

# SOFiA

## Exploring Values, Meaning and Spirituality

### Is There Any Hope for Faith?

At the centre of the recent debate on whether to change our name is the word 'faith'. For the change enthusiasts, 'faith' is an obstacle; it makes our organisation sound like propagandists for a religious, probably Christian world view. The consequence is that many of us were embarrassed to name our organisation to others. My view is that the word has largely negative associations for the general public, even though it is a word with a long and venerable tradition that is worth paying attention to.

By contrast, for most SOFiAns, the phrase 'Sea of Faith' has become familiar, so no longer causes the negative reaction that outsiders probably have.

But what about the word 'faith' itself? Do we still need it? Is there something valuable here that we need to become aware of? My first thought comes from James Barr, who claimed that the sentence is the smallest unit of meaning. In other words, a word by itself doesn't have a meaning. Barr was an Old Testament scholar, and this claim was a fundamental undermining of the *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* and the *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. These were a grand German theological project to provide a comprehensive dictionary of theological words used in the bible and to draw out of them all manner of profound insights.

Trouble is, the meaning of any word, including the word 'faith', varies depending on the sentence it occurs in. If we say 'the Christian faith has evolved over the two millennia of its existence' we are using faith

to mean something like 'the Christian religion as a whole.' If we say, 'I've lost faith in doctors' we mean by faith something like personal trust in a group of people. Ian Harris has made an eloquent plea for 'faith' and against belief. In what follows, I will try to unfold an understanding of faith in contrast to belief, stressing the inward, subjective side of religion.

This is no easy task, because Western Christendom has a long tradition of just the opposite. Battles have been fought and the church community has split asunder over differing beliefs. Some said that Jesus was *homousious* (of one substance) with the Father, while others said he was merely *homoiousious* (of similar substance). Some said that the Holy Spirit proceeded from the Father, while others said that 'he' proceeded from Father and Son jointly. Luther said that we are justified by faith, while the Catholic Church found that works were sufficient. Calvin had someone executed as a heretic for denying the Trinity. Predestination (the idea that God determined in advance who belongs to the saved and who to the damned) was a common theme but Calvinist thinkers argued over whether God already had predestined us before the Fall (supralapsarianism) or only after the Fall (infralapsarianism).

Each Protestant denomination produced its own confession of faith, in which its particular set of doctrines are articulated in order to establish its unique identity. I could go on but that should be enough. Attempts to articulate a purely rational, objective understanding of religion end up with weird arguments about strange concepts and have provoked a humanist rejection of all religion.

**Kierkegaard**, as the father of existentialism, was one of the first to protest against this process, which he saw supremely represented in the philosophy of Hegel. For him, 'truth is subjectivity'. He told the following story to illustrate the limitations of objective truth.

I shall here permit myself to tell a story, which without any sort of adaptation on my part comes direct from an asylum. A patient in such an institution seeks to escape, and actually succeeds in effecting his purpose by leaping out of a window, and prepares to start on the road to freedom, when the thought strikes him (shall I say sanely enough or madly enough?): "When you come to town you will be recognized, and you will at once be brought back here again; hence you need to prepare yourself fully to

convince everyone by the objective truth of what you say, that all is in order as far as your sanity is concerned." As he walks along and thinks about this, he sees a ball lying on the ground, picks it up, and puts it into the tail pocket of his coat. Every

step he takes the ball strikes him, politely speaking, on his hinder parts, and every time it thus strikes him he says: "Bang, the earth is round." He comes to the city, and at once calls on one of his friends; he wants to convince him that he is not crazy, and therefore walks back and forth, saying continually: "Bang, the earth is round!" But is not the earth round? Does the asylum still crave yet another sacrifice for this opinion, as in the time when all men believed it to be flat as a pancake? Or is a man who hopes to prove that he is sane, by uttering a generally accepted and generally respected objective truth, insane? And yet it was clear to the physician that the patient was not yet cured; though it is not to be thought that the cure would consist in getting him to accept the opinion that the earth is flat. But all men are not physicians, and what the age demands seems to have a considerable influence upon the question of what madness is.

For Kierkegaard, Christianity wasn't a set of doctrines, but a communication concerning a way of existing. In *Either/Or*, he set about contrasting two different ways of being: the aesthetic and the ethical. Now the transition between one and the other is not brought about by a new empirical insight; it is a leap, a discontinuity, a

sudden jump brought about by some inward process of maturation.

