

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 137

September 2018

Religion and Change

Religion is undergoing fundamental and far-reaching changes. Probably nobody really disagrees with that, but here are a few anecdotes from my personal experience that help to make this assertion concrete.

As I considered training for the Presbyterian ministry, I can remember reflecting that the Church had been around for almost 2000 years, so it was inconceivable to me that it would disappear any time soon. However, recent times have seen the rise of a plethora of fundamentalist and charismatic churches and the marginalisation or even collapse of the mainline Protestant denominations.

Not long ago, Hare Krishna was an intriguing new religion. Gaily clad devotees would process along the central streets of the city, rhythmically chanting the following:

Hare Krishna Hare Krishna,
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare,
Hare Rama Hare Rama,
Rama Rama Hare Hare"

This captivated the Beatles and George Harrison who wrote "My sweet Lord," celebrating the movement. By contrast, I was recently in Auckland and visited a Hare Krishna restaurant three times. I think I and my group were the only real customers. A few others came and went, but all seemed to be connected in some way with the institution, casually walking into the kitchen or the adjacent communal dining room. I subsequently learnt that this is now the only Hare Krishna restaurant in the whole of

Auckland, another one in Karangahape Road having permanently closed.

While in Auckland I also attended the Humanist International Conference. I was a little surprised to discover that I have a sensitive allergy to anything that sounds like humanist dogma or commitment to a humanist ideological cause. It seems we are losing plausibility structures that enable us to commit to any religious tradition.

There was a time when local religious movements went universal, standardising their point of view and applying it everywhere they had members. In spite of becoming spread throughout different cultures all over the world, these religions tend to retain some vestiges of their local origins. And so Judaism is still deeply attached to Jerusalem and the Western wall, Islam is attached to Mecca and its members are supposed to make the trip there at least once in their life and process around the Kaaba, which houses a black meteorite which is considered sacred. And Roman Catholicism is still centred on the Vatican City in Rome, as the erstwhile centre of the most important bishopric in early Christianity. While I hope that there will be a greening of religion, I think it unlikely that we will get anything like a new universal religion. Instead, we are seeing religion in a broad sense emerging in formerly secular contexts. In my local gym, many exercise classes finish with a meditation session. Its walls are plastered with exhortations and wise insights to help us with life, such as the following:



What we find difficult to grasp, is the way religion has always been changing. In a sense every transition to a new generation is a death and resurrection experience, a complete discontinuity. Only those ideas that resonate with the younger generation will continue, and so some fundamental concepts and experiences become unheard-of and even the ones that are shared find a new and different emphasis.

Fundamentalists like to think that they have an unbroken continuity going back to the early church. They don't realise that their emphases are strongly influenced by a reaction against modern biblical scholarship

Add to that the huge historical changes that have happened over the centuries. My favourite story to illustrate this is set soon after the death of Jesus.

In 66 CE, provoked by the Romans, the Jews rebelled, in part under the influence of the Zealots, who had a politicised understanding of the Kingdom of God. The Jews declared independence and began a war that lasted four years. Jerusalem was surrounded and held out for four months before it and the temple were destroyed.

