

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

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A recovered old Newsletter

SEA OF FAITH NETWORK (NZ)

NEWSLETTER 22

July 1997

Conference 1997

From: Noon Friday Oct 3
Until: 1:30pm Sunday Oct 5
At: Kings College,
Otahuhu, Auckland

The Arrangements Committee in Auckland is moving into top gear. The Registration forms are enclosed with this Newsletter.

We are fortunate in obtaining **Kings College** as the venue. The facilities are admirable and the Arrangements Committee is working hard to ensure a smooth-running and enjoyable weekend.

This will be a Conference with a difference. The Steering Committee has introduced three new activities into the programme:

- Elective Lectures
- Core Groups
- Book Reviews

There will be three Plenary Sessions, delivered by **John Spong**, **Charmaine Pountney** and **Lloyd Geering**. During the Sunday morning panel sessions they will also answer the questions that we will have formulated in our Core Groups.

You will find details of the Workshop Sessions, the Elective Lectures and the Core Groups on the Registration Form.

To accommodate these extras, the Conference begins at 12 noon on Friday the 3rd. The official Conference Opening is at 2:30pm and the first "plenary" lecture at 3pm.

Please note the timing -- Friday is an important day.

The Arrangements Committee is excited at the prospect ahead for us all. We are sure that it will be an excellent Conference.

Because we must limit attendees to 250, you should enrol promptly by sending in your completed Registration form.

Registrations will be processed in the order that they are received.

We look forward to hearing from you.

John Irwin
Chairperson, Arrangements Committee

Remember

Registration begins	Noon Friday
Conference Opening and Notices:	2:30pm Friday
Conference Closes after lunch and farewells:	1:30pm Sunday

A National Steering Committee

Since the foundation of the Sea of Faith Network in New Zealand, the Steering Committee has been based in Wellington. Each year, prior to the annual conference, an invitation is given, through this Newsletter, for other Regions to take on the tasks of the Steering Committee. To date no Region has volunteered.

The present Steering Committee is keen that the Committee should become a national committee in order to represent as wide a cross-section of the Network as possible. It is understandable that no one region wants to take over the whole task and so, for the coming year, we aim to obtain representatives from various parts of the country.

It may be helpful to clarify the role of the Steering Committee:

- to maintain the status of the Network as an Incorporated Society
- to manage the finances of the Network
- to keep a register of current members
- to produce a regular Newsletter
- to organise the programme for the annual conference
- to organise the location of future conferences, in liaison with local Groups
- to liaise with the Arrangements Committee for each conference
- to organise and run the Annual General Meeting
- to "steer" the Network in accordance with the wishes of the membership

Each year some of the members of the Steering Committee do not seek re-election, having served on

the Committee for several years. According to the Constitution, the Steering Committee can have up to twelve members. Therefore, for 1997-1998 we would hope to have 3 to 4 members from outside Wellington, with this number increasing in future.

In order to facilitate the smooth running of this national Steering Committee it is proposed that two meetings of the full committee would be held each year -- one immediately following the Annual Conference and the other when planning for the following conference gets under way. Teleconference calls would be used for all other meetings of the full Committee. The business of the Committee should be delegated to committee members who may opt to set up sub-committees and so involve a greater number of Network members.

We would very much appreciate your views on this development and would request that nominations for Steering Committee members, whether in or outside of Wellington, be sent to the Chairperson by Friday 5 September. Please confirm with nominees that they are willing to stand before you send the nomination and also check their availability for a meeting on Sunday 5 October at Kings College Auckland immediately after the end of the Conference. Elections will take place at the Annual General Meeting during the Conference.

Jane Griffith
Chairperson, Steering Committee

Local Groups

Auckland Central

The subject of their June meeting was "Designing Your Own Funeral" led by **Rhys Bean** who is a funeral celebrant. In July **Prof. John Bishop** will discuss "Alternative Concepts of God"; **Rosemary Calver** will ask "What Is The Sea Of Faith For Each Of Us" in August; and, in September **Jim Fiest** will talk on "Jung and Religion".

Contact: **Graham Shearer**
09-524-9941.

The Theme for the SOF Conference Auckland 3-5 October 1997 is "Faith On The Margins"

Christchurch

Their convenor, **John Goffin** (who can be contacted on 03-348-3479), reports that they had a record attendance of 29 at their May meeting when they started studying Lloyd Geering's God and The New Physics. They will study chapters 3 and 4 at their June meeting. In July, **John Hunt** will talk about Celtic Spirituality and **Bill Shephard** will address the subjects of Islamic Spirituality and aspects of Sufi thinking and practice in August. **Margaret Mayman** leads on Feminist Spirituality in September.