As Ian Harris points out (see page 6), the religious studies professor **Wilfred Cantwell Smith** has carefully analysed the way the word 'faith' has been used in the bible and down through the ages. For him, faith comes first and belief is something that is derived from faith. Linguistic analysts reduce faith expressions to propositional statements. They focus on belief rather than faith. No serious acquaintance with philosophy or religion of other cultures.

In general, modern scholarship tends to begin with belief and ignore faith's personal side.

Scholars anachronistically project twentieth century assumptions about the priority of belief over faith and misrepresent all known prior civilizations. By returning to the central significance of faith he hopes to overcome the modern tendency of objectifying religious life, the result of which is valuelessness, scepticism and loss of faith.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith: *A Theology for the World*. Edward J Hughes SCM Press 1986 p 20

For **Paul Tillich**, faith is 'ultimate concern'. This might be best understood by contrasting it with preliminary concerns, which are everyday matters of no great importance and that could be decided quite differently, such as which pair of trousers to buy and what colour you like best. Interestingly, his examples of ultimate concern are nationalism and communism. What happens with these quasi-religions, is that a particular concern comes to have absolute, unconditional importance. One's own nation has an importance that overrides all other factors such as a humane consideration of the fate of refugees. In Trump's 'Make America Great Again' we see the same dynamic continuing to work. Perhaps if Tillich were alive today, he would point to neoliberalism as another example of ultimate concern. Its obsessive focus on individual freedom, minimal government and lack of a framework for ensuring social welfare

If I could tell the world just one thing  
It would be that we're all ok  
And not to worry because worry is wasteful  
And useless in times like these  
I will not be made useless  
I won't be idled with despair  
I will gather myself around my faith  
For light does the darkness most fear  
Jewel Hands

# About SOFiA

SOFiA (The Sea of Faith in Aotearoa) is a network of people interested in the non-dogmatic discussion of values, meaning and spirituality. We want to explore for ourselves what we can believe and how we can find meaning in our lives.

SOFiA is not a church: it is a forum for discussing ideas, experiences and perspectives. SOFiA itself has no creed; its members come from many faiths and from those with no attachment to any religious institution.

If you are in sympathy with our aims, you are most welcome to join us; receive our Newsletter, attend a local group and/or come to our Conferences.

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

## Committee

Our national Committee oversees the work of SOFiA.

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## Life Members

Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK), Ian Harris and Noel Cheer (deceased). Also Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley.

**Publication deadline** for the next Newsletter is 7 March 2020.

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# SOFiA News

## Committee News

Your committee has appointed Ian Crumpton as chairman and is currently looking to co-opt additional members, as the AGM did not nominate any replacements for those whose term came to an end.

## Remembering John Irwin

John (1929 -2019) had very strong links with the Awhitu Peninsula where his family had a farm. He had his secondary school education at Kings College in Auckland and majored in biology at the University of Auckland. John trained as a secondary schoolteacher and worked at St. Kentigern's College for 23 years and Baradene College for 11 years.

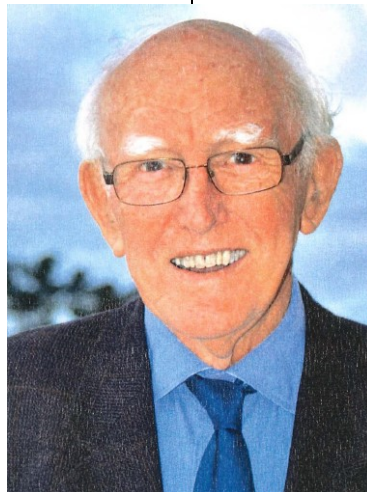
The Church was important for John. Over the years he taught Bible Class and Sunday school, led services and preached, on occasions played the organ, sang in the choir, and contributed to the social, pastoral and spiritual life of the community. At St. Luke's Remuera, John became Session Clerk, and then Parish Clerk, serving in these significant leadership roles for eleven years (1980-91).

The search for a personal contemporary theology was enriched for John by attendance at Lloyd Geering's Continuing Education Courses at the University. Along with Janet, Barbara, and five others from St. Luke's, John was part of a stimulating tour Lloyd led in 1989 to Israel and the Middle East. Lloyd became a friend and would often stay with John and Barbara. John also became actively involved in the Sea of Faith Network". Together, John and Barbara helped organise some of its conferences. John was inspired by the Sea of Faith's openness to new ideas and ways of thinking.