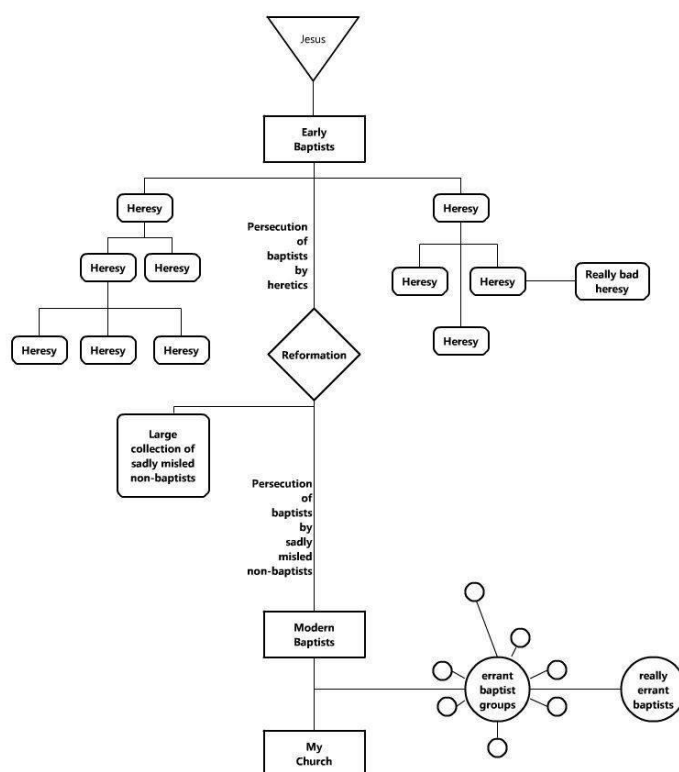


Roman legionaries carrying Jerusalem temple treasures

In the midst of the siege, an old rabbi, Johanan ben Zakkai, was worried about the future of Judaism. The zealots wouldn't let anyone leave Jerusalem on pain of death, so he hatched a plan. He had himself put into a coffin and carried outside the city walls for burial. Once there, he asked to be taken to the Roman command and requested permission to open a school in Jamnia. The request was granted and Jamnia became a centre of post-biblical rabbinical Judaism.

While we think of Judaism as continuing essentially the same over the centuries, Judaism before and after the destruction of Jerusalem was very different. Temple sacrifices were essential and there were different schools: Saducees, Pharisees and Zealots. Afterwards there was a focus on arcane interpretations and applications of the Torah by Rabbis.

The Editor



My church: unchanged since the early church!

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) and Ian Harris. Also Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley (appointed at the 2017 AGM).

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Newsletter Distribution is by Yvonne Curtis (paper copies) and Peter Cowley (emailed copies). Assistance is also provided by John Thornley (john.gill@inspire.net.nz).

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Both our present science and our present technology are so tinctured with orthodox Christian arrogance toward nature that no solution for our ecologic crisis can be expected from them alone. Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not. We must rethink and re-feel our nature and destiny.

LYNN WHITE, JR., *THE HISTORICAL ROOTS OF OUR ECOLOGICAL CRISIS*, 1974

Sea of Faith News

Annual Conference

Religion for a Sustainable Future

- 2-4 November 2018
- Silverstream Retreat Lower Hutt
- Speakers: Lloyd Geering, Byron Rangiwai, Barbara Peddie, Charles Waldegrave. Closing panel discussion chaired by Adrian Skelton.

Registrations close 1 October. Registration forms are available on www.sof.org.nz.

Two-Day Conference Proposal

The following outlines a proposal for future conferences that the Steering Committee has been working on. Please read and give us your feedback.

Over the last five years or so, there has been increasing concern expressed about the ongoing annual conference. Firstly, local groups became less able and willing to take on the task of hosting the conference in their region, which culminated in a national survey about the situation. The outcome of the survey was to establish a default position of holding the conference in Wellington, unless a local group indicated they wanted to take on the responsibility. This year will be the third time we have held the conference at Silverstream.

Secondly, there has been aging of the members of Sea of Faith. The average age of members has risen past 75 years to now be almost 80 years. Holding a residential conference at a school or retreat centre designed for teenagers and young adults was perhaps a delight for many in earlier times that sparked youthful memories of similar events, such as Christian youth camps. However, many people over the age of 75 need more comfortable and convenient accommodation.

Thirdly, too many people these days feel time-stretched, so that a three day event is a

significant commitment of time, which is not always able to be justified in the light of other responsibilities and life interests.

