

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 133

December 2017

Luther lit a fuse, what happens next?

The theme for this year's Conference was Reformation. Each of the keynote speakers addressed the theme from their own knowledge and experience. Those present were treated to fresh understandings of historical Christianity from Sir Lloyd Geering and the breadth of reforming movements in world religions by Rachael Kohn. Sue Bradford spoke of transformation beyond reformation in Aotearoa and Hal Taussig on new Progressive Christian movements in the United States. We were treated to four deeply personal and amazingly insightful presentations. You can read a summary of them in this newsletter.

Sea of Faith Conference is much more than the stimulating speeches and electives. In Core Groups, during meal breaks and informally at other times, talking to others expands one's horizons. A friend said that Conference allows for spiritual growth that has relevance and integrity for you, and the freedom to grow into a greater sense of human

responsibility for the whole of creation. The closing panel discussion, chaired by Adrian Skelton, brought the four speakers together to answer questions under the heading Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning. Global warming was frequently named as the most pressing challenge facing us today. This poses the question what are we doing about this individually and collectively?

Gretchen Kivell, the retiring chairperson, said in the Conference Newsletter, 'I always leave SoF Conference walking a little taller and with greater confidence'. I certainly agree with her and hope this was the feeling of others who were there.

Jan Calvert
Chairperson



But What About Mrs Luther?

In these days of equality between the sexes, it just won't do to talk exclusively of Martin Luther and to ignore Katharina von Bora, the nun who became his wife, as if she were of no significance. Christiane Dalichow has done what she can to redress the balance. Of course, women back then were expected to be subservient to their husbands and to leave major life decisions to them, but we would be wise not to underestimate the effect that Katharina von Bora had on Martin Luther's thinking.

She was a strong and gifted woman who shaped his ideas about marriage and family life. He called her "Doctora Lutherin" which implies that he respected her views in theological matters as well.

She was extremely good at managing a huge household (thirty student boarders, in order to make some income - and use the rooms of the monastery, I guess!). She had been well trained in the monastery in how to run a large household and farm! As Protestants we easily forget that!

If you were to sign up for a tour of the town of Wittenberg, where according to the legend Luther nailed his ninetyfive theses to the church door, you might well encounter Christiane Dalichow. She regularly dresses up in costume to look like Katharina von Bora and functions as a tour guide, taking people around the historical features of Wittenberg. Christiane has now written a book, *I, Katharina Luther, Tell You the Story of My Life. Leipzig 2017*. In it, she imaginatively sets down reflections on the events of her life.

Katharina was born in 1499 and grew up on a farm but was only five years old when her mother died and her father gave her to the Benedictine monastery in Brehna, where she was to be educated. When she was nine, she moved to another monastery, where her aunt was the abbess. There she first heard about Luther.

Together with eleven other nuns, she escaped from the monastery, hidden among empty fish barrels delivered by Leonard Koppe. This had been organised by Luther. Many refused to accept the nuns into their homes, as that would be a crime under canon law. Katharina spent some time in the household of Lucas Cranach the painter.

Luther was not initially interested in Katharina, and doubtful that marriage was the best course of action, as it involved breaking his ordination vows. However, he eventually decided that this would "please his father, rile the pope, cause the angels to laugh, and the devils to weep."

The elector of Saxony gave them the Black Monastery as a wedding gift, so Katharina took over the management of its animals and fruit & vegetable garden.

Katharina bore Luther six children, two of whom died prematurely. Things were difficult for her after Luther's death in 1546. On the outbreak of war, she had to flee, first to Magdeburg and then a second time to Braunschweig. While she was able to return when the war ended, the outbreak of the Black Plague forced her to flee once again. A terrible accident while fleeing resulted in her death at the age of fiftythree.

Laurie Chisholm



Christiane Dalichow in costume talking to a tour group at the statue of Katharina von Bora

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.

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 via annual Conference and Newsletter, 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 the following **Life Members**: Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK), Noel Cheer, and Ian Harris. Also Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley (appointed at the 2017 AGM).

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There is a team of **Copy Editors** (Shirley Dixon, Maria Cash, Barbara Purchas, and Jocelyn Kirkwood). **Newsletter Distribution** is by Yvonne Curtis (paper copies) and Peter Cowley (emailed copies).