In recent years, his questing mind struggled to make sense of institutional Christianity. The death of Barbara was a

huge shock, and despite his many friends, the gnawing loneliness and declining health, were not easy for him. He received great love, care and support from his family, particularly Elizabeth, and his friends who regularly visited him.

John was among the founding members of the SOF in Auckland in 1992. Over the last 26 years John (who was an unusually deep and perceptive thinker) shared in our exploration and contributed his own imaginative insights. Together we have searched for understanding and meaning in our discussions. These discussions were enriched by John's intellectual honesty and his ability to state his views emphatically yet respect others for their points of view.



We are greatly indebted to John for his practical skills and reliability over recent years in sharing the job of planning and organising our national conferences when they were held in Auckland as well as the sequence of one-day local conferences also held in Auckland over a number of years.

As an Octogenarian, John wrote his own Creed, concluding:

My hope is that the Evolving Global Consciousness will lead to respect,

responsibility and love for all living and non-living things.

I will die peacefully knowing that my ultimate destiny is that I will continue to be part of the Universe – maybe a 'new star' – watch the heavens.

So we honour the memory of a valued member who was always a pleasure to meet and always had a welcoming warm smile. Thank you for the memories John and for your contributions to the Sea of Faith (now SOFiA).

We extend to his children, Elizabeth, Mark and Chris and their families, and all who loved and admired John, our grateful thanks for a life well lived and the many contributions he made to enrich the lives of others.

*With thanks to Allan Davidson and George Dodd.*



# Book Review

## Philosopher of the Heart

*Philosopher of the Heart: The Restless Life of Søren Kierkegaard.* Allen Lane 2019



Kierkegaard (1813 – 1855) is traditionally regarded as the father of Existentialism, a philosophical and literary movement that really only got going after World War II. Clare Carlisle, the author, is currently Reader in Philosophy and Theology at King's College London. I find it fascinating that a relatively young academic appears to be devoting her life to deepening the understanding of this thinker, whom many would regard as old-fashioned or far too subjective.

This book is not a biography in the usual sense; it is a series of reflections set at particular stages during Kierkegaard's life and aimed at entering deeply into his way of thinking and helping us make sense of his ideas by setting them in his particular historical context. Reviewers complain that the jumping back and forth in time makes it difficult to follow, especially if a reader doesn't already have a sense of Kierkegaard's biography.

I was already familiar with one of Kierkegaard's most famous sayings, "life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards." Carlisle has helped to deepen our understanding of it. Kierkegaard lived in a time when railway was the new technology and in the ascendent. Imagine sitting in a train, facing backwards, and looking out the window. You see the countryside rushing past. You have a picture of where you have been, but cannot see where you are heading. Kierkegaard would

have experienced this and saw it as an image of how life is. This image helps him understand what it means to exist as a human being in the world. You can gain an understanding and knowledge of the past, but the future is a great unknown. Yet we must all live forwards into the future.

Carlisle returns repeatedly to the meaning of Kierkegaard's love life. He became engaged to Regine but then broke it off, causing a scandal that damaged his reputation. It seems that he felt unable to sustain an intimate relationship, given his melancholy disposition. He also saw that without wife and family, he could devote himself to writing and live off his father's wealth.

Explication of Kierkegaard's ideas forms only a small part of this book, but when she does explain, it is very helpful. There is absolutely no discussion of contemporary views of Kierkegaard and his ideas or direct response to criticisms that have been levelled at him. It's all about helping to understand where he is coming from.

Towards the end of his life, Kierkegaard engaged in a bitter polemic against the established Danish church and its leaders. Carlisle makes clear that this was just the endpoint of a conflict that began as early as his early work *Either/Or* and that his aim was "to make manifest the illusion of Christendom and provide a vision of what it is to become a Christian."

My theological hero, Eugen Drewermann, was influenced by Kierkegaard. After going through the exhaustive process of gaining a licence to teach Catholic theology (Ph.D. followed by a post-doctoral thesis, in all almost 2000 pages) Drewermann refused to take a paid teaching position, telling himself that being an honorary lecturer was only just acceptable. For Kierkegaard, "Christianity is not a doctrine but an existence communication... It can only be presented – by existing."

*The Editor*

# Faith vs Belief

*Ian Harris generously offered two of his Otago Daily Times columns on this topic. Your editor includes the following. It is from his Honest to God column of August 2018:*

Say goodbye to belief and welcome to faith, urges **Ian Harris**. They're not the same, and it's the life of faith that matters.