The Steering Committee have responded to these various concerns with a proposal to run a modified two-day conference, which would look like this:

FRIDAY

- 2:00 Registration Desk in operation – Tea and Coffee
- 3:00 Conference Opening, Welcome, Mihi Whakatau
- 3:30 AGM
- 5:00 1st Keynote – Sir Lloyd Geering (Memorial Lecture) (open to the public)
- 6:00 Socialising – Tea and Coffee (for all 1st Keynote attendees)
- 7.00 DINNER followed by movie (for Conference registrants)

SATURDAY

- 8:30 2nd Keynote
- 9:30 Core Groups
- 10:30 MORNING TEA
- 11.00 3rd Keynote
- 12.00 Core Groups
- 1.00 LUNCH
- 2.00 Panel Discussion
- 3.00 Conference Finishing. Poroporoaki

There are a number of features:

1. The conference would run from 3.00pm Friday to 3.00pm Saturday, and feature three keynote presentations rather than four, and a Friday night movie (related to the conference theme) to replace electives.

2. The first keynote would be open to the public, and entry could perhaps be by gold coin koha.

3. When the time comes that Lloyd is not able to give this lecture, we will invite a suitable person to give a Sir Lloyd Geering

Memorial Lecture, highlighting the work of Lloyd and relating to the conference theme for that year.

4. A Friday night dinner and Saturday lunch would be catered for conference registrants.

5. Registrants would organise their own accommodation for the Friday night.

6. The 2nd and 3rd keynote presentations would be preceded by core groups and a Panel discussion involving the three keynote speakers would end the conference.

The Steering Committee consider this format would be considerably easier to organise and be transportable around the various regions if local groups volunteer - Christchurch is already thinking about this. The Committee also consider the greater ease of this format would allow for the continuation of an annual event.

We look forward to more discussion about this proposal at the AGM this year at Silverstream, and welcome any comments or feedback in the meantime.

Jan Calvert (Chairperson)
Doug Sellman (Secretary)

Local Groups

In response to a request in the previous newsletter, we have the following outline of recent programmes at the Hawke's Bay Sea of Faith group.

Sunday August 19: Joan Cockburn on "War, Laws and Humanity"

Joan has been involved with New Zealand Red Cross for over 50 years and as President has led the New Zealand Delegation to international meetings in Geneva, Rio de Janeiro, Budapest, and China. The challenges are many, but the goal is always to save lives

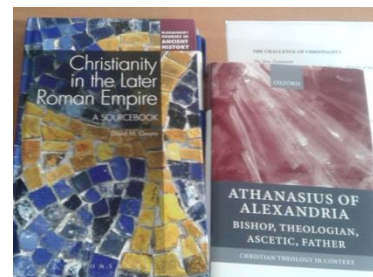
July 22: David Gwynn on "Why did the Roman Empire become Christian?"

David teaches history at Royal Holloway the University of London in the UK.

His academic interests include the transition from the ancient to the medieval world, the 'decline and fall' of the Roman Empire in the west and its survival in the east,

and the rise of Christianity AD 200-600.

16 attended his talk and wished him well on writing his latest book which he is currently undertaking away from the academic world in the relaxed setting of Napier.



June 17: Stuart Nash - on "Tax and Fairness"

The Hon Stuart Nash, Minister of Revenue, addressed some of the concerns about taxation raised at the March meeting of Sea of Faith Hawkes Bay.

He also reported on the progress of the Tax Working Group and invited participation.

<https://taxworkinggroup.govt.nz/>

May 20: John Warren - on Safe Drinking Water for New Zealand

John is a Sea of Faith member. In his professional life he oversaw drinking water systems in Gisborne and Ontario. He reported on the second report on the Havelock North drinking water misadventure and his hopes for future actions. There were many questions and a suggestion of a possible way forward now known as the three waters initiative which is now under way.

<https://www.dia.govt.nz/Three-waters-review>

Subs now due!

Sea of Faith Network membership subscriptions for the year beginning 1 July 2018 are now due. The cost per person to become a member, for those living in NZ, is \$20. That includes receiving a copy of the Newsletter by email. If you wish to receive a printed Newsletter it is an additional \$30. More details are available in the brochure on www.sof.org.nz or by emailing prcowley@gmail.com.