Wellington

Recent discussions over dinner at their monthly home meetings have included: critical personal life changing events; William Blake; and idols. Future meetings will include a discussion on inter-dependency and a video on Islam from the female perspective. Contact **Barbara Millar** on 04-476-3858.

Dunedin

Joan de Hamel began her talk at their March meeting with rich insights into the first childhood awakenings of her writing instinct and its inherent spirituality:

- does spirituality start with the discovery of one's separate self?
- is spirituality to do with moments of heightened awareness?
- is spirituality a matter of not wasting our talents?
- has it to do with tuning in to other people? cherishing memories?
- is it: discovering "my truth"? being in closer-than-usual empathy with "God", "the creator"? is it a "fine frenzy"?
- is spirituality always emotional and subjective?

In April, **Albert Moore** whetted their appetite for the then-current Guggenheim exhibition at the Dunedin Art Gallery. He made the distinction: "spirituality is individual, religion is institutional".

Dr. Colin Gibson spoke about, and illustrated modern hymn-writing and -singing in May. Colin advocated a light-hearted approach: don't take either yourself or "God" too seriously.

They are planning a panel on Non-Realism for their June meeting

and in July, **Peter Marshall** will talk about some aspects of ethics.

Contact is **Mae Cairns** 03-467-5058.

"Linking Up"

This item came from the June issue of the U.K. SOF Internet Newsletter "Portholes". **David Paterson** previews **David Hart's Linking Up**, Arthur Jones, June 1997 11.99 pounds in the U.K.

As an author, David is very much in the literary tradition of European philosophy. He reads a lot, he knows a lot of authors by their books and – if they are still alive – personally as well. His ability to draw on these authors is considerable, and he takes his readers on a wide-ranging tour of the past and present literary and philosophic tradition.

Sometimes, perhaps, we regret the shortage of stories drawn from first-hand experience; and sometimes we notice how rarely he assesses or criticises the people he quotes. We get some idea of what we might be missing when, in the middle of chapter 3, he sets up Mary Daly and Daphne Hampson as critics of each other's approach. It gets quite exciting!

But David's strength is in drawing, on a broad canvas, many different styles, offering an overall view rather than a reasoned argument. The over-all structure, loose though it is, makes its own sense.

On this broad canvas are juxtaposed:

- Sex and sexuality – the changing insights, rules, norms, hang-ups and blindness of Christian history; a plea for greater understanding that sexual encounters are of many different kinds.

- A complex argument about the relationship between male and female aspects of human nature: An extensive exploration of various feminist positions.

- A closely argued plea for the acceptance of homosexuality as having its own value and integrity: "The fact that they are gay is a significant part of the ministry of of homosexual Christians".

- Foucault's philosophical approach to the theology and spirituality of gay relationships, conjoined to Cupitt's Solar Ethics

• Mythological and mystic traditions, in which the erotic and union with the divine are metaphors of each other.

The theme uniting the whole canvas is that of linking. What links people together – in harmonious societies, in deep personal relationships, in the love of God?

Following Don Cupitt (see especially The Long-Legged Fly) David Hart seems to favour a one-dimensional view of the world. In this book there is little emotion or inwardness, except insofar as it is demonstrated on the surface of things, in actions, in philosophies, in theories or pronouncements. The book is still very much in the Western male, philosophical tradition.

Linking Up is an important and valuable contribution to the task of influencing public opinion and religious leaders away from rigid assumptions about what is natural and moral in sexuality, and towards a more flexible approach. If we are to find a fertility in our sexuality which is not just about genital penetration and procreation, then we must acknowledge many different levels of encounter and styles of sexual expression, and we must seek to assure people that such an abundance is OK.

But I felt I wanted the book to go further. There is a structure to love-making, a ritual which deepens the encounter with the other, which values the respectful approach and savours the feedback, which fosters mutuality and awe, and which takes delight in the deferment of climax.

Such love-making is deeply personal and profoundly private. Don Cupitt's image of "living expressively, outing ourselves ... all communication" seems to me to collude with the emotional inhibitions of the Western philosophical male and with a culture that seems either to fear sex or to be obsessed by it, and often both.

Contribution

The Following Story

Ian Cairns of Dunedin wrote:

One of my life's constants has been an ongoing fascination with the Jesus story. Perceptions have

Where Are They Now?

All members of the Sea of Faith are organised and eager to receive their regular letters -- aren't they?

Well, yes -- mostly.

But, for the last couple of issues a small number of newsletters have been returned to us stamped "Gone -- No Address" or "Redirection Expired".

This is a double request:

1. If you move, then do tell us -- it takes only a moment to alter the details on our file -- and we really don't want to lose you.