Other Steering Committee members: Adrian Skelton, Doug Sellman, Ian Crumpton, Brian Ellis, Steve Collard, and Rob McKay.

To offer a comment on material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact Laurie Chisholm (laurie.chisholm1@gmail.com) mobile 021 2010302.

Publication deadline for submitted Newsletter copy for the next issue: 14/02/18.

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This time from Daniel Phillips, our Steering Committee secretary.

Membership of the national organisation currently costs \$20 per year, which includes the newsletter, sent by email. This year's AGM agreed to charge an additional \$30 annually for the printed newsletter. Membership is now also on an individual rather than a household basis. The start date for the printed newsletter charge is yet to be established.

SoF News

From the Editor

The news spread like wildfire, even before Conference started. Our editor, Noel Cheer, had only a week or so before Conference, received a devastating diagnosis as a result of test results. He has therefore needed to relinquish his responsibilities as newsletter editor and web manager. We are still hopeful that he will be able to contribute to the newsletter.

After Conference, he sent our chairperson, Jan Calvert, this lovely email:

Thank you very much for the card that was made at the Conference and forwarded to me.

As you will appreciate this is not the most joyous time that Shirley and I have lived through but, buoyed by the love that we are receiving from each other, from family, close friends and even relative strangers, we are not only surviving, we are quietly content.

We are realistic in acknowledging that what is left to me can be measured in months — probably less than a year — but it's the quality that is important.

I am so pleased that the Conference went well. I hope to write a reflection on it for a forthcoming Newsletter. Thank you for your praise — some a bit extravagant — but I like it! And

thank you for the support of loving friends.

And when you too are invited to drink your last glass of red wine and turn to accept the 'darker draft', I hope you will be as well-supported as I am.

Kind regards

Noel

Newsletter Subscription

The AGM made changes to the way newsletter subscriptions work. More about this in a later issue!

Editorial Help Wanted

At Conference, Laurie Chisholm suggested that we form an editorial team and called for volunteers. Several volunteered to proof read issues but we need people to help establish editorial policy and steer the newsletter into the future. Volunteers can contact Laurie or Jan Calvert.

Conference Roundup

As always, the Conference Papers this year were informative and stimulating. For your convenience we have included below summaries and excerpts from the papers – some readings may not 'flow' because some excerpts do not form a continuous text. I began by giving actual quotes quotation marks, but stopped later. So sometimes it will be hard to tell whether it's editorial comment or actual quote, but you can always check the original handouts and audio files of the keynote addresses on our website sof.org.nz.

500 years:

From the Reformation of the Church to the Reformulation of (Christian) Faith

By Sir Lloyd Geering.



“Martin Luther never set out to reform the church...he was quite simply registering a protest.” “He set in motion three interconnected movements in human culture, which were to have far greater consequences than he ever intended or even imagined.”

1. The Christian world-view

Luther's “study of the Bible convinced him that there was no biblical warrant for the existence of such a place as Purgatory.” “The sudden abolition of purgatory... opened the door for further dramatic changes in the Christian world-view. Hell “began to fade out of the Christian world-view before disappearing altogether for most people but rigid fundamentalists.” The concept of heaven was still operating well into the twentieth century. John Baillie's defence of the after-life in 1934 rested more on philosophical grounds and somewhat less on biblical sources. Funeral services increasingly omit references to an after-life.

2. The role and authority of the church.

“The priesthood of all believers” became a Protestant slogan. Luther wanted to re-assert the equal status of all Christian believers and to remove the divisions between the ‘religious’ and the ‘secular’ and between the priests and the laity. This quickly led to the dissolution of the monasteries and convents, which may be seen as an important step towards the democratising of all society.

Luther also rejected the idea of an authoritative priesthood. The reformers were guided by the pattern of the early church which had overseers (episcopoi), elders (presbyters) and servers (deacons).

The pioneers of the Enlightenment took the Reformation theme – ‘the priesthood of all believers’ – to its logical conclusion. ...This... led to the flourishing of modern biblical scholarship and to the end of Christendom and to the ‘death of God’ theologians.

