is less scary; others have faced such collapse before, and indeed in a sense every generation faces it. We can’t just accept tradition, we have to appropriate it and make it our own.

Sea of Faith exists to explore and discuss that collapse of the old world and to work towards the formation of a new world. The original BBC TV series* “Sea of Faith” focussed on the challenge that Enlightenment thinking (including modern science and philosophy) posed to traditional religion. The last in the series, entitled “The New World,” was about the passionately anti-Christian Nietzsche and the coolly analytical linguistic philosopher Wittgenstein. A lot of water has passed under the bridge since then and attempts to construct a new world are taking on different shapes. We are faced with the environmental crisis and the need for a new picture of what it is to be human, one less destructive of the planet. There are signs that the younger generation is engaged in a spirituality revolution, as David Tacey claims.

Secularisation, the theory that progress inevitably brings about the decline and eventual disappearance of religion, now looks debatable. The French Muslim philosopher Abdennour Bidar, in an open letter to the Muslim world, said this:

“For the most part they [Western intellectuals] have forgotten the power of religion – for good and for evil, over life and over death – to the extent that they tell me, ‘No, the problem of the Muslim world is not Islam, not the religion, but rather politics, history, economics, etc.’ They completely forget that religion may be the core of the reactor of human civilization, and that tomorrow the future of humanity will depend not only on a resolution to the financial crisis, but also, and much more essentially, on a resolution to the unprecedented spiritual crisis that is affecting all of mankind.”

Sea of Faith has become more diverse. Along with progressive Christians, we have members who look to Buddhism rather than Christianity, people damaged by their experience of Church, people on a spiritual journey who don’t belong to any religious organisation, people who find climate change and related issues the dominant question of our time.

How do we contain that diversity in one organisation? I find my experience of therapy groups a helpful model. After someone has worked on a problem, group members are invited to give their response. Amazingly different reactions emerge, yet all have something to contribute to the truth about that person’s problem. [With any issue] we need at least three theories. If we have only one, we will think it is the whole truth. If we have two, we think it is an either/or. Once you have three, you are able to begin to see the complexity of reality.

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson 2014-2015

*You can see some material from the series on Youtube.

Go to Google and enter **Youtube “Sea of Faith”**

The quote marks will optimise the search - ed