The Interests of Money and the Maintenance of Nature

In the previous newsletter, Drewermann argued that religion in the future needs to teach an absolute respect for zones in the world that need protection from human intervention. He continues with an analysis of money and the role it plays in preventing a sustainable future...Your editor has translated and paraphrased this excerpt.

Religion has a further important ecological function by relativizing the factor of money. You can have as many psychological theories, moral exhortations and religious appeals as you want; but you will only achieve something when you deal with the factor of money. When there is an ecological disaster, you can be sure that in the background money plays a causative role. And whenever an environmental measure (such as raising taxes on petrol or exiting the nuclear industry) is regarded as impossible, then because of worries about losing significant income. It is evidently our attitude to money that makes us incapable of acting in an environmentally friendly way or that drives us to an environmentally destructive activism.

But why? And what has religion got to do with it? It all begins with the definition of money. Economic theory regards it as a universal means of exchange on the market, and indeed that is what it is: money functions as the equivalent value of wares that are available for sale. But this “mercantile” view of money is insufficient to understand the effect of money. Many archaeological evidences indicate that money was “invented” about 5000 years ago, to enable the circulation of debt claims. ...As the interest rate is dictated by the lender, providing credit is generally a reliable method of using money to obtain even more money from someone who has none.

Given this background, to understand the religious problem of money as a generalised form of debt, you only have to add that the first profiteers were priests. In all religions, it seems that temples took over the role of the

first banks. Economic debt (*Schuld*¹) was – not without reason – seen as a concrete form of the basic debt or guilt (*Grundschuld*) that every person had to expiate before God. The form, in which that happens, is sacrifice. For bringing such sacrifices, the “profession” of the priest is necessary. The priest lives from the destruction of life in order to reconcile humans with the divine sense of justice. This “sense of justice” is however, a projection of the unconditional will of all those very earthly lenders, who want to maximally enrich themselves from the economic debt of their fellow human beings. Just as lenders cannot wish that there were no more debtors, so priests have an interest in keeping humans in a state of eternal “divine” debt/guilt (*Schuld*). This establishes two central points that in Jesus’s view demand the strongest opposition in dealing with money.

Firstly: You don’t exploit the need of your fellow human being. The man from Nazareth, as a Jew, rejected interest in general, corresponding to Mosaic law. But according to Luke 14.12-14 he made this thought even more strict. If you have money to lend, he said effectively, then give it to someone who most definitely cannot pay you back, because he needs it the most.

Secondly: If someone is indebted to you, don’t demand compensation: all humans live from God’s forgiveness, and so you also must forgive all humans all their debts. In Jesus’s view the decisive question is how to let money just be what economic theory regards it: a universal means of exchange on the market. If it really is going to be this, then it must be consistently kept away from

¹ The German word *Schuld* means both debt (of money) and guilt (over ‘sins’)

interest, in a word we must put a stop to the whole economy of banks and stock exchanges. The theories of the Argentinian Silvio Gesell show that it is possible to use money without misusing it through speculation for credit gains. Other concepts are thinkable and they have often functioned quite well in practice. Here it's not about making particular monetary models into a dogma, but what makes the theme of money so important for us in thinking about the relationship of religion and ecology is the fact that combining money and interest demands an economy that is based on continual growth of at least 1-2%. What makes the capitalist economy so "dynamic" is that it puts participants in the economy under pressure through a continual requirement to pay back debt. In order to invest, you have to take out credit. Sales have to bring in more than the cost of all the credit, interest, wages, advertising, postage and equipment. Income has to come in as quickly as possible, for the longer it takes for the lent capital to produce results, the higher the interest costs. The pressure on the producers is passed on to the consumers. There can never be enough buyers, who also go into debt to be able to make their purchases. The often repeated demand for debt relief in third world countries goes to the heart of the capitalist economy and can only be met by doing away with the whole system.

