

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 117, March 2015

FAREWELL TO RALPH

In losing Ralph, Sea of Faith and Ephesus have both lost a valued and creative member. Ralph, and wife Margaret, have been with SoF from near the beginning, and Ralph was a vigorous contributor to artistic workshops. His prayer-flags and evocations of stained-glass windows decorated many Ephesus events.

It was Ralph who, many years ago, characterised SoF as “a safe place in which to talk about unsafe things.” This characterisation has been remembered and repeated by many appreciative members.

The Farewell

Ralph's funeral on 26 January, was held in St Andrew's on The Terrace in Wellington, and was conducted by Rev. Dr. Jim Cunningham. These are some of his remarks:

Just after noon last Thursday Ralph slipped quietly and peacefully from life into death. His journey here had ended. And with the ending of his journey began all other journeys that have brought us here this afternoon to this place.



... we are thrust helter-skelter into the bundle of life with other people. And to a large extent we become who



Ralph Athelstan Pannett, 11 August 1939 - 22 January 2015

with each other. That's why we are here. At some time and in some way Ralph Pannett touched our lives – and we touched his. And in those experiences, no matter how great or small, he became part of us and we became part of him.

Ralph discovered 'clowning'. To put on the costume – and he had three – and to apply the make-up gave him the freedom to be more himself. Gradually his creativity emerged – not just in clowning, but in painting, and photography, and sculpture. It came out in his work, and his word, and his leisure time. And sometimes it disappeared again. He spoke honestly and movingly about the struggle to let that which was locked up inside be free. And how it was always an ongoing task. And then he asked me if I would share that conversation with you at his funeral. And I agreed ...

Extract from *The Thank You* from Ralph's daughters Iona and Ruth Pannett

This is not a eulogy, but a 'thank you' to our much loved father. Dad was a fine man. He was a person of integrity with a strong commitment to social justice. He was a reliable and generous father and he was there for us, when other fathers were not there for their daughters. He lived his Christian beliefs by being inclusive and non-judgemental.

From very modest beginnings, he found success through hard work and his natural abilities as a scientist. He was intelligent, constantly curious, creative, analytical and a perfectionist. He was the product of hard working and determined working-class parents and the Welfare State, benefitting from a good and free education...

The modern fashion for funerals as a celebration of a person's life has struck us in some ways as the restriction of the ability to grieve or to express feelings of loss. The celebration must happen but the grief takes precedence. We now have no father, cancer stole our parent before he or we were ready. At seventy-five, it should not have been his turn. The last three months have been difficult as he deteriorated and the cancer gradually took him away from us, without mercy. We are grateful however that it left his mind and intelligence intact and that his end was peaceful. He not once complained about his illness, but the grief in his eyes told their own story and this caused us pain...

It gives us some comfort that Dad said that he felt at peace a few weeks before he died. He faced his death in a matter of fact manner. Part of the reason for this possibly is that he felt that he had had a good life. This



particular question of what constitutes a good life has of course been dissected; we have imagined what *he* might have meant.



Dad was happily married to Mum for forty-five years and described his marriage as a liberation. He was able to have two children and saw us grow to adulthood with our own families. He became a grandfather four times over. He was able to achieve a high level of education whereas his parents did not have that opportunity. He learned to speak two other languages and travelled extensively throughout the world. He was acknowledged internationally for his expertise in weather forecasting instrumentation. He fulfilled a long held ambition to be an artist. He found faith and community in the church, Sea of Faith and Ephesus. He was a community leader in his local area and in the church, and gave years of his life to voluntary organisations around the country. He had a wide circle of friends and most importantly, was much loved. To have achieved all this, was most likely his definition of a good life.

...It is impossible to sum up Dad's life adequately with our impoverished words. Dad was a scientist, an engineer, an artist, a performer, a community leader, a father, a husband, a friend and he was quite complex. He was conventional yet was sceptical and challenging of those in authority. He was a humanist who gave his life to the church and a socialist who left his humble beginnings behind.

And now it is time to say good-bye. To you Dad, our final message is, we grieve and feel bereft at your death, we miss you, we love you. You had a good life. Rest well.

.... continued on page 4

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: 21/04/15, 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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STOP PRESS CURRENT CONFERENCE NEWS

Date: October 2 to 4, 2015

Venue: St Cuthbert's College,
Epsom, Auckland

Theme: Micawber vs Cassandra: Responding to an increasingly uncertain future

Keynote Speakers:

- Sir Lloyd Geering
- Rod Oram, business commentator
- Kennedy Graham, Green Party MP
- Anjum Rahman, Waikato Interfaith Council

Miscellaneous: Full details and Registration Form will be sent out with the May Newsletter.

KEEP POSTED AT: WWW.SOF.ORG.NZ



Christmas 2014

Ralph's Best Friend, Rob Wilkinson, Reflects

When Ralph retired there was an art explosion! Where did that come from? He undertook diploma studies exploring a wide range of modes of expression, media and techniques. He had an astonishing output. The detail and quality of his first-class pieces was stunning. My favourite is his 'Green Man' head.

He made vital contributions to Ephesus and Sea of Faith in both leadership, the provision of ideas, and sheer work producing well researched and thought-through discussions and workshops. This is another capacity in which he will be sorely missed.

Iona asked me to speak about what it was like to be Ralph's friend. It was a comfortable, easy relationship.

Ralph and Margaret, together with myself and my wife Julie, enjoyed theatre at Drama Christi, Circa and Downstage. Ralph and I enjoyed film festivals, although he was more enthusiastic and eclectic than I.

We enjoyed dining together. Margaret is a gracious hostess and she trained Ralph to cook well.