It will be a grand day for Christianity when it ditches its obsession with belief and rediscovers the centrality of faith. That won't happen any time soon, because creeds, rituals and biblical translations seem full of the notion that believing the right things is what makes Christianity the religion it is.

That, however, is a modern aberration. It's faith that matters, not belief, and the two have become hopelessly confused in the minds of Christians and atheists alike.

For that, the churches themselves must bear most of the blame. Reverent of antiquity, tradition and authority, most preserve the texts of the past as if they were sacred, seemingly unaware that a living religion is free to evolve along with everything else. A deeper sacredness lies in the quality of relationships. And anyway, some key words in the texts don't mean today what once they did.

Foremost among them are "belief" and "believe". Forty years ago a professor of comparative religion at Harvard University, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, delved deep into the way their meaning has changed.

In the distant past the core meaning of both was trust and commitment. They equated to the Latin "credo" (I believe), which itself distils the words *cor* (heart) and *do* (I give). So *credo* carries the subliminal meaning "I give my heart to" – and so, in Old English, did "believe".

Then came the Norman conquest, and over time the newcomers sprayed a host of French words into English. Among them was "faith", signifying trust, loyalty and commitment – exactly what the English meant by belief. Gradually it usurped belief in that sense and ultimately prevailed. By 1604, when scholars set to work on

translating the Authorised Version of the Bible, faith was the go-to word.

They had a problem. Where once there was an obvious link between belief and believe, the noun faith had no matching verb. So when the translators needed one, they continued to use "believe" in its old sense. Regrettably, modern Bible translations still do.

In the following centuries the meaning of "belief" and "believe" underwent a sea-change. Instead of trust and commitment, they came to mean simply having an opinion, as in "I believe it will be fine tomorrow", or "I believe Donald Trump is the greatest US president ever". (Well, he does.)

Interestingly, though, there's a vestige of the word's origins when somebody says "I believe in my doctor". This is not a statement that in somebody's opinion the doctor exists – which is how "I believe in God" is usually understood – but that he or she trusts the doctor. For clarity, then, the church would do well to erase "believe" from its lexicon and talk of trust instead.

That's where faith kicks in. I know atheists who scorn faith as irrationality and delusion at best, ignorance and superstition at worst. Even church folk who are aware of that often avoid the word, lest they be misunderstood.

Smith insists that faith is not a matter of affirming doctrinal opinions. It's about orienting one's life towards love, grace and service – which, for Christians, is in the spirit of Jesus. Other world religions have their own equivalents.

Faith is deeper, richer and more personal than beliefs, he says. "It is engendered and sustained by a religious tradition, in some cases and in some degree by its doctrines; but it is a quality of the person, not of the system."

"It is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than the mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of a transcendent dimension . . .

“At its best it has taken the form of serenity and courage and loyalty and service: a quiet confidence and joy which enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one’s own life, a meaning that is profound and ultimate, and is stable whatever may happen.” It leaves in the dust the nihilism of alienation, cynicism, lack of commitment, and the pointlessness of life.

What is there not to like about such a rich and valuable human quality? And, says Smith, it is to be found among Christian and Jewish communities, Islamic and Hindu, Buddhist and other communities, and among humanists, throughout the world.

People’s religious beliefs/opinions are all over the place – that’s inevitable. What matters is living the life of faith.

*Ian Harris*

## Book Review: On Tyranny

On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century by Timothy Snyder. New York 2017

This is my kind of book! It is short (126 pages) and tightly focussed on its theme. The twenty lessons are all articulated by lessons from history and Snyder is a Professor of History at Yale University. I’m sure he knows enough to fill volumes but he

carefully selects and focusses the information so that it supports the lesson he is trying to convey. His comments show deep insight into the way things developed in the past but he also points to the present, including messages from the current US President. His message is “the price of liberty is eternal vigilance”. There are plenty of works written against tyranny (such as George Orwell’s *Animal Farm* and 1984 and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn’s *Gulag Archipeligo*), but I have assumed that these belong to a past world not relevant to today. However, Snyder argues that signs of a move towards tyranny are all around us today, so it is up to all of us to ensure that the move doesn’t become full-blown.

Based on the observations of Victor Klemperer, he describes four modes in which truth dies:

1. Open hostility to verification, such as the President’s antagonism to the media.
2. Shamanistic incantation, such as “lock her up” or “build the wall”.
3. Magical thinking, such as promising to reduce taxes and increase spending.
4. Misplaced faith

I’m now motivated to go back to those classics with increased interest. *The Editor*

## Stop Press: Shirley Murray

Dear friends and fellow poets and musicians

I am writing with the sad news from her son Alistair that Shirley Murray died 25 January, 2020. Her passing was peaceful.