3. The nature and content of faith

At the very beginning of Christianity, the historic figure of Jesus of Nazareth was transformed and replaced by the divine figure of Christ. In a similar way, faith became transformed into the acceptance of a set of beliefs. It may be claimed that Luther's basic “Here I stand, I can do no other” was the beginning of this rediscovery of the nature of personal faith. This faith gave him the courage to question some of the basic practices in the church of his time and to defy the authority of the Pope, even at the risk of his own life. God was the bundle of values – truth, compassion, goodness, justice – that called for our response.

Today we glory in living in a post-Enlightenment era. The enthusiastic gatherings of charismatic Christians... mark the swan-song of organised Christianity. They are based on emotional feeling... They lack the intellectual content that would give them some staying power.

“Today's humanistic secular culture is the direct product of past Christendom...Indeed they are the most vibrant component of the more recently emerging global culture.

In this long and complex process of the coming to earth of the Kingdom of God, Martin Luther in his day played a leading role. We honour his memory in this 500th anniversary of his heroic act.

The Call to Reform in the World's Religions

By Dr Rachael Kohn

Many SoFers will be familiar with Rachael; she has spoken twice at previous Conferences. As a qualified religious studies academic who works as a presenter and interviewer for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, responsible for "The Spirit of Things", she is uniquely qualified to survey developments in religion the world over. Accordingly, her keynote speech widens the perspective from the Protestant Reformation started by Luther to reformations of all sorts.



There were indeed ninety-five theses, but their nailing on the church door is a fiction. Luther's theology swept away the need for priests, orders and their buildings and lands. A major reformation happened in parts of northern Europe. This was a momentous change, although the Catholic Church was not as monolithic as it seemed and as the popular mind assumes.

In Judaism, reformation of a momentous kind had already occurred. The destruction of the temple and exile to Babylon brought about big changes. When Cyrus allowed them to return, they rebuilt the temple. Already when in exile, without the aid of a priestly cult in the temple, they gathered in synagogues for weekly readings of the scriptures. When the temple fell for a second time in 70 CE, under the Romans, Rabbinic Judaism took the people forward.

Jewish thinking and practice underwent many reformations in the diaspora: A strong mystical tradition in 13th century Spain; the Hasidic movement in 18th century Lithuania and Poland; the Reform Judaism movement in the 19th century.

Islam underwent a major reformation period in the 9th to 11th centuries. Today, some Muslims in the West are calling for a new reformation in Islam.

Buddhism, originating in the 5th century BCE in North-Eastern India as a reaction to Hinduism, has experienced some of the most momentous reformations in its 2,500 year history.

In the 3rd century BCE, King Asoka set about spreading the faith beyond the Ganges valley. Under Greek influence, the Buddha was depicted in sculptural form. Previously only a footprint was allowed to represent him.

The 1st century CE saw the emergence of Mahayana Buddhism. This broke down the barrier that had grown up between the 'elite' self-serving monks of the Theravada tradition and the people.

The third millennium has seen an increase in the importance of spiritual experience. For example, the World Community for Christian Meditation emerged, under the leadership of Laurence Freeman. This opens a new space for Christians and can be regarded as a Christian form of mindfulness meditation.

Pentecostalism downplays theology and ritual and is primarily concerned with a personal encounter with divinity. One of its most recent forms is Hillsong, which features contemporary songs and the flowing emotions of joy, love, and even weeping. 30,000 people attend its annual conferences and it numbers Justin Bieber as a member, along with other celebrities.

There is also the prosperity gospel, propagated by Benny Hinn, for example. Some of this type of religion has a hollow side, but it can provide a welcome alternative to the routine of the day-to-day world.

Buddhism has an equivalent to the doctrine of indulgences. In Thailand you can buy a little Buddha to stick onto a stupa, an action that will raise your merit for future rebirths. There has been a 20 year investigation into this practice, suspecting corruption, but without coming to any conclusion.

Taiwan has seen the emergence of Ciji in 1966. This is a service organisation and a kind of pure land Buddhism. It has 8 million members and 80% are women. It was founded by Cheng Yen, who was influenced by Catholic nuns who had a social justice ethic.

In the Islamic world, Ida Lichter has written a book on Muslim Women Reformers but reformation there is difficult. While Islam is not centralised, there are battles between rival schools.

Not all reformations are good. The German Faith Movement and Isis are examples of bad reformations.

Rachael concluded by asking about future reformations. She thought it unlikely that the secularised West would provide one. It is too easy to opt out and we are spoiled for choice. Those of us with no religion are likely to stay there until we find something that fulfills a need.