2. Does anyone know where the following three people are?

Their May Newsletters were returned.

- Beverley Bertholet, was in Whangarei
- N. Lowry, was in Thames
- Shirley Wood, was in Whangamata
- Helen Ridley, was in Wellington

Thanks, and keep in touch!

**Roy Griffith,
Membership Secretary**

changed, vastly, but the fascination remains.

Working with Mark's gospel over the past two years has brought me to some conclusions. One is that Jesus is no longer "saviour" in the traditional sense, but a man whose lifestyle inspires and whose wisdom expands my mind. And another is that, when Jesus died, he died as permanently as we all must eventually die. Stories about an empty tomb and physical appearances, are just that -- stories.

In Mark's myth of the resurrection he has a young man inform Jesus' women followers, "Jesus is going ahead of you to Galilee. You'll meet him there. So, go and tell his other followers." But the women were so terrified that their lips were sealed, and they said nothing at all!

So, the reader of Mark is faced with a problem. If the only ones

who "knew" refused to tell, how did the Jesus story ever get launched in the first place? And how come it is still fascinating me, almost in spite of myself?

Cees Nooteboom has written an "elegant tale" called The Following Story.

He tells of a classics teacher named Herman Mussert who goes to bed in Amsterdam, and awakens 20 years earlier in Portugal, where he had spent the definitive years of his life. Whether in memory or in replay, his life and loves, his successes and failures unfold until eventually he embarks, in an assorted company, on a ship voyaging west to the New World. On the voyage the passengers one-by-one tell their story, and then disappear from the scene. Finally Herman alone is left to tell his story, the "Following Story", to a former student who has become his "angel of death".

The reader is thus invited to go back and read again from the beginning, and again and again, until the penny drops as to what the story is about.

I think that is what Mark wants to say: "You won't hear from any eyewitnesses: they were all struck dumb. So, go back to Galilee, to the beginning of the story. And read it again, and again -- until the penny drops, and you sense for yourself what it is all about."

Ian Cairns

"The Contemporary Jesus"

Tom Altizer's latest book has recently been published in the US. Our man in Silicon Valley, John Klopacz, reviews it. This item originally appeared in the June issue of the U.K. SOF Internet Newsletter "Portholes".

The Contemporary Jesus, Thomas J.J. Altizer, State University of New York Press, 1997; \$19.95 in the U.S.

Among the books sure to be available at [the UK SOF] Conference is Thomas J.J. Altizer's most recent book, The Contemporary Jesus.

The author himself sees this book as "the culmination of many theological studies over a long period of time," (p. ix) and so it may serve as a convenient

introduction to the major themes and concerns found in Altizer's writings of more than thirty years. This book is not, however, "an easy read." Altizer's prose is dense and allusive, and requires close reading and careful unpacking. It is a book to "read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest" slowly.

Altizer dedicates this attempt to bridge the gap between New Testament scholarship and "our imaginative visions of Jesus" (p. xi) to the memory of Albert Schweitzer. The man, called by Don Cupitt "the first post-Christian Christian," appears to frame Altizer's book.

In the first chapter, Altizer introduces an apocalyptic Jesus and our contemporary theology "generated by the ending of a Christian world" (p. 9). He then turns to the Jesus Seminar (Chapter 2), which he sees as "a quest for the original Jesus in the absence of all theological perspective" (p. 26). (At recent meetings of the Seminar, however, I have seen a more conscious engagement with the theological issues.) He then turns to an examination of Dominic Crossan's *The Historical Jesus*, (Chapter 3), the Gnostic Jesus (Chapter 4) and the Pauline Jesus (Chapter 5). In his discussion of Paul, Altizer returns to Schweitzer, the scholar and disciple of both Jesus and Paul.

The centre and, for Altizer I suspect, the heart of this book is his discussion of the Catholic Jesus (Chapter 6), the Protestant Jesus (Chapter 7), and the nihilistic Jesus (Chapter 8). In these chapters, Altizer turns from historians and theologians to heretical poets, novelists and philosophers: Dante, Joyce, Milton, Blake, Dostoyevsky, and Nietzsche. As someone who came to theology by way of literary criticism, I find these chapters the most engaging. Altizer reads these classic authors with fresh insight and illumines the apocalyptic element within each.

Altizer discovers the loci of theology in the *coincidentia oppositorum*, or dialectical unification of real opposites, and in the cross. In this respect, Altizer may be considered a type of Hegelian, but his thought owes as much to the Johannine and Pauline

strains in Christianity and to Buddhism. According to Altizer, "Buddhism has been essential" (p. xi) to his theological quest, and he discusses the Buddhist Jesus in Chapter 9. As Buddhist thinkers are master analysts of the self, or rather no-self, this chapter should be especially interesting to Network members engaged with Cupitt's recent books.