An economy that can only maintain itself by continual growth is just like a cancerous growth in the stomach. In a finite world nothing can grow indefinitely, but just that is what globalising the capitalist economy means. It needs more and more humans as consumers of more and more wares to pay back more and more credit – the ecological catastrophe is directly produced by this type of economy. The final triumph of such a system means its final collapse.

In this ever-accelerating race to catastrophe within capitalism, we become witnesses to a process that is religiously and humanly unacceptable: the transformation of the concept of value into an amount that can be realised as a price on the market... There is a continual loss of value, ultimately

a nihilism of value. Money is becoming the measure used to evaluate the whole world, the only thing of significance.

How do you assess the value of a jungle, or a river, or the pain of millions of chickens in factory farming? In a world in which everything is for sale, everything is devalued, because having money grows to be the only valid value. What is the Amazon worth? Answer in 1999: an area the size of Holland and Belgium in the Amazon costs exactly \$12 million. That is what the Brazilian Do Almeida bought it for. How many animals in the Amazon go under through his monetary transactions is evidently completely irrelevant. How much suffering factory farming needs to cause in order to stabilise the price of eggs is irrelevant. If primeval forest in Guatemala and Honduras is burnt just to provide cattle farms for McDonald's, that doesn't count at all. So the balance is: the world has no value in itself because of the only value: money. This seems to be the fate of our time. Only a religious reconsideration would be in a position to stop the sell-out of the world and to relativise, even overcome mercantilism by a true assessment of the value of things and creatures.

The sociologist Niklas Luhman says that you can only criticise a system in relation to the "sensors" that are intrinsic to each system. This means that you can preach against capitalism as long as you want – it's as useful as trying to remove fat with water. Only when you show how the principle of maximising returns can be interpreted in such a way that 'environmental protection' is a fundamental condition of just that principle, can the interests of ecology be combined with the interests of the economy.

Religion is all very well, but where does it get the "value" of its argumentation from? How can you establish limits to the capitalist system? It is of little use looking for the solution of structural problems at the level of the individual, for example by exhorting consumers to eat less meat and to buy organic eggs.

Independently of religious and moral maxims, there is a kind of self-correction at work, and there are indications that certain

environmental considerations will need to be included in the cost calculations of the economy. The prices we currently pay are misleading, because they only include production costs. The social consequences of redundancies and the ecological cost of disposing of the product at the end of its life are not included. A new German law proposes that the costs of shredding and disposing of a car are included in its purchase price. And what would it cost if the car industry needed to pay for roads and motorways, as rail currently does? What if we were to include animals such as rabbits or the protected hedgehog, that are run over in the hundreds of thousands annually, in our cost calculations?

Such questions show that it is a logical contradiction to want to globalise world trade, but at the same time to ignore the global consequences of opening borders for the transfer of goods and capital. The capitalist economy can no longer afford to devastate the whole world, without this devastation having an effect on the system; only when that happens will economy and ecology be compatible.

Only: Will we really have to wait before such a combination of culture and nature becomes unavoidable, or will we manage to avoid this out of religious conviction. On this question the credibility of faith will reveal itself in the near future. For, "What does it profit a man, if he wins the whole world, but ruins himself?" (Luke 9:25).

From Eugen Drewermann *Hat der Glaube Hoffnung? Von der Zukunft der Religion am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*, p 243-252.

Why Criticising Islam is not Hate Speech

Until Auckland mayor Phil Goff decided to ban two controversial Alt-Right speakers from using the Bruce Mason Centre for a private pay to listen talk, the names Lauren Southern and Stefan Molyneux would have meant nothing to most Kiwis. Thanks to the NZ Federation of Islam Associations who

made complaints to NZ Immigration requesting they be refused entry into the country, and after this was unsuccessful, to then complain to Auckland Council about using their venue, these two Canadians got massive publicity and air time on both national television and radio talkback. At the heart of the debate was the issue of Free Speech, with commentators on the left and right both arguing the pair have the right to express their views, whereas others called for censorship on what they viewed as being Islamophobic and racist Hate Speech.