Reformation is most likely to play out in Islam. Isis is apocalyptic and savage but a variant could emerge that does have a future.

Religion is here to stay but it never stays put. Watch this space and hope for the best..

Making it Real: Beyond Reformation to Transformation

By Dr Sue Bradford

The Sea of Faith may be in danger of endlessly discussing interesting themes and encouraging its members never to go beyond discussion to action. Sue Bradford was a refreshing counter to this and her courageous willingness to reinvent herself and to keep a focus on action to change the world was an inspiration. The real Sue Bradford is very different from her public image of angry left-wing radical. In particular, there is obviously profound thinking and penetrating insight that underlies her activism.



Sue described her early life and her experience in the anti-war and peace movements at the time of the Vietnam War. She talked about her work for the unemployed at the Auckland Unemployed Workers Rights Centre. She was a student of Lloyd Geering while at Victoria University. After losing the leadership battle to Metiria Turei, she worked on a PhD in Public Policy and gained an MA with first class honours in Mandarin. She won a scholarship to China where she lived for a

time. Currently she is still involved in the Kotare Trust and Auckland Action against Poverty.

She looked at the new government, wondering whether it is committed to changes within neoliberal capitalism and whether it has the capacity to move beyond it.

Transformation can be personal...spiritual and/or political.

She left us with the following questions:

- What would a transformed Aotearoa look like?
- Can the practice and discussion of spirituality and religion be a disengaged substitute for political action?
- Is working to end inequality and its structural causes in Aotearoa/NZ a spiritual/religious issue that SoFers could engage in?
- Do you have any ideas about steps forward for engagement and action?

The recently published biography of Sue Bradford was on sale at Conference and was a hot favourite!

Constant Radical. The Life and Times of Sue Bradford by Jenny Chamberlain. Fraser Books, Masterton 2017.

Reforming Toward Beautiful, Less Arrogant, and De-Centered Christianities

By Professor Hal Taussig

The Reformation did not seep very deeply into my pores. While Christianity is failing throughout much of the world, I am much more gripped by profoundly new and healthy emergence of non-normative Christianities. I aim to give images, stories and examples of these blossoming Christianities.

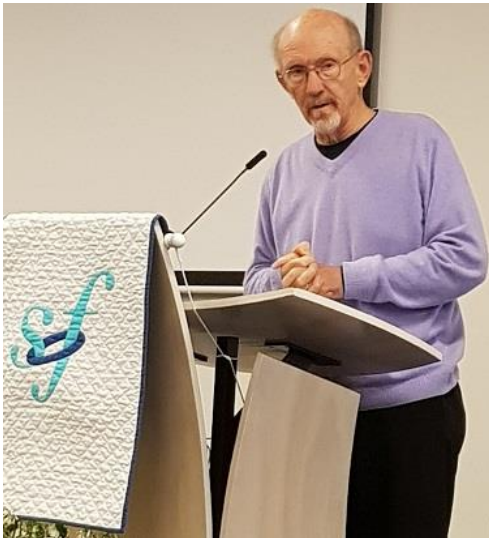
Twelve years ago, Polebridge Press published my book, *A New Spiritual Home: Progressive Christianity at the Grass Roots*. My pastoral experience and grass roots research over the past thirty years wants to stand both over against and on the shoulders of the primarily deconstructive era of liberal Protestant critique, anti-

spiritual posture, and word-heavy tendencies. I want to describe real phenomena.

My five primary characteristics of “progressive Christianity” are:

- Spiritual Vitality
- Intellectual Integrity
- Transgressing Gender Boundaries
- Vitality without Superiority
- Justice and Ecology

In my book, I listed and described 1,000 such local churches.



Here is my 2017 list of characteristics:

- Vulnerability

21st Century Christianities can learn from and articulate clear practices of vulnerability as they seek to find ways past the arrogance, self-absorption and privileged social location of classic Christianity.

- Queerness

Queerness is blazing new ways of thinking about everything from national identities through biblical studies to massive migrations.

- Democratic Ritual

Democratic rituals defy hierarchical and intellectualist controls in order to make deeper meaning in their own practice and reform life itself.

- Spirituality.