Ralph and I both loved engineering and the fulfilment of making things. We enjoyed similar books although I could never go so far as to finish reading Marcel Proust or Umberto Eco. As young



men we both enjoyed photography although Ralph was much better at it with a rather quirky eye. He was the artist, I was the technologist who enjoyed processing images.

We were both interested in liberal Christianity but Ralph was more activist than I. We both enjoyed talking and we often had wide-ranging discussions but seldom serious argument.

As I said, it was a comfortable easy relationship and I'm going to miss my friend enormously.

Ralph was diagnosed with multiple myeloma two or three years ago. He dealt with this in his usual quiet private way. He told very few people. He was stoic, not self pitying and as his disease progressed he did not complain, accepting that he had lived a good and full life.

On Wednesday we waved goodbye to each other as we had often done over the years somehow knowing that our ways were parting. Ralph, it was a privilege to have shared so much of life's journey with you.

You demonstrated intelligence and flair; strong values and some bloody mindedness; challenge; reflective thinking and wicked humour; good engineering and impressive art; love and compassion. You were a good man.

Thank you, Ralph, for the gifts you brought into our lives. Go in peace.



Responding to an increasingly uncertain future

MR MICAWBER OR CASSANDRA?

It's your choice!

Our Conference next October will consider

"responding to an increasingly uncertain future".

It will investigate the issues from the points of view of two contrasted fictional characters who represent the breadth of options open to us as various aspects of the world are becoming subject to radical change.

Wilkins Micawber, a character in Dickens' novel *David Copperfield*, is known for asserting his faith that "something will turn up". His name has become synonymous with someone who, even when things are not going especially well, **lives in hopeful expectation that they soon will**. Nellie Forbush, from the musical *South Pacific*, is even more adamant in her 'cockeyed optimism' while Pollyanna, subject of the best-selling 1913 novel, tops the poll in optimism by seeing every situation as material by which 'the glad game' can be played.

At the other pole is **Cassandra**. Her story in Greek mythology is that Apollo gave her the power of prophecy in order to seduce her, but when she refused him, he gave her the curse of never being believed. She appears in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*.

Cassandra foresaw the destruction of Troy; she warned the Trojans about the Greeks hiding inside the Trojan Horse; Agamem-

non's death and her own demise; her mother Hecuba's fate, Odysseus's ten year wanderings before returning to his home; and much else. **However, she was unable to do anything to forestall these tragedies since no one believed her.**

Cassandra also predicted that her cousin Aeneas would escape during the fall of Troy and found a new nation in Rome.. Those who predict harmful climate change know the feeling.



The celebrated American science fiction writer Ray Bradbury described himself as "Janus, the two-faced god who is half Pollyanna and half Cassandra, warning of the future and perhaps living too much in the past—a combination of both".

You might like to study the extracts that follow and consider where your opinions and emotions lie – and where, on considered reflection, they ought to lie.

DRIVERS OF GLOBAL CHANGE

[We can expect the] emergence of:

- a deeply interconnected global economy
- a planet-wide electronic communications grid connecting the thoughts and feelings of billions of people and linking them to rapidly expanding volumes of data ...
- a completely new balance of political, economic, and military power in the world
- rapid unsustainable growth — in population; cities; resource consumption; depletion of topsoil, freshwater supplies, and living species; pollution flows ...
- a revolutionary new set of powerful biological, biochemical, genetic, and materials science technologies...
- a radically new relationship between the aggregate power of human civilization and the Earth's ecological systems, including especially the most vulnerable — the atmosphere and climate balance...

From pages xiv and xv of *The Future* by Al Gore published by WH Allen, 2013

SCENARIOS OF THE FUTURE

Similar to Gore but more extensive, Lloyd Geering wrote of 10 future scenarios of which "None is certain but all are possible; some are probable". See his *The World To Come* by Lloyd Geering 1999, page 138-149.

ENLIGHTENMENT HOPE – OVER?

"The death of God only made sense against the background of a new kind of faith: faith in humans being capable of acting rationally and morally without guidance from beyond. It was that faith that drove Enlightenment humanism and the optimism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the end of the nineteenth century that faith, too, had begun to be eaten away. The history of the twentieth century - two world wars, the Depression and the Holocaust, Auschwitz and the gulags, climate change and ethnic cleansing - helped further gnaw away at Enlightenment hope". *The Quest for A Moral Compass: A Global History of Ethics* by Kenan Malik, Atlantic Books London 2014 p341-342

WHAT ISIS REALLY WANTS

ISIS is part of an uncertain future. It is worth comparing this article (preferably in full) with that in Newsletter 114 which played down the religious content.

This article talks of 'caliphate' as taken to be the only legitimate form of government, a 'radical Islamic' position at the heart of the Qur'an. You can read the entire article at

<http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2015/02/what-isis-really-wants/384980/>

Before printing, beware that it is 38 pages long!

"It is a religious group with carefully considered beliefs, among them that it is a key agent of the coming apocalypse."

The reality is that the Islamic State is Islamic. *Very* Islamic. Yes, it has attracted psychopaths and adventure seekers, drawn largely from the disaffected populations of the Middle East and Europe. But the religion preached by its most ardent followers derives from coherent and even learned interpretations of Islam.

Virtually every major decision and law promulgated by the Islamic State adheres to what it calls, in its press and pronouncements, and on its billboards, license plates, stationery, and coins, "the Prophetic methodology," which means following the prophecy and example of Muhammad, in punctilious detail. Muslims can reject the Islamic State; nearly all do. But pretending that it isn't actually a religious, millenarian group, with theology that must be understood to be combatted, has already led the United States to underestimate it and back foolish schemes to counter it. We'll need to get acquainted with the Islamic State's intellectual genealogy if we are to react in a way that will not strengthen it, but instead help it self-immolate in its own excessive zeal."