Our community has lost a brave bright soul, a distinctive prophetic voice and New Zealand’s finest religious poet. Her work is known, admired, and sung throughout the Christian world. Her hymns and songs will be her legacy for many years to come; her latest volume (published by Hope) reached her a short time before her death.

In one of her poems, Shirley wrote

Something beautiful for God,  
in my seeing,  
in my being,  
something beautiful for God  
let the Spirit make of me.

Something meaningful and true,  
in my living  
and believing,  
something meaningful and true,  
something beautiful and new.

I think we can all agree that her wish was fulfilled.

Colin Gibson

# Popular Music and Theopoetics

## A theological 'road trip' by John Thornley.

I have been on a 'heart and mind' road trip for over six decades, all starting in the mid 1950s with rock'n'roll. There were times when my parents despaired of my obsessive purchase of pop records, leading to my letting early keyboard and violin lessons die away, and be replaced by shelves and shelves of vinyl recordings. This introductory article picks up some of the key signposts on a personal journey that continues in 2020.

## 'Theomusicology' and Black Sacred Music

The US (what other country!) uses the term 'theomusicology' to cover the territory I have been exploring. Confirmation that I am not alone on this trip is the publication, from 1987 to 1995, of 9 issues of the journal *Black Sacred Music* by Duke University Press, USA. Google informs me that there has recently been made available a complete digital archive of the full set of the journal (Cost \$500). I am pleased that I still have the nine hard-copy issues in my home library.

The Duke University library archive has a definition of Theomusicology.

'It is a theologically informed musicology and a distinct discipline, incorporating methods from anthropology, sociology, psychology, and philosophy, and examining the full range of black sacred music'.

This is what I attempted to cover in my own self-published biannual journal *Music in the Air* (1996 to 2015), which ranged over a wide spectrum: from the early days of rap, soul, jazz and civil rights to religious music of Africa and the African diaspora. I focussed on musicking in Aotearoa and aimed at a lay rather than an academic readership.

Two quotations by David Edwards and Herbie Hancock provide foundation stones for theopoetics in popular music.

## David Edwards

David Edwards is a founding editor of the SCM Press and a retired Anglican Bishop. The two quotations (in box and below)

illustrate that the secular is spiritual and the spiritual is secular, two sides of the same coin. In his 1963 SCM book *God's Cross in our World*, I found this quotation, where the image of 'resurrection' highlights the 'spiritual' voice in popular music. 'It is estimated that at least 45 million Africans were shipped as slaves to America. There they gave to the world, as voices for their patience and courage, the negro spiritual and jazz. Most of the popular music of the West is

one long echo of Africa's resurrection across the Atlantic.'

## Herbie Hancock

Herbie Hancock (born 1940), keyboard player, is a founding musician in jazzrock recording from the 1970s onward. In this quotation he plays with two understandings of 'humanity' – first, the 'positive qualities of acting as a human being', and second, signifying 'all people' – we have the 'secular' emphasised:

'Most black music has come about in response to repression from the outside, but it has expressed itself as humanity from the inside, and not just for the black community but for all humanity.'

## David Tacey: Understanding God in a Secular Age

David Tacey was present at the Sea of Faith conference held at Nga Tawa College, Manawatu, in 2006. Don Cupitt and Lloyd Geering were also keynote speakers. Lively debates took place, in which Tacey critiqued the progressive viewpoint, finding himself a defender of religious faith. Readers wanting a fuller description of what happened on the

Why spend the time debating,  
When the day is swiftly passing,  
And multitudes are waiting  
To receive the Saviour's blessing?

Gird up thyself, thou grumbler,  
And be ready for the journey,  
Carry to thy wayward brothers  
The sweet old gospel story.

From 'Why Spend the Time Debating', a hymn text by African-American hymnwriter John Howardton Smith (1880-1977), born the son of ex-slaves in Rowan County, North Carolina.



battlefield of ideas are referred to pages 223 to 229 or the closing pages of Chapter 11, 'After Belief', in *Beyond Literal Belief*. An understanding of theology via 'theopoetics' or, to use another term favoured by Tacey, 'Re-enchantment', closes this chapter. I have two extended quotations that illustrate the kernel of this debate.