The likes of Taizé monasticism draws thousands of people daily to rural France to chant Gregorian versions of scripture and spend afternoons in intense social discussion. People are practising Buddhist and Hindu meditations although their own traditions do not model them or endorse them.

I think there is increasing vitality even while the overall situation in American local churches has further declined. These re-emergent swirls are probably best compared to the fervor of medieval monastic movements. The social marginalization of monastics often has allowed them to birth beautifully deep spiritualities and incisive intellectual clarity.

Reformation 2.0

Rev Clay Nelson gave the first of the elective lectures. An ordained Episcopal priest, he came to NZ from California in 2005 to serve as manager of communications and marketing at St Matthew-in-the-City in Auckland. He became famous/notorious through numerous controversial billboards. Currently, he is minister at the Auckland Unitarian Church.



Luther's break with Rome “was as much a political act as a theological one.” Others followed his lead, but “all wanted to substitute their brand of ‘purified’ theocracy ... for the dominant corrupt version. They fully intended that their new, improved Christianity would become the new, improved law of the land... The religion of each country's ruler determined which version of Christianity would be the civil law in this new age of nationalism. So, if you were Catholic and your king became a Calvinist, you had to convert or face harsh retribution.”

“The seeds of the problem go back to the early church losing sight of Jesus' vision of creating a kingdom of heaven here on earth.”

“Unitarians were amongst the radical reformers that first tried to reform the reformation.” “The father of Unitarianism, Francis Dávid, was born in the Transylvanian Alps of Hungary. Initially, he defended Catholicism, but was swayed by the soundness of the Lutheran arguments, so became Lutheran. He then

defended the Lutheran position against the Calvinists, but was again convinced and so became a Calvinist. The young king of Transylvania issued an Edict of Toleration, which allowed Dávid to explore further, providing the foundation of Unitarian thinking, and convincing the king to also become Unitarian.

When the king was succeeded by a Catholic, David was convicted of the crime of “innovation” and condemned to prison for the rest of his life.

We are all socialised into a particular culture, but we need to transcend its enculturation. “We have to be born again and again and again until we die.”

“If the church were able to step outside of the norms it created and reboot itself, a new reformation would be marked by free thought, innovation, a focus on creating the kingdom of heaven and not preserving what remains of a once powerful institution stunted by demanding its followers conform to antiquated beliefs. I’m not sure what a Reformation 2.0 church would look like. Innovation is full of surprises. Unitarianism today would be unrecognisable to Francis Dávid and 500 years from now the same may be true of the church to us. My hope is that it will reflect Jesus’ vision more than does today’s belief-centred Christianity.

The Didache: On to the Past, Back to the Future

Tom Hall gave the second elective lecture. In his inimitable style he gave us a provocative look at an ancient document that didn’t make it into our bible.

The Didache was discovered in 1873. It is a 100-verse ancient document that reflects an early form of Christianity and was “likely written by Galilean “Jesus Jews.” It may “reflect [the] earliest beginnings of the Christ myth.”

It could be the oldest Christian document, pre-dating Q and 1 Thessalonians.

The last chapter envisages the imminent final assault of evil and the salvation of the faithful. “Today of course, we can ignore these predictions of divine apocalypse, knowing that the greater threat is self-destruction by ecological apocalypse.”

“Only a thorough-going elimination of supernaturalism can take Christianity back to its origins and lead to a creative and nurturing religion of the future.”

Tom closed with a summary of his message in a parody of the Georgia Institute of Technology’s fight song:

Like all the earliest Christians, I take my Jesus straight;
Forget all those fantastic fictions, just be good to your neighbour, mate.

Omnibus CD

To enable you to really appreciate Conference, a CD is available containing all the audio files and documents from Conference. \$20 from the Membership Secretary, 1/30a Dunns Street, Silverstream, Upper Hutt 5019.

Religion is here to stay;
but it never stays the same

Rachael Kohn



The lively closing panel. Rachael’s comments provoke interest and evident pleasure. Lloyd appears to be pondering a difficult issue.

The Internet Corner

On any given day, we access multiple pages from the Internet, but probably give little thought to where exactly these pages come from. One answer is that they are “in cyberspace,” a special domain of their own which does not easily map to our ordinary concept of space.