A COCKEYED OPTIMIST

When the sky is a bright canary yellow
I forget ev'ry cloud I've ever seen,
So they called me a cockeyed optimist
Immature and incurably green.

I have heard people rant and rave and bellow
That we're done and we might as well be dead,
But I'm only a cockeyed optimist
And I can't get it into my head.

I hear the human race
Is fallin' on its face
And hasn't very far to go,
But ev'ry whippoorwill
Is sellin' me a bill,
And tellin' me it just ain't so.

I could say life is just a bowl of Jello
And appear more intelligent and smart,
But I'm stuck like a dope with a thing called hope,
And I can't get it out of my heart!
Not this heart...

*From the musical
"South Pacific"
by Rogers and Hammerstein*

THE OSTRICH

Peek-a-Boo, I can't see you,
Everything must be grand.
Boo-ka-Pee, they can't see me,
As long as I've got me head in the sand.
Peek-a-Boo, it may be true,
There's something in what you've said,
But we've got enough troubles in everyday life,
I just bury me head.

*Oh, Ostrich consider how the world we know
Is trembling on the brink.*

Have you heard the news, may I hear your views,

Will you tell me what you think.

The Ostrich lifted its head from the sand,
About an inch or so;
'You will please excuse, but disturbing news
I have no wish to know.'

Oooh, Peek-a-Boo, I can't see you,
Everything must be grand.
Boo-ka-Pee, they can't see me,
As long as I've got me head in the sand.
Peek-a-Boo, it may be true,
There's something in what you've said,
But we've got enough troubles in everyday life,
I just bury me head.

Then I noticed suddenly where we were,
I saw what time it was.

*Make haste, I said, It'll be too late,
We must leave this place because....*

He stuffed his wingtips into his ears;
He would not hear me speak,
And back in the soft Saharan sand
He plunged his yellow beak.

Oooh, Peek-a-Boo, I can't see you,
Everything must be grand.
Boo-ka-Pee, they can't see me,
As long as I've got me head in the sand.
Peek-a-Boo, it may be true,
There's something in what you've said,
But we've got enough troubles in everyday life,
I just bury me.... (BOOM)

From a sheltered oasis a mile away
I observed that dreadful scene.
And a single plume came floating down
Where my Ostrich friend had been.
Because he could not bear the sound
Of these words I had left unsaid;

***'Here in this nuclear testing ground
Is no place to bury your head!'***

*From the LP Album
"The Bestiary of Flanders and Swann".*

So, Should We...

- ☒ **Worry** that we can see the problems but have no power to *fix* them.
- ☒ **Hope** that the ingenuity of human beings will pull us through: e.g. geoengineering that will counter climate change processes.
- ☒ **Require** national leaders to take all dangers seriously.
- ☒ **Analyse** (and attempt to assuage) the grievances of terrorists.
- ☒ **Become** an activist, recruit our grandchildren as disciples.
- ☒ **Plan** mass evacuations, move people from the growing deserts in the tropics or even from Earth to, say, Mars.
- ☒ **Learn** to grow vegetables and bake bread.
- ☒ **Ignore** all concerns: "I'll be dead before any of this happens".

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

TWO WORLDS

Chairperson Laurie Chisholm, in his Last Word column in the January issue of the Newsletter, wrote on the topic of Matthew Arnold's quotation: "We are wandering between two worlds, one dead, the other powerless to be born." Laurie states that the Sea of Faith exists to explore and discuss that collapse of the old world, and to work towards the formation of a new world. In my experience, the Sea of Faith has discussed at length the collapse of the old world, but has shown little inclination to actively work towards the formation of a new world. To my knowledge, nor has anyone else.

Over the centuries there has been a succession of great *potential* reformers. While these forward thinkers no doubt aspired to see a new world order, little has really changed. Most of our religions, and religious practices, still reflect the ancient mythologies which gave rise to them. For example the Pope, a hero figure worshipped and (almost) deified by his followers as in early mythological traditions, can still draw six million people to an old world Papal mass in the Philippines. He may accuse his cardinals of "spiritual Alzheimer's", but the Pope himself presides over a huge institution still firmly rooted in the old world.

To me, movements such as Progressive Christianity are just tinkering with the old world order which, despite what Matthew Arnold says, is not yet really dead. While many have abandoned the old world, or have never been part of it, nothing has really taken its place, and it lingers on. So, to update Matthew Arnold, we are left wandering in a spiritual wilderness between a still breathing old world, and a new world still powerless to be born.

Derek Pringle, Auckland

REPORTING DIRTY POLITICS

The items about Nicky Hager's 'Dirty Politics' in SOF Newsletter No. 116, appear to applaud the book, and it motivates very strong calls for more values-based politics. But, in the interests of impartial journalism, should one of the book's many criticisms have been presented also, so that we can decide for ourselves if its authenticity and integrity warrant all that is pinned on it?

For some, political orientation carries with it a deep-rooted bias, others choose freely from the several manifestoes that NZ offers. Anyway, the general public showed their opinions of the writings at the 2014 elections. Why then stir the hornets' nest again?

Margaret Whitwell, Tauranga

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

CLIMATE OF OPINION CHANGE

News media, the advertising industry and political spin-doctory are all powerful and well-resourced shapers of public opinion. Central to their missions is that those they address are invited to see reality in the terms that those who do the proposing declare. Any editor (including yours truly) feels the power that flows from the ability to select what gets published ... or not. Advertisers benefit from the uncritical gullibility of undiscerning buyers. Spin doctors weave our prejudices into webs of 'certainty'.

Is there a real world out there, with real and predictable processes going on? Or do we live in overlapping climates of manufactured opinions? How would we know? For a dramatization of this issue, refer to the 'Matrix' series of movies.