### **First, taking issue with the liberal progressives:**

'Tillich said, with a nod of approval to conservatives: liberal, demythologized theology [reference to Bultmann, Cupitt and Geering – author insert] paid the price of adjustment to the scientific era. Liberals reduced religion to humanism and threw the baby out with everything else. He went on: "Liberal theology paid the price of adjustment to the scientific era by losing the message of the new reality which was preserved by its supernaturalistic defenders" (Tillich's *Theology of Culture*).

However, Tacey then criticized liberals and conservatives, and said both had missed the point. The point is not that God, heaven, spirit represented the incursion of another world. They are deeper dimensions of this world, but dimensions that rational thought cannot open for us, cannot communicate. There is another world, but it is in this one. This doorway to depth can only be opened for us by sacrament, imagination, vision, poetry, music and iconography. The arts and imagination are what convey the sacred in today's disbelieving world. It is through the symbolic that the spirit takes flight and is released into life.'

### **Second, the discovery of Re-enchantment.**

David Tacey names the three stages of faith as enchantment, disenchantment, re-enchantment. We begin with the naïve faith of childhood leading to adult rationality, the latter characterised by intellectual enlightenment, materialism and ultimately, disbelief. We must move beyond this stage and replace the hermeneutics of suspicion by opening up to the wonder and mystery of the third stage, re-enchantment. This second quotation, found later in Chapter 11, is an exhilarating picture of the 3-stage faith journey:

'Remaining as a little child means continuing to read Bible stories as children read them. Remaining as an adult means dismissing the stories as fairy tales. It means ditching the stories because they belong to an ancient worldview that can no longer be supported.

Becoming a little child again ('Unless you change and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of heaven' – Matthew 18:3) means returning to the stories again but seeing them through new eyes. They are no longer literally true, no longer supernatural tales, but narratives that speak to us in a symbolic code. They only divulge their meaning if one is able to crack the code and see beyond the external features to the connotations. Finding this mystery is like discovering buried treasure in the field, which was one of Jesus' parables of the kingdom of God. It is like finding the pearl of great price, the jewel in the lode. The myths speak to us in a new way, rather like dreams once we learn their symbolic language. And like dreams, the untrained mind discards them as junk, but the trained mind discerns in them a meaning that is supportive and life-changing.'

There are three books by Tacey: *ReEnchantment* (2000), *The Spirituality Revolution* (2003), and *Beyond Literal Belief: Religion as Metaphor* (2015).

## **John D Caputo: The Poetics of What is Going On in the Name of "God"**

A friend recommended the John Caputo book as an introduction to the post-modern philosophy of Jacques Derrida (1930 – 2004). It is a slim 130 page book and, while simpler to read than the original texts of Derrida and others of the same ilk, it remains a challenging work to read. Key names referenced include Saint Paul, Paul Tillich, Derrida, and God. Key topics listed in the Index: deconstruction, kingdom of God, insistence, the call, the unconditional, weakness and religion. I like the tribute from Bernard Brandon Scott, US theologian: 'We were taught to *believe* in God, but Caputo shows that the more important quest is how we *think* about God'. The smiling face on the inside back cover shows Caputo to be a genial figure. The final comment – also a quote from the blurb – is that here is a work, 'as playful as it is serious'. Here are the closing lines of *The Folly of God*:

'The call calls only by means of the still and quiet promptings of a theopoetics. The call calls. It calls from the bodies of the hungry and naked and imprisoned and recalls the body of the crucified one, setting off the sparks of a response, short flickers of light that disappear into the dark.

The call calls. The call calls for a response, which may or may not transpire. God insists, while existence is up to us. The call is not a Mighty Spirit, but a soft aspiration, the soft sigh of a perhaps. The call is not a mighty being but a might be. The call is not the ground of being, or the being of beings, but a may being. What is coming is the possibility of the impossible, which we desire with a desire beyond desire, with all the madness of the kingdom, where the only rule is the unruly gift of unconditional gifts. The call calls unconditionally. Unconditionally. We love because we love with all the felicitous folly of love. What else is there to say?

*'Lord, when was it we saw you hungry and gave you food or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?'* (Matthew 25: 37-39).

Good question. Enough said.'

John D Caputo: *The Folly of God: a Theology of the Unconditional* (2016).