Cyberspace is essentially a synonym for the Internet. Its parent term is cybernetics, the study of control systems, based on the Greek word for a helmsman. It is not an especially fortunate choice of words and I think that the term Internet is more precise and informative. “Cyberspace” sounds a bit vague and mystical. Internet is an abbreviation for internetwork; it is a network of networks, a structure that interconnects networks all over the world with one another.

But where exactly are web pages in our space and time? Let me try to explain this simply. When you enter a web address (such as www.sof.org.nz) into your browser, the browser sends this off to a special computer called a domain name server, which converts that human-readable name into an Internet Protocol address (such as 121.75.105.117), which is machine-readable. At its simplest, this address is unique in the whole world and identifies a particular computer (high-end computers used in the Internet are generally called servers). The web page will be somewhere on that server. In that server’s settings, the web address will be mapped to a folder such as c:\users\documents\website. When you enter a web address such as www.sof.org.nz/doclist.htm, the computer looks in c:\users\documents\website to find the file doclist.htm and sends it to your browser.

Engineers are clever people and they often have difficult problems to solve. What if the computer fails? What if the whole city in which the computer resides is bombed or flooded or destroyed in an earthquake? Mechanisms are in place that enable other computers to take over. They maintain a backup copy of the files on the first computer, and if it fails, they take over. So it is an oversimplification to say that the web page exists on a particular computer.

Moreover, the content of most commerce websites nowadays is stored as a database, not as htm or html files and the web page is generated on the fly from records in the database. So you could say that the web page doesn’t even exist until you ask for it! A web page can also contain hyperlinks, which connect that page to other pages on other websites – just another part of the genius of the Internet.

So where are the websites that comprise the Internet? One answer is, “in cyberspace,” another “in the cloud.” Both are shorthand for a complex reality devised by clever engineers to provide the whole world with information stored in any computer anywhere. Sometimes even human-created reality is worthy of our awe and amazement!

Religion Dispatches

<http://religiondispatches.org>

Religion Dispatches is your independent, non-profit, award-winning source for the best writing on critical and timely issues at the intersection of religion, politics, and culture.

This is a US website with news on religious matters. It’s the place to go to if you want a religiously informed commentary on contemporary social and political issues. One example is the recent survey of the current debate on LGBTQ issues, focusing especially on Australia, where the recent controversy has been particularly heated (the title is “Australian Church Leaders See Marriage Vote as a Battle for Soul of Australia”). Other articles look at Donald Trump and at mass shootings.

The editors comment, “Our editorial aim is to create a new way of thinking about religion in American culture and politics, one that challenges last century’s media dominance by an ultra-conservative fringe, that invites free discussion of religious ideas once they’ve hit the public square—and that keeps us and our readership powerfully engaged.”

Laurie Chisholm

Reflection on Christmas

As a rule, discussion on the Christmas stories boils down to the question, “Can it be true?” The answer can be, “Yes, that’s the way it was. Gabriel came from heaven, went to Mary in her room, spoke to her, with big wings and a white garment, just as the Gothic painters envisaged.” But the answer can also be, “It’s all pious fantasy. Legend, symbol at best.” Both answers seem to me to be too simple.

The imagery of this and the following stories of the birth in the inn, of the shepherds and the wise men, are too full of meaning and significance, to permit talking about “pious fantasy.” Perhaps this story is the most astonishing example of a cosmic synopsis that has ever been attempted.

The breadth extends from God via angels and humans to animals. The palace is in the scenery as is the temple, the inn, the manger and the field. The wise men from Mesopotamia, the Caesar in Rome, the king in Jerusalem, the scribes and the shepherds, the richest and the poorest, and in-between the solitary heart of a girl with her child...

Anyone who has begun to see the images in which important, healing and great things appear in a human soul and in the world will carefully pause at this story and hope and wish that it might open up its meaning to him.

*Jörg Zink, Erfahrung mit Gott
(Experience with God) page 308-9.*

On the Misuse of Religion

After centuries of the misuse of religion for social and political purposes, many people feel betrayed. One should never have used “God” for patriotic propaganda. “God

is with us” as a blessing text on soldiers’ helmets – religion should never have been useful like that. Moreover, the time of ritual magic is evidently coming to an end, in which people believed that you could influence the course of events through prayer and sacrifice. Science is useful for explaining the world and technology for changing it. Religion is useless; that much seems to be established. And yet this liberation of religion from everything purposeful has in itself a surprising effect; it opens up a humane realm.