Noel Cheer, Editor

CREATIVE FAITH

'Authority' is dead, 'revelation' is dead ... now it's over to Creative Faith: the morals of Jesus in the only world we have, or ever will have.'

Creative Faith, Religion as a Way of Worldmaking

By Don Cupitt, Polebridge Press 2015

This is a short mention of Don Cupitt's latest book – his 50th. We expect more reviews in later Newsletters.

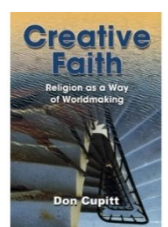
Early on in this book Don makes the, by now, familiar *Jesus v. Christ* distinction which maps into *ethics v. supernaturalism*. This quotation comes from page 15:

"At some point very early on in its development, Christianity split between two different pathways: one path stayed with the teaching of Jesus and the primacy of ethics, and the other path started with the return of Jesus and therefore with supernatural belief, holding that Jesus had been exalted to the heavenly world, whence he would in due course return in glory to establish his kingdom on earth. The main body of believers took this latter course, committing the faith to 'realistic' belief in God and in the supernatural world.

On the practical side, the believers' main business was with worship and with self-purification so that one would in due course—probably after death—be ready to join him in the heavenly world.

Today supernatural belief, and metaphysics in general, are widely questioned.

Belief in the old God is in unstoppable decline, even within the churches and amongst the clergy."



JESUS IN THE VERNACULAR

John Patrick of Warkworth offers a more “feet on the ground” Jesus

The Westar Institute has done a real service to biblical scholars, and to all of us, by analysing the gospel records and making a serious attempt at discovering who Jesus was, and what he may well have said, and what it is unlikely that he said.

As a consequence of this, and other work on the gospels, I became interested in extending the record with my own “gospel”, filling in the gaps in the same way that the gospel writers did, but extending the “story” by trying to imagine what happened between Jesus saying something (and he was often quoting from the Old Testament traditions) and the eventual context surrounding orally remembered fragments.

Anything reported in the gospels had a background in religious, social and political events which beset Israel at the time. I have tried to turn the conversations between Jesus, his followers, his girl friend Mary into something (perhaps) more akin to reality. Perhaps I am novelising the stories. In this context I am reminded that my old friend Don Glenney maintained that novels should be required reading for students of theology, and that great scholar Kappy Rex demanded serious study of the novel. (In my case “Those Without Shadows” by Francoise Sagan.)

This is my attempt at contextualising the fragments that may tell us something about the man Jesus, although it would not disturb me in the least if it was conclusively demonstrated that Jesus never lived: the stories are compelling in themselves. I leave you to decide if my efforts are useful!

John Patrick

The text says: “As Jesus walked by Lake Galilee he saw two fisherman, Simon and his brother Andrew, catching fish on the lake with a net. Jesus said to them: “Come with me and I will teach you to catch men.” At once they left their nets and went with him.

He went a little further on and saw two other brothers, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. They were in their boat getting their nets ready. As soon as Jesus saw them, he called them; so they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and went with Jesus.”

Wonderfully simple isn't it? What interests me is what went on during the days (or weeks!) for that to happen. What did they talk about? What do fishermen talk about down by the beach while performing regular, boring, tasks? And — what could these particular men have talked about to result in their upping sticks and wandering off with the local religious nut!!

Jesus Giddyay.. how's the fishing?

Andrew Who's asking?

Jesus Yesu ben Yussef.. I have just wandered over from Nazareth... testing the political and religious waters.

Andrew You a fisherman?

Jesus No, just someone who's interested in the goings on in Jerusalem.. you know... the Roman occupation, and the corruption in the Temple.

Simon It's about time someone kicked back against the Romans (bastards!) and the fancy boys in the Temple are just making a mockery of the faith of the nation! Filling their own coffers.... Everything for show: what happened to justice in the country?

John You some kind of revolutionary?

Jesus No, just a concerned and determined man wanting to make a difference.

James How can you make a difference? The power is entrenched in Roman soldiers, and the Temple authorities. It's difficult to make a living when we spend all our waking days catching fish.... There's no time for political action... and anyway, the occupiers are too strong.

Andrew Anyway, it's time we got to work.. how about you come home with me after we have finished here... in the meantime you might like to wander the beach.

Jesus That's very kind of you.

Andrew Okay we'll be a couple of hours. See you then.
[In the boats]

Simon .. interesting character.. what do you think?

Andrew Odd ball, comes from Galilee .. they are always talking overthrowing the Romans.

James [different boat!!] Well we've talked about those sorts of things often enough. This guy seems to be a bit like some of our forefathers who railed against the injustices in the country. Let's meet for a meal, and a few glasses of wine. There's some fresh bread in the house too!!

John Get on with the fishing! I liked the guy.. had a sort of presence about him.. determined and perhaps risky to be around.

James Haul in the net!! Wow! It's a long time since we got this sort of result! Can share with Simon and Andrew.. and possibly smoke some as well.. Mum will be chuffed.

[Later at Andrew's house]

Simon Boy this is a beauty wine.. have some more.. where did you get it?

Women, Your friend Jesus brought it. Says it comes from his father's vineyard.

John Beautiful Sauvignon Blanc and fresh fish.... Couldn't ask for a better meal.

Jesus Well Dad is a good winemaker as well as a carpenter... we can't be poor with both those skills!

John You know what you were talking about... do you want to start a revolution?

Jesus Yes, but not in the traditional sense... with force of arms. There are plenty of things need changing in our society before someone starts on the Romans. Anyway, they could obliterate Jerusalem and the Temple any time they like.

Simon What then?

Jesus Well, it's been a long day.... How about we chat again tomorrow morning. I'll sleep on the beach.. I've done it plenty of times before.

Andrew NO! You will stay here and sleep here... you know what our forefathers said about hospitality and strangers.

