



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

NEWSletter

"I'm Religious, I don't discuss War"

Is it appropriate to be discussing the Iraq war under Sea of Faith auspices?
Should we leave it to political discussion groups?

An Editorial

The Middle East Muddle

The Israel problem had at its instigation a perception by some Jews and some Christians that the creation of a Jewish homeland in the Middle East was a religious obligation. In a talk to the Auckland Central SoFN Group on March 16th (see page 7), Philip Culbertson used Karen Armstrong's useful distinction between *mythos* and *logos* as part of his explanation. This is amplified in an excerpt on page 3. You can get Lloyd Geering's excellent book on the origins of this conflict, *Who Owns The Holy Land?* from The St Andrews Trust for the Study of Religion and Society (SATRS) in NZ. Their details are on their website at www.standrews.org.nz/satrs/

Fundamentalism

There is emerging a looming worldwide tragic standoff between Fundamentalist Christians and Fundamentalist Muslims. The incursion of religious fundamentalism into global politics has become problematic. Incidentally, western military tactics appear to be as unable to deal with terrorists as they were with Vietnamese guerilla fighters a generation ago. Perhaps someone might mention diplomacy to the Pentagon? We plan a review of Karen Armstrong's work on religious fundamentalism (*The Battle for God*) in the next Newsletter. SATRS will be running a lecture series on Fundamentalism in July in Wellington.

Just War

Frank Gaze writes eloquently about the "Just War" argument on page 10. It's easier to get the hearts and minds of the folks at home when you're sending their sons and daughters to get killed if there is a buy-in to a "higher purpose".

Doing God's Will

It must feel great to be an agent of divine governance or retribution -- "jihad" and "crusade" are frequently spoken. My own view is that if terrorism and the current war effort is "God's will", then I would

recommend subscribing to a better god. After all, a gun is an instrument of death with a human being at each end.

So, Where's the SoFN?

I suppose it all comes down to the tightrope that the SoFN is often tempted to walk:

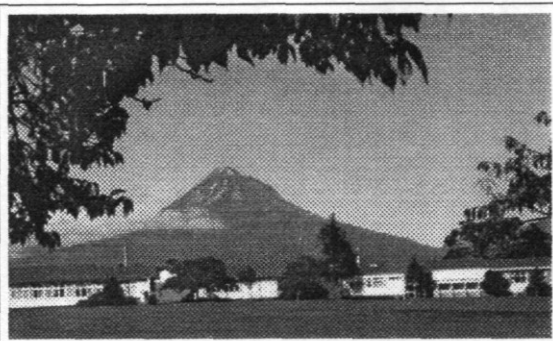
- On the one hand, we know that mixing religion and politics usually ends up creating schism to both sets of organisations.
- On the other, if one has a religious faith, especially one that can be articulated, then it must (by definition) be the most profound set of views that you have on anything — including politics.
- To "count me out because I'm religious but not political" might be to adopt a worthwhile *principle* but to offer nothing *practical*. It seems to be a recipe for irrelevance and a denial of the priority of religious faith.
- If you have a view, or if you are as ambivalent as I am, then submit a Letter to the Editor before June 1st.

Noel Cheer, Editor

Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Newsletter

Number 51, May 2003

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Mt Taranaki/Egmont behind Inglewood High School

From The Arrangements Committee

Leaving Frank to tell you about the Keynote Speakers [see p10] for the coming Conference and Elective Lecturers [see this page], I thought I would tell you a little about the venue.

Inglewood is a small but not insignificant Taranaki town, lying only 12 minutes drive south of New Plymouth. Its history goes back to 1874, when pioneers began to carve it out of the dense bush which lay between Mount Egmont/Taranaki and the central North Island. Now it is a service centre for a rich dairying district; it has a collection of shops and businesses dating from the earliest days to the present, and of course a High School. It's also the home of the Fun Ho! National Toy Museum (bring those old favourites along if they need mending), a Mondo international standard Athletic Track and a theatre to which people travel from around the province. Oh yes, Tom Cruise is filming here too!