In the tenth and concluding chapter, Altizer returns to Schweitzer's historical Jesus, who "comes to us as one unknown, without a name." He introduces us to an "anonymous" Jesus, who emerges from "a humanity whose depth is indistinguishable from its surface or mask" (p. 187). It is nearly impossible to summarize this final chapter for here Altizer turns apocalyptic seer: "Yes, a new total presence is dawning in our midst, but it is a total absence of everything we once knew as either world or humanity. Ours is surely an apocalyptic situation" (p. 204).

John Klopacz

Contribution

Evolution and Form

The author is Rob Harris of Wellington.

Evolution still disturbs the mind of many of the intensely or even vaguely religious, because it hints at change which is unsanctioned and unpredictable. Darwinian theory in its present forms provides for change based on:

- previous characteristics;
- physical limitations of shape, form and adaptation;
- physical and behavioural barriers to breeding;
- time for changes to occur; and,
- environmental changes acting on the selective survival of individuals in a breeding group.

The question of divine architect is at the least taken out of immediate contention and placed in the category of myth, prime cause or indirect manager. As one of the main reasons for faith and religion is to provide surety and comfort for humans who are an eternally uncertain species, religious disquiet is a not an unexpected reaction when faced with the theory.

Most of us in the West have had to grow a new world view with the advent of the modern scientific paradigm (translatable as a world

view or model of reality) and our increasing knowledge of the world's ecology and geography. What was a useful paradigm in the medieval world can no longer explain the very clear biological evidence that species transform and the physical chemical evidence that the physical world has altered through time. While it may be impossible to convince some people, what is the evidence for evolutionary change and why is the theory so important for biology and science generally?

Modern biology grew to maturity on the back of the growth of the scientific paradigm in early modern Europe. The growing knowledge of the world brought back from new worlds, the mere fact of religious dissent, free-masonry and mysticism, the growth of capitalist ethic in both the Catholic and Protestant worlds, the opening up of ancient scholarly texts, printing, the interest in experimentation within industry,

the transformation from wood to coal, the political transformation to modern democracy all played a part in the increased interest in learning more about the world.

During this period of economic and ideological transformation elements of western culture learnt to observe, measure and predict events in the world in ways that rely on the systematic use of evidence. The scientific paradigm is about testing belief and investigating entities, wider patterns and connections between entities on the basis that everything is potentially knowable. This sense of freedom to be able to know was a heady brew to people like Darwin, but it also held traps for them in that they had to reconcile what they observed as reality, with their religious training.

In one sense we can now see that the two are not incompatible as the universe with its own rules is consistent with a formative divinity.

"Books That Made A Difference"

This is a regular section in the Newsletter which features books that have made a difference in the personal faith-journeys of members of The Sea of Faith Network.

Dark Nature: A Natural History of Evil. by Lyall Watson, Sceptre, 1995 is recommended by Fred Marshall of Waikato.

The Goldilocks Theory which underpins this book states that the universe exists because the multiplicity of elements which compose it combine in exactly the right proportions and ways, to within remarkably small degrees of discrimination. Like Goldilocks' porridge they are "just right". Evil is defined as an excess or a lack which upsets the equilibrium. Evil is consequently an integral part of the Natural world.

The human is a part of the natural order and subject to the same conditioning factors as all other creatures. Following Dawkins, Hamilton *et al*, Watson traces the genetic imperatives for survival (**Be nice to insiders; be nasty to outsiders; cheat wherever possible**), through diverse animal behaviours to primates and humans. He describes the emergence in humans of a moral sense; in that context he examines "horrible" crimes like the murder of the little Bulger child by 10 year olds and the Holocaust.

He concludes with the conflict in each of us "between an old set of impulses which are, by design, very strong; and a new set of values which are, inevitably, unnatural". We each contain a Jekyll and Hyde, and are required to confront the "shadow self" – the gene-motivated, selfish impulse and choose not to follow its urgings, i.e. to exercise our free will. Watson invokes Shell Drake's "morphic fields" to support the view that each individual "right" choice helps to create a climate of rightness.

His last chapter states more clearly and cogently than I have found elsewhere the dilemma of choice that confronts humanity and the evolutionary consequences which may come from the choices we make.

Fred Marshall

Please send your contributions to the Editor (Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay)

"Einstein's comment that he saw so far because he rested on the shoulders of giants applies to all researchers who depend on accumulated wisdom." See Evolution and Form

But, in another sense we are left with the problem of what happens when one dethrones a realist or parental god from day to day interference and take away the personal nature of godhead from a part of our firmament.