Jesus [sleepily] Thanks, our forefathers said some wonderful things that we all seem to have forgotten... in the morning, eh?

[First night and day on the road, and Jesus chatting about "things that matter."]

DAY 2

Jesus [still sleepily] Well, I slept like a log, good food, excellent wine, and good company! Thanks Andrew for your hospitality and also your mother: she has treated me like one of her own.

Andrew No worry... we enjoyed your company.. about time Simon showed his face: we've got a big day today, as we have to take some fish into the next village!

Simon Good grief! Is that the time? Some water and some dry bread will do: let's get to work: you want to come Jesus?

Jesus Yes, I'd love to have a day fishing.

[Down to the beach and meet up again with James and John.]

Simon Hi you two! One boat or two today? I've got a feeling about the weather.. looks good for a bumper catch!

John Okay, but watch the load with all five of us, and whatever we catch.

Andrew Okay John you have a dream as usual... you can sit there with Jesus: You can both think and yarn while we get on with the business!

Simon Cast the nets!

[After 30 minutes]

James Pull in the nets its getting rougher, start bailing Jesus there's a wooden bailer under the thwarts!

Simon [uttering an expletive] Watch the swell: hang on! For Pete's sake Jesus, bail faster. Cut the nets free!!!

Jesus No need, our god will protect us! Just stay calm and pull for the shore: take the sail down and keep the bow up!!

John I told you! Too many in the boat: I don't think we can manage to get to shore!

[After 40 minutes]

Simon Thank God we're almost there .. well done everyone, I don't know how we survived.. wonderful catch!

Jesus Well, I told you: just stay calm, have faith in your seamanship, and don't panic.

Andrew Let's get the catch out... time to get to the village, looks like a thunderstorm approaching!

Simon [quietly to John] Who the [expletive] is this guy. Waves go down a bit: storm arrives and he is as cool as a cucumber.

John I have no idea, but interesting and stimulating!

James Jesus, you want to come to the village market with us?

Jesus No thanks, I think I'll just spend some quiet time down here on the sand.

Andrew Okay, but stay the night again: a lot of things have happened today that I don't quite understand.

Jesus [sotto voce] It's not as complicated as you think. [chuckles]

Next enthralling episode:

Jesus meets Mary from Magdala!



OUT-SOURCING OUR MORALS

Can/should money be able to buy anything? Michael Sandel doesn't think so, see:

<http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/video/2015/jan/07/michael-sandel-more-things-money-can-buy-harder-to-be-poor-video>

A MESSAGE FROM THE DISPOSSESSED

“Becoming a holy warrior, a jihadist, a champion of an absolute and pure ideal, is an intoxicating conversion, a kind of rebirth that brings a sense of power and importance.”

Posted on "Truthdig" on January 11, 2015
by Chris Hedges. See more author and publisher information below.

The terrorist attack in France that took place at the satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* [Charlie Weekly] was not about free speech. It was not about radical Islam. It did not illustrate the fictitious clash of civilizations. It was a harbinger of an emerging dystopia where the wretched of the earth, deprived of resources to survive, devoid of hope, brutally controlled, belittled and mocked by the privileged who live in the splendor and indolence of the industrial West, lash out in nihilistic fury.

We have engineered the rage of the dispossessed. The evil of predatory global capitalism and empire has spawned the evil of terrorism. And rather than understand the roots of that rage and attempt to ameliorate it, we have built sophisticated mechanisms of security and surveillance, passed laws that permit the targeted assassinations and torture of the weak, and amassed modern armies and the machines of industrial warfare to dominate the world by force. This is not about justice. It is not about the war on terror. It is not about liberty or democracy. It is not about the freedom of expression. It is about the mad scramble by the privileged to survive at the expense of the poor. And the poor know it.

If you spend time as I have in Gaza, Iraq, Yemen, Algeria, Egypt and Sudan, as well as the depressing, segregated housing projects known as banlieues that ring French cities such as Paris and Lyon, warehousing impoverished North African immigrants, you begin to understand the brothers Cherif Kouachi and Said Kouachi, who were killed Friday in a gun battle with French police. There is little employment in these pockets of squalor. Racism is overt. Despair is rampant, especially for the men, who feel they have no purpose.

Harassment of immigrants, usually done by police during identity checks, is almost constant. ... French Muslims make up 60 to 70 percent of the prison population in France. Drugs and alcohol beckon like sirens to blunt the pain of poor Muslim communities.

The 5 million North Africans in France are not considered French by the French. And when they go back to Algiers, Tangier or Tunis, where perhaps they were born and briefly lived, they are treated as alien outcasts. Caught between two worlds, they drift, as the two brothers did, into aimlessness, petty crime and drugs.

Becoming a holy warrior, a jihadist, a champion of an absolute and pure ideal, is an intoxicating conversion, a kind of rebirth that brings a sense of power and importance. It is as familiar to an Islamic jihadist as it was to a member of the Red Brigades or the old fascist and communist parties.

Converts to any absolute ideal that promises to usher in a utopia, adopt a Manichaeism* view of history rife with bizarre conspiracy theories. Opposing and even benign forces are endowed with hidden malevolence. The converts believe they live in a binary universe divided between good and evil, the pure and the impure. As champions of the good and the pure they sanctify their own victimhood and demonize all nonbelievers.

They believe they are anointed to change history. And they embrace a hypermasculine violence that is viewed as a cleansing agent for the world's contaminants, including those people who belong to other belief systems, races and cultures. This is why France's far right, organized around Marine Le Pen, the leader of the anti-immigrant Front National, has so much in common with the jihadists whom Le Pen says she wants to annihilate.