Asked for a maxim of ethical action, Kant answered 230 years ago, that humans must always be regarded as ends in themselves, never as means to an end. If this is true, it is unethical and irresponsible to be already equipping 4-year olds with smart cards for optimising their education, so as to improve Germany’s chances in international competition, or to transform youth on the parade ground into killing machines. But where in society are there humane, purpose-free spaces, inaccessible to the plans of the economy, the military and the political system?

From a lecture by Eugen Drewermann. Reported in Matthias Beier’s Facebook page.

To the Editor

I want to express my gratitude to all who helped make the 2017 SOF Conference a very special occasion for me. Thank you.

I was very surprised and felt very special to be awarded Life Membership of the SOF along with Pete and Suzi at the conference.

Being part of the SOF since its inception has been a very important part of my life and has given me so many opportunities to meet the most wonderful people, see interesting places, and hear absorbing stories. It has continued to deepen my faith and understanding of the potential we all have as human beings to help others and ourselves to live life to the full.

Thank you and best wishes to you all for the future. Yvonne Curtis

Last Word

By Guest Correspondent Daniel Phillips, newly appointed Steering Committee secretary.

"In the beginning was the word (logos).....
Straightforward enough, on the face of it, but,
at a deeper level, quite profound. At Noel's
invitation I am writing the "Last Page" -
definitely not the last word! Back in the deep
south I have had time to reflect on our
conference keynote speakers as they considered
the word "reformation". It is 500 years since
Martin Luther upset the established Roman
Catholic order of the day and triggered a series
of changes that he could never have imagined.
There have been tectonic shifts in
understanding, since then, as cultural plates
collide, sometimes violently, sometimes
peacefully. The restless molten core that is
human nature powers this process through our
interactions as individuals, groups, and nations.
Maybe Quakers are more aptly named than their
founding fathers could ever have foreseen as
they are often found as facilitators at cultural
plate boundaries. Could cultural tectonics be the
way ahead as most of us strive to live in peace?
Who remembers that Scottish song "Donald
where's your Troosers"? It seems appropriate
again now but for very different reasons and a
totally different context.

Sir Lloyd Geering, fresh from celebrating his
50th anniversary since facing charges for heresy,
and the founder of SOF NZ, was first to speak.
About to celebrate his 100th birthday in
February he continues to amaze. Heresy
obviously has a lot going for it and many of us
are forever grateful that he chose to defend his
views and share them openly as they have
evolved over decades. His many books make for
stimulating reading. Lloyd is a beacon for free
thinkers worldwide and a stimulus for change.

Rachael Kohn, a previous speaker at two
conferences, pointed out that "Reformation" is a
loaded word. Reality and myth often take
different paths. By illustrating reformations

that have taken place in other major religions,
through the centuries, she led us to conclude
that this process is the norm rather than the
exception. An inevitable result, perhaps, of the
driving force of human nature?

I have admired Sue Bradford over decades
for her strong social conscience and her drive to
act. It takes unconditional love for others to be
the "get your hands dirty" activist that she
continues to be. Being prepared to go to jail for
what you believe in takes an inner strength that
is beyond most. Cradle to grave conformity is
the way of choice - don't rock the boat. Is there
a place for aging "rockers" in the Sea of Faith?
Who needs a boat - get your feet wet. Walking
on water is for the few, up to your neck in it for
the rest. Should we follow Sue's lead and add a
sprinkling of activism to the talkfest? At the
very least food for thought.

Hal Taussig opened his address with an
apology for speaking slowly. When you are
decades into your journey, as I am, that is such a
refreshing change. Spraying your subject with a
barrage of words, delivered at speed, is not the
way to understanding for many of us. Hal's title:
"Reforming toward beautiful, less arrogant, and
de-centred Christianities", says it all. I will not
attempt to summarise his presentation. Please
read this carefully crafted piece.

Noel and Shirley, as the messages of support
will confirm, you were in the minds of all who
have been influenced by your actions over many
decades. While time ensures a return to the
cosmos, for all of us, memories persist beyond
the physical and thank God for that.

Thank you both for choosing black humour and
red wine, in place of eggshells, as your way of
handling the situation you find yourselves in.