Fundamentalists are right to fear the process because it can lead them into the unknown of the self made path, often without the maturity of understanding of scientific reasoning and philosophy that Darwin had when he wrestled with his dilemma.

Teilhard de Chardin tried to avoid the dilemma by postulating a universe that was set in motion to become or join with God. It is an idea that has a lot of personal appeal although it requires as much an act of faith as any traditional belief in a parental and personal God.

Modern evolutionary theorists such as Richard Dawkins avoid the God principle altogether and describe evolution as a natural part of the world driven by the nature of energy and matter, which in interacting produces emergent novelties which in turn build on each other to provide a living universe. It can be logically 'proved' that when more than two particles or entities interact the result is inherently unpredictable in detail and resulting combinations are evolutionary in moving from one form to another. (This is also the basis of Chaos Theory). The existence of matter therefore in this view will inherently produce an evolutionary universe.

The question of the formation of matter and the universe appears to be unresolvable in our present state of knowledge. Whether we have a God providing the *pnuema*, or impetus for causing the universe, or the universe comes from a singularity or point, or we have continuous generation of matter from a universal potential, we are still left with the problem of how the universe came to form. In one sense the singularity cause in the big bang is possibly misleading, because any point in three dimensions is not a point in a larger number of dimensions. The supposed point or white hole is therefore an entity or process capable of being an infinite size depending on the number of dimensions of our reality. At present we do not have direct ways of confirming or measuring the existence of higher

dimensional numbers, only mathematical modelling and predicting the behaviour of matter based on these models.

I believe these questions are perpetually fascinating in my personal search for engagement with the universe, but I can understand why others cannot easily contemplate the uncertain and contingent in their personal faith. Scientific belief is also not often incorporated into our other needs for community and mundane reinforcement. The traditional church and even more so the fundamentalists in their modern sense have an advantage that many of us don't, despite their wilful ignorance and contempt for scholarship.

The scientific paradigm has a companionship of its own on the journey towards 'truth', but it is a perception rather than a limited set of methods. It is also not as objective as people think, containing within it the irrationality of people in how they come to want to observe and their complex mental states when they observe and come to conclusions. A researcher relies on both inducing specific observation into general hypotheses (induction) and formulating general models and hypotheses to explain specific instances (deduction).

A practitioner will naturally move between both viewpoints. Sometimes the approach is intricately intermingled and the researcher will come from the top and bottom in the research framework and will choose methods which be consistent with inductive and deductive directions in the gathering of information and testing models. Inherent in the scientific process is the knowledge that everything is ultimately provisional, although some things are more provisional than others.

One of its great dangers in using the scientific method is to assume that anything is fixed forever, because although some information is confirmed over and over again, e.g., that species assemblages have changed, the particular significance of evidence shifts as more evidence and new technique becomes available. Einstein's comment that he saw so far because he rested on the shoulders of giants applies to all researchers who depend on accumulated wisdom. To some degree this always biases

St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society is pleased to bring to New Zealand in October the first

Geering Lecturer

John Spong

John Shelby Spong is an author, lecturer and Bishop of the Episcopal (Anglican) Diocese of Newark. His speaking events will include topics such as: *the future of Christianity in the 21st century; re-rooting Christianity in its Jewishness; new steps in a non-literal understanding of the Bible; ethical issues such as the ordination and marriage of gays and lesbians; and physician assisted suicide.*

Mark Your Diary

Wellington: lunch-hour lectures in St. Andrew's on the Terrace October 7,14,21,28. Watch out for notices of Sunday preaching.

Auckland October 3 and 5: Sea of Faith Conference

Auckland Oct 5: St. Luke's Remuera 4pm. St. Matthews in the City 7:30pm.

Napier Oct 17 evening: Public meeting.

Palmerston North Oct 20 7pm: public event.

John Spong's latest book Liberating The Gospels: Reading the Bible with Jewish Eyes (\$29.95) was reviewed in SOF Newsletter 21.

For further information, fax or phone Liz Robinson on 04-568-2794.

what we investigate, but it is an inevitable consequence of depending on a agreed body of knowledge and of being human. It does however, allow us to test new ideas and evidence against the existing body of knowledge and therefore having consistency in testing and in formulation.

A essential goal of a good scientist is to be humble in how they conceive of the world. In many ways this isn't so different from the mystic who seeks to know through faith and is certain that the world is

ultimately only known to God or unity. In the study of life and its surroundings, evidence gradually accumulates so that our scientific knowing rests on faith that the evidence corroborates a particular view of reality.