When you sink to despair, when you live trapped

* **Manichaeism** was a major Gnostic religion that was founded by the Iranian prophet Mani c. 216–276 AD in the Sasanian Empire. Manichaeism taught an elaborate dualistic cosmology describing the struggle between a good, spiritual world of light, and an evil, material world of darkness. Through an ongoing process which takes place in human history, light is gradually removed from the world of matter and returned to the world of light whence it came.

in Gaza, Israel's vast open-air prison, sleeping 10 to a floor in a concrete hovel, walking every morning through the muddy streets of your refugee camp to get a bottle of water because the water that flows from your tap is toxic, lining up at a U.N. office to get a little food because there is no work and your family is hungry, suffering the periodic aerial bombardments by Israel that leaves hundreds of dead, your religion is all you have left. Muslim prayer, held five times a day, gives you your only sense of structure and meaning, and, most importantly, self-worth. And when the privileged of the world ridicule the one thing that provides you with dignity, you react with inchoate fury. This fury is exacerbated when you and nearly everyone around you feel powerless to respond.

The cartoons of the Prophet in the Paris-based satirical weekly *Charlie Hebdo* are offensive and juvenile. None of them are funny. And they expose a grotesque double standard when it comes to Muslims. In France, one who denies that the Holocaust occurred, or someone who denies the Armenian genocide, can be imprisoned for a year and forced to pay a \$60,000 fine. It is a criminal act in France to mock the Holocaust the way *Charlie Hebdo* mocked Islam. French high school students must be taught about the Nazi persecution of the Jews, but these same students read almost nothing in their textbooks about the widespread French atrocities, including a death toll among Algerians that some sources set at more than one million, in the Algerian war for independence against colonial France. French law bans the public wearing of the burqa, a body covering for women that includes a mesh over the face, as well as the niqab, a full veil that has a small slit for the eyes. Women who wear these in public can be arrested, fined the equivalent of about \$200 and forced to carry out community service. France banned rallies in support of the Palestinians last summer when Israel was carrying out daily airstrikes in Gaza that resulted in hundreds of civilian deaths. **The message to Muslims is clear: Your traditions, history and suffering do not matter. Your story will not be heard. ...**

"It is a sad state of affairs when Liberty means the freedom to insult, demean and mock people's most sacred concepts," the Islamic scholar Hamza Yusuf, an American who lives in California, told me in an email. "In some Latin countries people are

acquitted for murders where the defendant's mother was slandered by the one he murdered. I saw this in Spain many years ago. It's no excuse for murder, but it explains things in terms of honour, which no longer means anything in the West. Ireland is a western country that still retains some of that, and it was the Irish dueling laws that were used in Kentucky, the last State in the Union to make dueling outlawed. Dueling was once very prominent in the West when honour meant something deep in the soul of men. Now we are not allowed to feel insulted by anything other than a racial slur, which means less to a deeply religious person than an attack on his or her religion. Muslim countries are still governed, as you well know, by shame and honour codes. Religion is the big one. I was saddened by the 'I'm Charlie' tweets and posters, because while I'm definitely not in sympathy with those misguided fools [the gunmen who invaded the newspaper], I have no feeling of solidarity with mockers."

Charlie Hebdo, despite its insistence that it targets all equally, fired an artist and writer in 2008 for an article it deemed to be anti-Semitic.

Shortly after the attacks of 9/11, while living in Paris and working as a reporter for *The New York Times*, I went to La Cité des 4,000, a grey housing project where North African immigrants lived in apartments with bricked-up windows. Trash littered the stairwells. Spray-painted slogans denounced the French government as fascist. Members of the three major gangs sold cocaine and hashish in the parking lots amid the burned-out hulks of several cars. A few young men threw stones at me. They chanted "Fuck the United States! Fuck the United States! Fuck the United States!" and "Osama bin Laden! Osama bin Laden! Osama bin Laden!" By the door of an elderly Jewish woman's apartment someone had spray-painted "Death to the Jews," which she had whitewashed out.

In the banlieues Osama bin Laden was a hero. When news of the 9/11 attacks reached La Cité des 4,000—so named because it had 4,000 public housing apartments at the time of its construction—young men poured out of their apartments to cheer and chant in Arabic, "God is great!" France, a couple of weeks earlier, had held the first soccer match between a French and an Algerian team since Algeria's war of independence ended in 1962. The

North Africans in the stadium hooted and whistled during the French national anthem. They chanted, "Bin Laden! Bin Laden! Bin Laden!" Two French ministers, both women, were pelted with bottles. As the French team neared victory, the Algerian fans, to stop the game, flooded onto the field.

"You want us to weep for the Americans when they bomb and kill Palestinians and Iraqis every day?" Mohaam Abak, a Moroccan immigrant sitting with two friends on a bench told me during my 2001 visit to La Cité des 4,000. "We want more Americans to die so they can begin to see what it feels like."

"America declared war on Muslims a long time ago," said Laala Teula, an Algerian immigrant who worked for many years as a railroad mechanic. "This is just the response."

It is dangerous to ignore this rage. But it is even more dangerous to refuse to examine and understand its origins. **It did not arise from the Quran or Islam. It arose from mass despair, from palpable conditions of poverty, along with the West's imperial violence, capitalist exploitation and hubris. As the resources of the world diminish, especially with the onslaught of climate change, the message we send to the unfortunate of the earth is stark and unequivocal: We have everything and if you try to take anything away from us we will kill you. The message the dispossessed send back is also stark and unequivocal. It was delivered in Paris.**

Chris Hedges previously spent nearly two decades as a foreign correspondent in Central America, the Middle East, Africa and the Balkans. He has reported from more than fifty countries and has worked for *The Christian Science Monitor*, *National Public Radio*, *The Dallas Morning News* and *The New York Times*, for which he was a foreign correspondent for fifteen years.