Last year a proposed talk at the same Bruce Mason Centre by Somali born and former Dutch politician, now American-based activist, feminist and author Ayaan Hirsi Ali, was also cancelled because of security concerns. As an apostate former Muslim and outspoken critic of Islam through her books *Infidel* and *Nomad* and *Heretic*, Hirsi Ali has had many death threats and Fatwas against her from 2003 onwards, so is no stranger to danger. After cancelling her tour Down Under, Hirsi Ali stated 'Today you have this horrible alliance between the far left and the Islamists and they're using the modern media tool to shut people like me out by smearing us'. She also stated 'Political correctness is a weapon used to silence people who tell the truth' and claims 'Islam is not a religion of peace. It is a political theory of conquest that seeks domination by any means it can'.

Although Islam is a religion, like many religions it is an ideology, and like any ideology needs to be able to be critiqued and examined for its merits and shortcomings. One hundred years ago at the end of World War 1 we saw the rise of fascism in Germany and Italy which grew in popularity, culminating in the Second World War twenty years later and the death of 52 million people including 6 million Jews. Socialism and Communism have also been political ideologies embraced by whole nations in the twentieth century and forced upon everybody living in those countries. Stalin was ultimately responsible for killing 40 million of his subjects and Mao for killing 70 million Chinese, and Pol Pot for wiping out half the Cambodian population. Hitler,

Stalin, Mao and Pol Pot all silenced and killed off their critics who spoke out against their espoused ideologies. In the Western world today we have embraced a neo-liberalist, post-modernist ideology and are becoming guilty of doing the same thing, silencing dissenters with name calling putdowns such as 'fascist' or 'racist' which were levelled against both Southern and Molyneux.

The Christian faith in all of its variances has undergone criticism for many centuries, and rightly so, as anything which makes a truth claim should be able to be intellectually challenged and dissected. This is critical to progressive thinking, and to take away the ability to challenge a truth claim or particular ideology is to return to the dark ages. If something is true, it can stand being challenged; but if it is not true, it needs to be challenged. If we are unable to challenge the truth claims of Islam for fear of offending Muslims, when at the same time Christianity has been sliced, diced and mocked for decades, we have a severe case of double standards. The Islamic faith should not be so fragile that exposing flaws in it results in Fatwas being pronounced and riots and acts of terrorism taking place, and when the free-thinking world bows down to this potential intimidation by silencing Islam's critics, it is no longer 'free-thinking'.

Anti-blasphemy laws are being dismantled in most Western countries including New Zealand as they are superfluous from a bygone era, but in their place we have a different sort of censorship under the guise of 'hate speech' being enforced. Most of the countries in the world where anti-blasphemy laws are still being enforced today are Muslim majority countries where criticising Islam or the prophet, in extreme cases can result in the death penalty. A community like the Sea of Faith which is critical of religious ideas would never be able to arise in these types of countries.

The life of Jesus was mockingly parodied in Monty Python's *The Life of Brian* and works of art such as the infamous Virgin in a Condom at Te Papa Museum which offended Roman Catholics in particular, have been promoted and displayed with gay

abandon with no life-threatening consequences. But when a Danish newspaper publishes cartoons depicting the prophet Muhammad and the liberal French magazine Charlie Hebdo publishes material Muslims are offended by, there is a lot of tut-tutting by Western governments trying to appease the outpouring of Islamic wrath. Ayaan Hirsi Ali refers to Islam as '*the new fascism*' and that it is dangerous and unreformable, and a ' *nihilistic death cult*'. Because of her skin colour, she cannot be labelled 'racist' by her critics, unlike Lauren Southern; and she goes on to say '*Islam is not a race...Islam is simply a set of beliefs, and it is not 'Islamophobic' to say Islam is incompatible with liberal democracy*'. Hirsi Ali points out that 'Islamophobia' is a manufactured word, used to silence critics of Islam. If Islamic ideology and the lifestyle and claims about its prophet Muhammad cannot be put under the microscope and examined for veracity and merit in this age of reason, the future of freedom of thought, freedom of speech and freedom of expression are certainly under threat here in God's Own.