In the case of evolution and its significance for life we have a number of separate pathways to knowing. Traditional religion has problems with the idea of going from apparently nothing to the most complex of organs and entities, but as many evolutionary biologists point out, all known development paths can be explained by a series of small changes for which there is direct and indirect evidence in the fossil assemblage and in foetal development stages. We know also that drastic changes in the habitat potential can trigger higher rates of change over shorter periods of time. Evolution at the margins often happens when environments change or disasters happen. Previously less expressed characteristics may come into play after biophysical changes produced by events.

Evolution as far as we know is a combination of slow underlying shifts in the genetic material combined with faster and more intermittent change. Much change is driven by sexual differentiation as this creates possibilities for far greater recombination changes in the gene pool, the reasons being both the process of sexual recombination of genes itself, and behavioural selection/exclusion set up by variation in sexual characteristics. Sex is one of life's greatest ways of producing variation which is the driving force of evolutionary change and incidentally keeping us one step away from susceptibility to disease and hazards.

The evidence for evolution is firstly, the changing fossil assemblage linked to sequential layers in the rock strata. Secondly, the rock strata are fitted into a time sequence of layers generated over time by different processes such as folding, volcanism and erosion and accumulation of sediment. Thirdly, we have evidence in the orientation of particles in rock that the earth's magnetic field has changed its polarity or direction over time consistent with the time sequence of rock formation. Fourthly we can sense

and measure that the landscape has changed over time and the changes are consistent with changes in local and global climates, life possibilities and the fossil record. Fifthly, the fossil record is made up of everything from pollen to dinosaurs and leaves and we can recreate a larger picture than if we were dependent only on the remains of larger creatures.

Sixth, there is evidence that plates on the earth's surface has been moved around the globe and the continents have drifted apart and together creating a jigsaw of fossil assemblages and fitting patterns that can only be made sense of if time is used as the determining factor. Seventh, the sediments and ice caps are made up of differing proportions of isotopes, eg, O_{16} and O_{18} , and the differing proportions represent climatic changes and evidence of animal and plant assemblages which show intermediate adaptations to these external changes caused by climate. Eight, the divergences in DNA and protein patterns between animals and plants species are consistent with time and evolutionary separation, e.g., chimpanzees and humans, flowering plants and conifers.

Plants in particular are a useful laboratory for showing familiar relationships based on breeding closeness based on their flowering parts and gene sequences. Nine, we have experimental evidence of what happens when populations are separated by sources of food supply or geographical barriers, eg, fish in lake systems.

There are numerous other research avenues which make the theory of evolution one of the more solid ideas that we possess and a basic building block of biology and human sciences, but it still has theological implications which we must deal with. As I have pointed out I don't think there are easy routes to faith in the 'new' world. There are going to be just as many arguments between rabidly puritan scientists as there are arguments between those of religious persuasion in deciding whether to retain a degree of mysticism in how we approach the world. Personally I have no problem in retaining both the science and the mystical sense of connection to the world around me, but others may not for numerous reasons.

In the end both science and religion are there to provide ourselves with a connecting link between the individual and the larger scheme of things. I value the diversity and contingency in my beliefs and others value the security more, but each end of the spectrum has its validity. In the case of acceptance and use of evolutionary theory we may always have some people that constitutionally are unable to stomach the uncertainties of the theory or indeed much science. For those people we may have to accept that they can never follow us in a more complex intellectual journey, but also know that part of us also yearns for security as well. We however shouldn't apologise for our predisposition to question and think because this is among the best characteristics of civilisation.

Rob Harris

"After Christianity"

This review by Anthony Freeman appeared on the U.K. SOF Internet mailing.

After Christianity by Daphne Hampson, SCM Press 14.95 pounds in the U.K. (0-334-02640-7)

Still a professional theologian and a feminist, Daphne Hampson has ceased to be a Christian. She now believes that Christianity is both immoral and untrue – in that order: "Once people form the ethical judgment that Christianity is a masculinist religion . . . they have clear eyes to see that Christianity cannot possibly be true."

If only she had written this book as if she really believed that! Had she just guided her readers to make that ethical judgment for themselves, and then stood back to let the scales fall from their eyes, this could have been a great work of conviction and conversion. For she makes her case powerfully, and the central chapters should be compulsory reading for all clergy and thinking lay Christians who have so far avoided the bare-knuckled feminist critique of their faith.

Take the Trinity, for example. The whole edifice is presented as a masculine construction designed to answer a male agenda: "Christian theology is a therapy designed to alleviate fear of the father. . . . Trinitarianism allows for the

resolution of the relation to the father: for the son will one day come to have an equality with him." Since this is a purely male psychological hang-up, Christianity is shown to enshrine the solution to a problem women do not even have. At the same time it fails to satisfy a need they most certainly do have: "What the male symbolic order lacks (exemplified well by Christianity) is the image of a woman as the adult equal of man." In Christian symbolism, God is to man as man is to woman. So the man is weak and sinful in relation to God, but he is strong and upright in relation to the (even weaker and more sinful) woman. Woman is always at the bottom of the heap. So Christianity is morally bankrupt.