Truthdig was co-founded by Los Angeles entrepreneur Zuade Kaufman, who serves as publisher, and journalist Robert Scheer, the website's editor. See <http://www.truthdig.com/about>

EXPENDABLES

[Discussing class structure in the First Century CE agrarian Roman Empire.]

The Expendable Class is the terrible title given by Lenski to the very bottom of this social structure. It "included a variety of types, ranging from petty criminals and outlaws to beggars and underemployed itinerant workers, and numbered all those forced to live solely by their wits or by charity". Why was this class maintained, and what was its structural purpose in society? The explanation is as terrible as the title: "Despite high rates of infant mortality, the occasional practice of infanticide, the more frequent practice of celibacy, and adult mortality caused by war, famine, and disease, agrarian societies usually produced *more people than the dominant classes found it profitable to employ*". What was the origin of those in the Expendable Class? They "were seldom able to maintain normal marriages, and owing to infanticide, malnutrition, disease, and deprivation, seldom reproduced themselves," but such "high death rates were usually offset by the steady stream of new recruits forced into [their] ranks from the classes immediately above [them]. These recruits were largely the sons and daughters of poor peasants and artisans who inherited little more than the shirts on their backs and a parental blessing". What did expendables do? "It seems safe to say that illegal activity was the best hope of those who fell into this class, and for the poorest peasants as well". What was their number? "The best estimate ... is that in normal times from five to ten per cent of the population found itself in this depressed class, with the figure rising as high as fifteen per cent on some occasions and falling almost to zero on others".

John Dominic Crossan, *The Birth of Christianity*, HarperSanFrancisco, 1998. pp155-156 quoting and citing Gerhard Lenski

DID YOU GET THE PICTURE?

In 1899 an American schoolteacher, who used the penname Edwin Markham, was inspired by a painting to write a poem. The painting was "L'homme à la houe" (below) painted by the French artist, Jean-François Millet (1814-1875) in 1863; Markham's poem was "The Man with a Hoe".

It connects with the previous article about the dispossessed and also with those predictors of the future who see global starvation producing uprisings among the economically disadvantaged.

"The Man with a Hoe" Edwin Markham

Bowed by the weight of centuries he leans
Upon his hoe and gazes on the ground,
The emptiness of ages in his face,
And on his back, the burden of the world.
Who made him dead to rapture and despair,
A thing that grieves not and that never hopes,
Stolid and stunned, a brother to the ox?
Who loosened and let down this brutal jaw?
Whose was the hand that slanted back this brow?
Whose breath blew out the light within this brain?

Is this the Thing the Lord God made and gave
To have dominion over sea and land;
To trace the stars and search the heavens for power;
To feel the passion of Eternity?
Is this the dream He dreamed who shaped the suns
And marked their ways upon the ancient deep?
Down all the caverns of Hell to their last gulf
There is no shape more terrible than this –
More tongued with cries against the world's blind greed –
More filled with signs and portents for the soul –
More packed with danger to the universe.

What gulfs between him and the seraphim!
Slave of the wheel of labor, what to him
Are Plato and the swing of the Pleiades?
What the long reaches of the peaks of song,
The rift of dawn, the reddening of the rose?
Through this dread shape the suffering ages look;
Time's tragedy is in that aching stoop;
Through this dread shape humanity betrayed,
Plundered, profaned and disinherited,
Cries protest to the Powers that made the world,
A protest that is also prophecy.
O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,



"L'homme à la houe": Jean-François Millet

Is this the handiwork you give to God,
This monstrous thing distorted and soul-quenched?
How will you ever straighten up this shape;
Touch it again with immortality;
Give back the upward looking and the light;
Rebuild in it the music and the dream;
Make right the immemorial infamies,
Perfidious wrongs, immedicable woes?

O masters, lords and rulers in all lands,
How will the future reckon with this Man?
How answer his brute question in that hour
When whirlwinds of rebellion shake all shores?
How will it be with kingdoms and with kings –
With those who shaped him to the thing he is –
When this dumb Terror shall rise to judge the world,
After the silence of the centuries?

EXIT QUESTIONS

1. Is ISIS a) anti-Western? b) anti-Christian? c) sincerely Islamic in a fundamentalist way d) not really Islamic but using Islam as a cover?
2. In de-stabilising Iraq, did "the Coalition of the Willing" provide a launch-pad for ISIS?
3. Is the West so mis-reading the Middle East that further strategic errors are likely to be made?
4. Was *Charlie Hebdo* a) nobly standing up for freedom of expression b) making money from cheap laughs c) inviting retaliation d) out of touch with reality?
5. Do you agree that freedom of expression need pay no heed to the sensitivities of those being mocked?
6. What would you do to lessen the threat from ISIS – without making a bigger mess?
7. ISIS refers to the West in terms of spiritual weakness, even corruption. Do they have a point?

We welcome Letters to the Editor – see page 3

THE LAST WORD

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson

70 years ago, on 9 April 1945, the German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by the Nazis.

Most theologians and philosophers lead a quiet life of reading, research and writing but Bonhoeffer's firm convictions brought him into conflict with the Nazi authorities. He went to the USA in 1939, where he could have stayed and had a quiet life, but he felt it would be irresponsible to walk away from the situation in Germany, so returned on the eve of war.

Bonhoeffer became widely known through his *Letters and Papers from Prison* (the German title is *Widerstand und Ergebung: Resistance and Submission*), one of the sources for Bishop Robinson's book *Honest to God*. It is a measure of the continuing interest in Bonhoeffer that this work has kept on being republished, with each edition incorporating additional material. The latest version is 800 pages long. Even though his close friend and former student Eberhard Bethge has written a detailed biography, research has uncovered documents that shed additional light on his life and new biographies are still being produced. Metaxas' biography is an egregious attempt to claim Bonhoeffer for conservative American evangelicals. Schlingensiepen's biography reminds me of Bonhoeffer's courage, integrity and determination. I am struck by how the stances he took, which we so admire today, put him very much in a minority position then.