Robin Boom

● No woman in a burqa (or a hijab or a burkini) has ever done me any harm. But I was sacked (without explanation) by a man in a suit. Men in suits misfolded me pensions and endowments, costing me thousands of pounds. A man in a suit led us on a disastrous and illegal war. Men in suits led the banks and crashed the world economy. Other men in suits then increased the misery to millions through austerity. If we are to start telling people what to wear, maybe we should ban suits.

Henry Stewart
London

Interesting Texts

Rather than concentrating on discursive argumentation, your editor plans from time to time to include interesting texts that are more like poetry or song. They express themselves in a concentrated though often metaphorical form and can have a powerful emotional effect.

A Love Song to the Earth

This stars Paul McCartney and a whole array of high-profile vocalists. And surely, if the struggle against climate change, etc. is to have any success, we need to have feelings for Earth.

[Verse 1]

This is an open letter
From you and me together
Tomorrow's in our hands now
Find the words that matter
Say them out loud
And make it better somehow

[Pre-Chorus]

Looking down from up on the moon
It's a tiny blue marble
Who would've thought the ground we
stand on
Could be so fragile

[Chorus]

This is a love song to the Earth
You're no ordinary world
A diamond in the universe
Heaven's poetry to us
Keep it safe, keep it safe, keep it safe
Cause it's our world, it's our world

[Verse 2]

It's not about possessions
Money, or religion
How many years we might live
When the only real question that matters
Is still a matter of perspective

[Pre-Chorus]

[Chorus]

[Chorus]

[Outro]

It's our world
It's our world
It's our world
Cause it's our world

It's well worth listening to the song itself, which you can find on Youtube together with a stunning video: <https://youtu.be/ZSnOXbaXzfM>.

If the Earth
were only a few
feet in diameter, floating a
few feet above a field somewhere, people
would come from everywhere to marvel at it. People
would walk around it, marvelling at its big pools of water,
its little pools, and the water flowing between the pools. People
would marvel at the bumps on it, and the holes in it, and the different areas on it. And they would marvel at the very thin layer of gas surrounding it and at the water suspended in the gas. People would marvel at all the creatures walking around the surface of the ball, and at the creatures in the water, and at the green vegetation growing on the surface. The people would declare it as sacred, because it was the only one, and they would protect it so that it would not be hurt. The ball would be the greatest wonder known, and people would come to pray to it, to be healed, to gain its knowledge, to know its great beauty, and to defend it with their lives because they would somehow know that their lives, their own roundness, could be nothing without it. If the Earth were only a few feet in diameter.

Celebrating Noel Cheer's life

The following is a lightly edited version of what Margaret Rushbrook had to say at Noel's funeral. Thank you, Margaret, for capturing so well the person that he was.

Noel, many of us here want to celebrate your life in the Sea of Faith Network and the Ephesus Group.

You lived and breathed Sea of Faith and we have been the better for it. I'm not at all surprised that you became one of a select few to become a Life Member of Sea of Faith NZ. As well as attending overseas Sea of Faith conferences in the UK, at the national level you've been on the Steering Committee, you've had your stint as Chairperson, you've acted as the Webmaster for the Sea of Faith website, you've recruited new members, you've played an important part in organising NZ conferences, you became an absolute institution leading those well-organised, fast moving, lively Speakers' Panels which have become a high point ending each conference ... 20 Panels, I think! You oozed enthusiasm and loyalty for Sea of Faith.

AND, what a job well done editing the Sea of Faith newsletters (which I've thought of more as a magazine than a newsletter!). 132 minus 13 makes 119 newsletters. That's how many Sea of Faith newsletters you edited, Noel, going from issue 13 in Oct 1995 until issue 132 in Oct, 2017 ... 22 years! (They're all there on the website!) As recently as May last year, in your Noel-like way, you categorically wrote in the newsletter that you had no intention of either sharing or surrendering the role of editor of the newsletter as you so much enjoyed soliciting and finding copy, and assembling the newsletter, BUT you also stated that democracy or mortality could step in at relatively short notice..... (a premonition, I wonder?). I did chuckle when you acknowledged that any editor (including yourself) feels the power that flows from the ability to select what gets published ... or not published. It's obvious you were inspired through being the editor and in turn you inspired the readership.