The corruption is there in the very fabric and structure of Christian theology, and no good can possibly come of cosmetic changes, such as renaming "the Father and the Son" as Parent and Offspring, or even Mother and Daughter. Still worse is the temptation to apply feminine attributes (such as motherhood) to a masculine God. Such efforts serve only to exalt the male further by implying that he has no need of the female to complement him. It bolsters the false idea that a male is a complete human and a female a deficient one.

Unhappily Daphne Hampson does not show the courage of her convictions, and she pays dearly for her lack of nerve. Instead of leading off with her strongest suit, she plays into her opponents hands with two opening chapters of defensive and bad-tempered wrangling about the nature of Christian truth. At best they are poorly argued; at worst they are frankly embarrassing.

In chapter one, for instance, she sets out "to explain what I mean when I say that Christianity cannot be true". Yet all she manages is to show that "Christian belief becomes a matter of faith". The Archbishop of Canterbury could have told her that! It has nothing whatever to do with the claim that Christianity cannot be true.

The second chapter attacks liberal and feminist writers who agree that historical Christianity is a masculine religion, but who try to rehabilitate scripture and the

tradition by fresh "readings". This is a tactical mistake on Hampson's part. Whether their theology is right or wrong, the very existence of such Christian feminists is fatal to her claim that acceptance of the feminist critique entails the perception that Christianity is false. They should have been kept out of sight until her readers' hearts had been won over.

There are other weaknesses. The author denies defining Christianity in a narrowly conservative way, but she does so all the same. She lays down with papal confidence what Christians must believe, and then declares invalid any form of Christian discipleship which does not conform to her own imposed standards. This enables her to draw on the insights of her former faith without compromising her new non-Christian status, and to deny the name "Christian" to any liberal or radical theologians who might challenge her claims about the faith they still profess.

Although totally opposed to western monotheism ("I have wiped the slate clean of an anthropomorphically conceived God"), Hampson does call herself a theist. She writes "of there being more than meets the eye; of there being that on which we can draw", and to this dimension of reality — which is for her a matter of empirical fact — she gives the name God. This gives her theology an objectivity which is lacking from many contemporary forms of belief. As she says, "I clearly think the word God to have a reference. It is not simply to be de-mythologized."

This attitude gives the clue to what, in my own view, is the most unsatisfying feature of her book: its inconsistencies and breaks of logic. These stem from the author's unwillingness to grasp the twin nettles of historical relativism and the human construction of theology, and her consequent inability to follow her arguments through without contradiction.

Relativism says that the way we perceive and express Christian truth is bound to change with time. So feminism may offer new insights today, but without denying the value in its own context of all that has gone before. Hampson rejects this approach, insisting that "whatever God is . . . God has

always been". It follows that if her feminist understanding of God is true now, then it always has been and always will be true. And all other views are eternally false. But she is not consistent about this.

Earlier in the book (when criticising Bultmann) she has herself invoked a favourite relativist slogan of my own: "To say the same thing in a different age is to say something different!" If this is so, then whatever she says about God today, the same words would have meant something different in the past, and will do so again in the future. In such a situation, what does she mean by saying "whatever God is . . . God has always been"? What is the cash

A Better Ten?

The Rev. John Papworth, an Anglican priest in the U.K., has suggested a better set of commandments:

- I have made everything in heaven and earth and thou shalt revere and cherish with awe the works of my hand in all their beauty with all thy strength.
- Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.
- Thou shalt venerate thy family and thy human-scale neighborhood above all forms and degrees of human association.
- Thou shalt enjoy the gift of sex I gave given thee as thou wilt but thou shalt not procreate excessively.
- Thou shalt not pollute the earth or the waters, nor shalt thou toxify the air I have given thee to breathe.
- Thou shalt live simply and truthfully and not waste the finite resources of the earth, which I have bestowed for thee and for all generations.
- Keep holy the Sabbath day as a day of rest, and for contemplation of the transcendent nature of the life I have bestowed on thee.
- Thou shalt not steal from thy neighbor.
- Open your heart to love and compassion and resolve disputes without violence.
- Thou shalt not heed commercial notices nor become enslaved to cars, computers television and like technologies.

value (as we used to say) of an hypothetical unchanging referent for the term God, if our language about it cannot also hold its meaning?

This is not a rhetorical question. I very much want to know the answer.