## Example 1: 'Freedom Blues' by Little Richard

Little Richard was born in Macon, Georgia, and Google informs me that he was born in 1932. He is therefore entering his 88<sup>th</sup> year. The other founding voices of 50s rock music – Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, Chuck Berry – have died. Only Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis, both 'full-on' boogie pianists and vocalists, are still alive. Little Richard's mid 50s rock anthems – 'Tutti Frutti' and 'Long Tall Sally' etcetera – are unashamed anthems to a male expression of physical sexuality. Like the male peacock strutting his feathered tail, the songs are so extravagant and 'in your face' that most thinking folk of whatever sexual orientation, can only smile, if not laugh out loud, at the hyperbole. There is nothing to fear here, just everything to celebrate and get us up and off our seats to jive on the dance floor.

Fifteen years later, in 1970, Little Richard records 'Freedom Blues'. Now he knows what he was, and always has been, singing about: peace and love for all, freedom for all. When he refers to 'paying our dues', this is the Black story of slavery and second-chance citizenship endured by African Americans down to today: a suffering that is exorcised in music and dance. It is indeed

the 'resurrection' music that both David Edwards and Herbie Hancock, quoted earlier, are describing. The reference to 'that old man' is quite specific: President Nixon, soon to be exposed by the Watergate tapes. This is Soul rather than Blues, and to get rid of 'Freedom Blues' means not to feel chained in our lives, but open to change for the better, which is what the Soul music of Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin and James Brown in the 70s, was all about.

## Freedom Blues

I hope that I should live to see,  
when every man can know he's free.  
Sufferin' from the past  
I make I ought to be sad.

I got my duty rock'n'roll,  
now everybody, everybody, everyone's gotta be free!

Now la-la, la-da-da-da.  
La-la, la-da da-da. [*Pentecostal 'singing in tongue'*]

Mmmm, let's get rid of that old man, hey-ey-ey,  
And bring our government up to date.  
It may be very hard to do,  
just open your mind, let love come through.

You hear me callin' you?  
Everybody, everybody, everyone's gotta be free!  
Oh, yes!

La-la, la-da-da-da.  
La-la, la-da da-da.  
(*Saxophone bridge sequence*)  
We did our thing, every thing, and we paid our dues,  
now let's get rid of these freedom blues.  
It may seem very hard to do,  
just open your mind, let love come through.

I got my duty rock and roll,  
now everybody, everybody, everyone's gotta be free!

La-la, la-da-da-da.  
La-la, la-da da-da.  
*Freedom Blues*, from the album titled *The Rill Thing* (1970) by Little Richard

## Example 2: Like a Rolling Stone by Bob Dylan

The critical consensus is that this is the greatest rock single – to date! Towards the end of this article, use of the term 'journey'

evokes the Jungian term Archetype, as applied to a metaphorical or mythical understanding – a key topic for David Tacey.

The song marks a turning point in Dylan's career – from acoustic folk to electric rock; from the ballads and parables with explicit moral lessons to the creation of myth where the meanings are multiple and implicit. The listener is challenged to complete the communication. From songs that pointed fingers at other people – White racists, masters of war, obtuse adults in authority, etc – to songs that found the finger pointing at himself.

Recall the background of the song: the movement of significant numbers of middle-class Whites opting out of mainstream values and goals, the Hippie and Flower Power youth believing that hobnobbing with the poor and oppressed would earn them the mantle of street credibility:

'You've gone to the finest school all right Miss Lonely, but you know you only used to get juiced in it and nobody's ever taught you how to live on the street and now you're gonna have to get used to it.'

In reality, Dylan suggests, the children of middle-class America haven't earned such downward mobility in the social order. To quote the writer Matt Damsker (*Rock Voices: the best lyrics of an era*, 1980):

"It's as if the 'mystery tramp' and 'Napoleon in rags' we once threw dimes to and must now contend with as a matter of survival, are the honest 'nobility' of the down-and-outs, while we 'used to ride on the chrome horse' with the thieving politicians who oppress us all."

Their claim to be saviours of others was shown to be a sham in the 70s and 80s when, under President Reagan, they rejoined the privileged class and turned their backs on the less fortunate.

The song is not a putdown of the high society Miss Lonely. The song's real target is himself, and coming to terms with his own conscience. To quote a much earlier pilgrim after truth, Paul of Tarsus, Dylan is working on his own salvation in fear and trembling (Philippians 2: 12 – 13).

The more sympathetic acceptance of Miss Lonely's plight towards the end of the song, and the gentler, more compassionate later

versions of this song, recorded at Budokan in Japan, 1978, and a live concert of 1994 screened on local television, give support to this reading of the lyrics.