He was, of course, a leader in the Confessing Church, those who rejected the clever attempts of the Nazis to infuse the church with Nazi ideology in exchange for hypocritical promises of institutional support. He also attempted unsuccessfully to convince ecumenical leaders to regard the Confessing Church as the officially recognised Protestant Church of Germany, arguing that the Nazi-controlled church had distorted the gospel and was effectively heretical.

The Confessing Church was primarily concerned with the purity of the gospel and unwilling or unable to challenge the Nazis in the political realm. Bonhoeffer was one of the very few who made the "Jewish question" central, breaking with the Lutheran doctrine of two kingdoms, whereby one's faith requires obedience to the government because it is, following Romans 13,

appointed by God and part of His way of ruling in the world. He argued for concerted action against the denial of human rights to Jews, but found himself a lone voice. The most others were prepared to do was protest against the exclusion of those of Jewish race from the Protestant Church.

Bonhoeffer was also in a tiny minority as a conscientious objector. He lived with the background fear that he would be called up. Refusal to accept military service earned the death penalty.

In Lutheran theology, salvation is by grace alone. Bonhoeffer engaged in a polemic against "cheap grace," and saw the danger of proclaiming an easy forgiveness that did not require any sort of discipleship. Here too, Bonhoeffer was a solitary voice: Karl Barth for example had deep reservations. His book *Discipleship* (also known as *The Cost of Discipleship*) was published in 1937 and explored following Jesus, contrasting it with following Hitler (the Führer, i.e. leader).

Bonhoeffer was unusual also in his desire to see a strong, mutually supportive Christian community and even looked to monastic traditions for ideas. He worked for the Confessing Church as leader of a preachers' seminar and established the "House of Brethren" as such a community. Theology students joined this community for a six month course in practical ministry, until it was closed down by the Nazi authorities.

Bonhoeffer went out on a limb most of all by joining the resistance. Early on it became clear to him that the time had passed for verbal protests. The only way forward was the elimination of Hitler and the defeat of Germany. He was able to become part of German Military Intelligence (*Abwehr*), with a brief to use his ecumenical contacts overseas to gather intelligence information for the German military. Military Intelligence was a hub for the resistance, so his real role was to act as a courier, making contact with the English government through Bishop Bell, with a message asking if they were willing to declare a cease-fire if Hitler were assassinated. He effectively functioned as a double



Dietrich Bonhoeffer
1906-1945

agent. The hope was that British support would persuade more military leaders to join the resistance. But the British Government declined to respond, as Churchill's line was that all Germans were Nazis, and that nothing other than unconditional surrender was acceptable. This made it much more difficult for the conspirators. After the failed attempt on Hitler's life, the Nazis eventually found evidence of Bonhoeffer's involvement in the circle of conspirators, resulting in his execution.

In prison, Bonhoeffer wrote letters to his friend Eberhard Bethge, exploring the new thinking that so delighted Bishop Robinson and others. He attacked the God-of-the-gaps (the argument that God is needed as a stopgap, in places where science does not (yet) have an explanation). He rejected the assault on the adulthood of the world as a means of softening up in preparation for the gospel. He explored the idea of "religionless Christianity". Long before, in his post-doctoral thesis of 1927, he had written, "Einen Gott, den 'es gibt,' gibt es nicht," best paraphrased as "a God, of whom people say, 'There is a God,' does not exist."

Bonhoeffer also (and this is not so well known in the English-speaking world) began to write poetry while in prison. "By Powers of Good" has been added to German hymnbooks and is a firm favourite for New Year services. "Night Voices in Tegel" encapsulates his experience in prison, hearing a jailer come before dawn to fetch a prisoner for execution, and waiting in the dark for day to break. One of the highlights of my time in Germany was hearing this poem sung by Siegfried Fietz at a concert in my church to an enraptured crowd of completely silent young people. "Stations on the Way to Freedom" reflects on stages of his life: discipline, action, suffering, and finally death, which he knew was immanent and addressed like this: "Come now, highest

festival on the way to eternal freedom".

A lot of what Bonhoeffer writes sounds quite traditional today. It could easily be taken for conventional and bland piety, but looks very different when you realise that it describes his experience and the convictions he lived by under extremely difficult circumstances. I am left wondering what Bonhoeffer would say and do today, where we are faced, not with an evil Nazi regime, but with a globalised system that is content with half-hearted and ineffectual measures when faced with runaway climate change, horrendous gaps between rich and poor, and continual wars.

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson 2014-2015



FROM THE STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee held its annual face-to-face meeting at the recently refurbished conference rooms of St. Andrews on the Terrace in Wellington on 14 February.

The following outlines some of what it did at the meeting:

- Spent some time telling each other how we came to be involved in the Sea of Faith.
- Received a report by George Dodd from the Auckland Local Arrangements Committee.
- Modified the title of Conference 2015 to read "Micawber vs Cassandra: Responding to an increasingly uncertain future".
- Heard of progress in inviting keynote speakers.
- Explored ways of ensuring that keynote speakers deliver the text of their talks sufficiently in advance of Conference to enable its photocopying and give core group leaders time for preparation.
- Brainstormed ideas for the Conference 2016 theme.

SEA OF FAITH (NEW ZEALAND) STEERING COMMITTEE 2015

Back: Doug Sellman Gretchen Kivell Norm Ely George Dodd Peter Cowley (Treasurer) Noel Cheer (Editor)



Front: Bruce Tasker Jock Crawford (Secretary) Bernadette Krassoi Laurie Chisholm (Chair)