Anthony Freeman

"A Reasonable Faith"

This seventeen page booklet is subtitled *"An Introduction To The Sea Of Faith Network"*. Written by David Boulton, the editor of the British Sea of Faith Magazine, this is a very helpful resource for members and others who are questioning their beliefs. There are some aspects of the of the booklet that are specific to the British Network but these act as an interesting comparison to our own New Zealand Network.

Local Groups may find *A Reasonable Faith* a useful resource as a discussion starter.

Copies of this booklet are available at a cost of \$7 (including postage) from Roy Griffith, 82 Kinghorne Street, Wellington 3. Make cheques payable to the Sea of Faith Network.

Stimulus to Heresy?

Because 1997 marks the 30th anniversary of the trial of Lloyd Geering for heresy, the New Zealand religious magazine *Stimulus* has devoted its May issue (Vol 5 No 2) to reflections on that event. Lloyd did not contribute but Jim Veitch wrote a detailed analysis of the conflict which, though a matter of concern mainly to the Presbyterian Church, fueled controversy among many New Zealand Christians. Jim concludes that, although Lloyd was acquitted and the "liberals" thought that they had won, "the 1967 decision unwittingly paved the way for a conservative-evangelical alliance to gradually fill a leadership space and to influence the theological identity of the church".

Jim Veitch also contributed a "shorthand sketch" of the wider debates about resurrection that erupted in the sixties.

One of those opposing Lloyd, Robert Blakie, died in 1975 but his son, Graham, who is a staff

member with Campus Crusade for Christ in New Zealand contributed an article as did Duncan McLeod (National Youth coordinator for Presbyterian Church) who did an extensive review of Robert Blakie's 1970 book *Secular Christianity and God Who Acts*.

With the exception of an article ("Lloyd Geering Saved My Faith") by David Simmers, most other items disagree with Lloyd, in line with the generally conservative style of the magazine.

But, its still a worthwhile read for those interested in the non-meeting of minds that still goes on over the central theme of Christianity.

You can arrange to have a copy mailed to you (it costs \$18 including post and GST) by phoning 06-378-9699.

Noel Cheer

In Brief

"By Their Fruits Ye Shall Know Them"

Lois Wells of Christchurch invites us to be firm with "Religious Canvassers" because so often they come "without an appointment or any considerations for my feelings or situation regarding time and knowledge". "Had they really believed in Jesus Christ, I would have expected them to have come respectfully and to have given me choices."

Oops!

In the item titled *What God Was, Culture Now Is* on page 4 of the May Newsletter, the following sentence appeared:

"He traces some of these attitudes back to Constantine (354-430CE) whose Platonic dualism gave him a gloomy view of human nature in general and of sexuality in particular."

The reference should have been to **Augustine**. The error was a fault of the editor.

The Logo

The Steering Committee has come up with a design that is likely to be widely accepted. It will be published in conjunction with the next Newsletter.

In the submissions there were many references to appropriate symbols. These are some of them:

- "Like the Celtic open-ended curve, the SOF Network attempts to be an open-ended forum" [Neil and Suzanne Thornton]
- "... the circle being an ancient symbol of Deity and eternity ..." [Ivan Frost for the Te Puke Group]
- "... the circle around the logo, symbolising the world." [Lois Wells]

"... travelling on the 'Sea of Faith' is more akin to a surf board ride than, say, a ship ..." [Bruce McMillan]

The Steering Committee thanks all who submitted ideas.

Subscriptions

Sea of Faith Network subscriptions are due for renewal each year at the time of the National Conference.

If you are attending this year's Conference in Auckland then you should take the opportunity to renew your subscription along with your Conference registration.

If you are not attending the Conference and became a member (or renewed your last year's sub) before 1 June 1997, then please send \$10 per household (\$15 if overseas) to Roy Griffith, 82 Kinghorne Street, Strathmore Park, Wellington 3. Make cheques payable to the Sea of Faith Network.

Next Newsletter

October 1997: While it will feature material from the Conference, we still welcome news about Local Groups, "Books That Made A Difference", Letters to the Editor and submitted articles.

Copy deadline is September 15th. To offer a contribution, send a floppy disk or hard copy to Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper St, Titahi Bay. Or send a fax to 04-236-7534.

The Sea of Faith Network (NZ)

is an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint. The Sea of Faith Network itself has no creed. It draws its members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions.

It publishes a regular newsletter, assists in setting up of local discussion groups, and holds an annual conference.

For membership details and for the address of your nearest local group, contact the Membership Secretary, Roy Griffith, 82 Kinghorne St., Strathmore Park, Wellington, Phone 04-388-1885.

To offer a comment on any material appearing in the Newsletter, contact the Editor, Noel Cheer 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay, Phone 04-236-7533, Fax 04-236-7534.