If this understanding of the lyric pushes a specific interpretation too far, you might be more comfortable with a more general reading: the song as one person's journey – though implicitly it's a journey we all make – from adolescence to adulthood, from innocence to experience. In such a journey disillusionment and loss of ideals are an inevitable part of growing up. This doesn't deny the Don Quixote valour of crusades against the rich and powerful – and Dylan still sings his early acoustic morality songs with conviction – but recognise that we can do more than tilting at windmills!

For many listeners, it's the chorus that is the emotional hook, summing up the existentialist dilemma: conveying both individual exhilaration at freedom from the past restrictions and despair at the loss of communal supports and structures:

'How does it feel,  
how does it feel,  
to be without a home,  
like a complete unknown,  
like a rolling stone?'

*Like a Rolling Stone* by Bob Dylan: from the album titled *Highway 61 Revisited* (1965). Full lyrics available; search Google.

John Thornley

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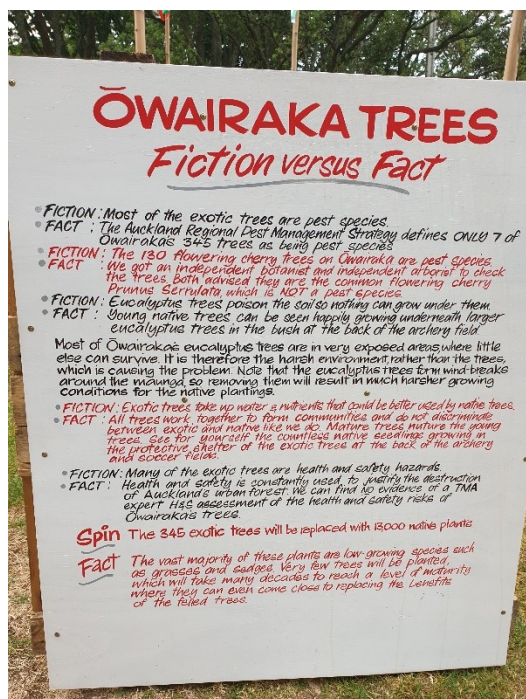
## Protesting Tree Felling

The 'Honour the Maunga' group has been protesting the proposed felling of 345 exotic trees on Owairaka/Mt Albert, Auckland. Owairaka is one of the volcanic cones in Auckland that were vested in the Tupuna Maunga Authority (TMA) set up by Parliament as part of a Treaty of Waitangi Settlement.

The TMA only advised local residents at the end of October 2019 that the 345 trees were scheduled to be removed from 11 November onwards, leaving precious little time for any protest. The locals quickly set up a protest group and blockaded the mountain from 11 November to stop



Treescape from felling the trees. The following poster testifies to their competence:



The TMA decides policy on the volcanic cones and the Auckland Council implements it. The TMA appears to have a policy of wholesale removal of all exotic trees on the volcanic cones. This policy has already been implemented in Pigeon mountain, on Mangere mountain and (in part) on Mount Wellington (Maungarei). In spite of producing comprehensive documents on their plans, strategies, values and pathways, they don't appear to have signalled publicly that removing exotic trees was their intention.

I am so impressed by Honour the Maunga's competence and the creativity they have shown. They've done the following:

- Set up a Facebook group and a website ([honourthemaunga.org.nz](http://honourthemaunga.org.nz)). Many members contribute to the group.
- Organised a 24/7 roster for the occupation of the mountain and

provided a cloud-based link to the current roster

- Provided numerous posters that draw public attention to the issue. Initially, these were hand-written on cardboard. Professionally sign-written posters (see photos) came later. These were burnt down by vandals.
- Tied coloured ribbons around the trees to be felled, so giving those coming to the mountain a dramatic picture of the effect of the felling.
- Researched background information and applied to the Auckland Council with Official Information Requests to access TMA documents, finding many that were not available on the Auckland City Council website.
- Worked with Pouroto Ngaropo of Ngati Awa to organise a "Unity Gathering." This made it plain that the protest is not a Maori vs Pakeha issue. Rather, the focus is on saving mature trees from destruction.

My own involvement began after supporters had been present on the mountain 24/7 for a whole month. I was upset at the TMA's high-handed actions and lack of consultation. Being on site with other protesters has been enjoyable. They are an interesting bunch, with a strong spirituality and set of values. Conversations are stimulating and informative. I've also engaged with numerous visitors to the mountain, some supportive and others keen to put an opposing point of view.

Being on the mountain has confirmed my conviction that felling the trees is a big mistake, just the wrong thing to be doing in a time of climate change when mature trees capture large amounts of carbon dioxide.

