

# Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

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A recovered old Newsletter

## SEA OF FAITH NETWORK (NZ)

Newsletter No 4. . . . . July 1993

### National Conference

Plans for the Conference are now well advanced, thanks mainly to the work of John Denny, the Conference Administrator and Warden of Bryant Hall, where the Conference will be held. John and Gillian Denny were both at the UK Sea of Faith Conference at Leicester in July 1992.

You receive the Registration Form with this Newsletter. Positive interest has already been widely expressed from the far North down to Invercargill; it promises to be a good representative gathering. You would be wise to book early, since the number which can be offered accommodation at the very modest rate offered by Bryant Hall is limited to 100. Other accommodation is available. Some will be attending on a daily basis from the Waikato area. Registrations should be in by August 13 (late entries may be accepted).

Further items on the programme, not available earlier are: Betsan Martin, an Anglican priest, will deliver the Saturday morning lecture, her topic being, "Post-modern Possibilities for Disrupting Dualistic Faith Discourses - a Feminist Perspective".

Workshops will include: "Reclaiming Worth-ship", led by Jill Harris and Helen Wright. It will provide the basis for the Sunday celebration.

On arrival at Conference members will elect which discussion group to join from such topics as: "Why are we here?", "What are the real religious issues facing us today?", "Can the Church be Redeemed?", "Has the novel become the modern Bible?", "What social issues should chiefly

engage us?", "How far do modern people experience a God-shaped hole?"

### SOFN Statistics

The number who are now linked with the Sea of Faith Network is 172 and the number who have paid their subscription is now 132. They stretch from Kaitaia to Invercargill.

### "Honest to God" Tapes

There has been considerable interest in these and already about ten sets have been copied for those who sent blank tapes.

### Discussion Groups

News has been received of groups meeting in North Shore, Auckland, Napier, Hutt Valley, Wellington and Dunedin. Hopefully they will all be represented at the Conference and be able to share with others what they have been doing.

### Overseas Theological Lecturers

Elizabeth Clark from North Carolina and Keith Ward from Oxford will lecture at St. John's College Auckland during July 6-9, and in public lectures at Auckland University, July 12-15.

At Victoria University, Wellington, Friday evening July 23 and Saturday July 24, Keith Ward and others will share in a seminar, "Beyond the Crisis in Christianity".

At Knox College Dunedin, 15-21 August, overseas theologians will lecture at a Symposium on "Science and Theology".

Further enquiries should be made locally.

### New Books

Those finding it difficult to hear about new religious books may like to subscribe to Theo Lit, a little

journal reviewing theological books, published quarterly by Dr Clive Pearson, 9 Puriri St. Riccarton, Christchurch, 8004., for \$12 per year.

#### Jesus by A.N.Wilson

Wilson is a journalist, highly regarded for his biographies of C.S.Lewis and Tolstoy. This book caused a little stir when first published last year. What makes the book so interesting is not so much what he says about Jesus but how he came to write the book, and to discard his belief in Christianity, as a result. He tries to investigate the New Testament with as little religious bias as possible, either for or against traditional Christianity. He had remained a practising Christian for many years, trying, he said, to "avoid facing the implications of what he had studied when he read theology at Oxford". He has now come to see that "the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith are two separate beings, with very different stories".

Much of the material will be familiar to those who acquainted with New Testament study (particularly in the earlier part of the book) and he draws considerably from the Jewish scholar Geza Vermes.

Because he approaches the subject with the freshness of journalistic enquiry he sees possibilities which may not occur to New Testament scholars (and it must be conceded that most New Testament scholars are writing from within a commitment to Christian orthodoxy). The freedom to speculate, which he draws upon, does not mean that his hunches are right, yet he does produce a very plausible portrait of the human Jesus. He suggests, for example, that the Cana story preserves memories of Jesus' own wedding.

Many will find unconvincing, some of his speculative reconstructions.

The book has been strongly criticised to the point of condemnation by more orthodox NT scholars such as N.T.Wright, in Who was Jesus? (SPCK, 1992).

Wright, a NT scholar of Worcester College, Oxford has sharply condemned, often with emotive language, Barbara Thiering's Jesus the Man, Wilson's Jesus and Bishop John Spong's Born of a Woman: A Bishop Rethinks the Birth of Jesus.

Thiering's book is admittedly somewhat bizarre, depending as it does on a mode of interpreting the Gospels which no one else at all has found acceptable. But the books by Wilson and Spong are in quite a different category.

John Spong, who visited New Zealand in 1991, has recently published a book on the Resurrection of Jesus and plans to visit New Zealand in July 1994.

Some SOFN groups have been studying Spong's book Into the Whirlwind.

One of the best surveys of where contemporary scholarship stands on issues relating to Jesus is : John Bowden, Jesus: the Unanswered Questions, SCM, 1988, \$39.95. Bowden is an Anglican priest and editor of SCM Press. He writes from the questioning point of view which those linked with SOFN will find congenial.

Some of the most interesting religious writing is coming from those with a Roman Catholic background. For example, there was Jesus who Became Christ, Collins 1975, by Peter de Rosa, and some excellent little books by Hubert Richards, who visited NZ in the '70's.

The next issue will discuss A History of God, Heinemann, 1993, \$59.95, by Karen Armstrong, who after 7 years as a nun, has become

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presenter.

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