I can hear you expressing that, in important ways, the formal churches have lost the plot, but that the plot remains important. You saw the Sea of Faith as a forum for open, speculative and non-dogmatic debate ... a 'talk-shop' which was born out in the cutting-edge material you chose for the newsletter. ... the articles (national and international), book reviews, pre and post conference thinking, upcoming events, the pithy thought provokers

There was often a link between what came out written in the newsletter and things you shared verbally in our local Sea of Faith group. I'll continue to hear some of your sayings, like:

Mahatma Gandhi's 'Seven things that will destroy us':

- Wealth without work
- Pleasure without conscience
- Knowledge without character
- Commerce without morality
- Science without humanity
- Worship without sacrifice
- Politics without principle

Or some of the Kent Keith Paradoxical Commandments you enjoyed sharing, like:

1. People are illogical, unreasonable, and self centred. Love them anyway;
2. The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow. Do good anyway;
3. Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable. Be honest and frank anyway;
4. The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest men and women with the smallest minds. Think big anyway.
5. Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth. Give the world the best you have anyway.

(Can't you hear Noel delighting to share things like these?)

Noel, you knew you would get a laugh out of us when you shared those 'attitude to life' definitions:

- A pessimist: my glass is half empty
- An optimist: my glass is half full
- A realist: my glass needs a refill

In our local Sea of Faith group, we've thrived on your vitality, enthusiasm, humour and intellect, Noel. It's been fun meeting in your home together with Shirley; the warm hospitality, the snacking, the conversations, quips and stories. I can still feel the glee, pride and satisfaction you expressed as you told us the story about your visit to Wittenberg in Germany, 2015, when you followed in the 498 year old footsteps of Martin Luther and, against the protective netting at the Wittenberg church door, you held up your very own "Sea of Faith: Up-To-Date Theses".

You organised our local monthly Sea of Faith gatherings very well, starting with the early email reminders. Sea of Faith newsletters would be laid out on the coffee table, along with the latest theological books you'd been avidly devouring. From your reading you'd choose short excerpts that had tickled your fancy, to share with us. For each meeting you'd preview and choose (from your amazing filing system) interesting, pertinent, challenging DVDs and video clips to show us, using your sophisticated technology. We've enjoyed the way you and Shirley entertainingly bounced ideas off each other. The annual Christmas party was an event to look forward to and we could return home clutching holiday reading (Cupitt, Geering, Spong, Crossan, Sacks) that you and Shirley generously let us borrow from your extensive library...

We already miss you at the Ephesus Group, Noel. We've been most appreciative of your technological skills you've been so reliably helpful and generous with both your time and the use of your projection equipment, and you persevered to meet the demands for the variety of presentations asked for. I liked the way you were so pleased with yourself about carrying around a spare projector bulb, just in case, and it did eventually come in handy at one of our weekends away at isolated Cross Creek! You accepted obligingly, with no apparent qualms, any invitations to contribute in a

variety of programmes, usually in a succinct, colourful and novel manner. Some of your blanket statements could engender a few jumpy responses, but you took that in your stride.

Actually, the 'parry and punch' move from Tai Chi classes makes me think of you, Noel. You'd throw in a question or perceptive quip and then punch home a point. Sometimes it was around the other way ... punch and then parry! You have been a significant part of Ephesus and we thank you for that.

Thanks too that you and Shirley were open about the fact that you were dying and so allowed us to grieve along with you during the process.

Noel, we celebrate your life within the Sea of Faith Network and the Ephesus Group.

There will be many ways that you will live on for us. You have been one of a kind.

Thanks for being you!



You are invited to share your memories of Noel. Send them to the Editor and they will be included in the next newsletter.