The High School is some fifty years old, but doesn't look it; a great deal of expertise and money has gone into making it attractive and comfortable. The facilities are modern and the gardens a pleasure. We shall be using the main hall area and the classrooms for our speakers and discussion groups (I have been assured that the heating will be turned on!). The school is compact and easy to get around, being all on one level and with covered walkways connecting the three wings and the library.

As you know, we have asked you to take charge of booking your accommodation. If you haven't done so already, please do it soon; it doesn't take much to fill all the beds in Inglewood if there is a national athletics meeting or a big rugby game. There is also plenty of accommodation in New Plymouth, and we will bring those of you who don't have your own transport to the school by bus if necessary. Check first to see if you can get a lift in with someone.

We're working to give you a comfortable and interesting weekend; we look forward to meeting you!

Mary Boekman

Chair of Arrangements Committee, Phone 06-756-7644

CONFERENCE MATTERS

Elective Lecturers

We have four Elective Lectures lined up:

- **Rex Hendry** (DOC Taranaki Manager): *Post-modern Antarctica - modelling our future?*
- **Roger Hanson** (engineer and amateur astronomer): *The Creation Process - Science and the Grand Designer*
- **Lloyd Geering**: *Why Israel Holds the Key to World Peace*
- **Jill Harris**: *The nothing that is: NZ poets explore our spiritual experience.*

You should start working out which one of these four you would like to hear on the Friday evening.

Workshop Conference Presenters

Now is the time to crystallise the vague ideas that have been running round your mind about that Workshop that you had always intended to present. We need definite proposals for this year's Conference.

If you have an idea you want to float, or a workshop you want to get feedback on, please contact

Marjorie Cox

1/65 Church Street Devonport, North Shore, Auckland

Phone (09) 445 1240;

email: marjorie.cox@whl.co.nz.

Marjorie will send you a formal proposal form for you to complete and send back.

In The Listener

In line with requests from our membership, we have placed an advertisement on the "Noticeboard" page of The NZ Listener. It is scheduled to appear on

April 12, May 10, June 14, July 12 and August 16.

It looks clearer in The Listener than the sample below.

In the first placement, they got our website address incorrect, so we got an extra free insertion on April 26.

An association of people exploring
religious thought from a
non-dogmatic standpoint.

Sea of Faith Network

For a free Newsletter, clip this advert and
mail it with your name and address to
"SoF, 133 Orangi-Kaupapa Rd, Wellington"
<http://sof.wellington.net.nz>

Mythos and Logos

excerpts from the Introduction to *The Battle for God* by Karen Armstrong, HarperCollins 2001.

We tend to assume that the people of the past were (more or less) like us. But in fact their spiritual lives were rather different. In particular, they evolved two ways of thinking, speaking, and acquiring knowledge, which scholars have called **mythos** and **logos**. Both were essential; they were regarded as complementary ways of arriving at truth, and each had its special area of competence.

Mythos

Myth was regarded as primary: it was concerned with what was thought to be timeless and constant in our existence. Myth looked back to the origins of life, to the foundations of culture, and to the deepest levels of the human mind. Myth was not concerned with practical matters, but with meaning. Unless we find some significance in our lives, we mortal men and women fall very easily into despair. The mythos of a society provided people with a context that made sense of their day-to-day lives; it directed their attention to the eternal and the universal. It was also rooted in what we would call the unconscious mind. The various mythological stories, which were not intended to be taken literally, were an ancient form of psychology. When people told stories about heroes who descended into the underworld, struggled through labyrinths, or fought with monsters, they were bringing to light the obscure regions of the subconscious realm, which is not accessible to purely rational investigation, but which has a profound effect upon our experience and behaviour. Because of the dearth of myth in our modern society, we have had to evolve the science of psychoanalysis to help us to deal with our inner world.

Myth could not be demonstrated by rational proof; its insights were more intuitive, similar to those of art, music, poetry, or sculpture. Myth only became a reality when it was embodied in cult, rituals, and ceremonies which worked aesthetically upon worshippers, evoking within them a sense of sacred significance and enabling them to apprehend the deeper currents of existence.

In the premodern world, people had a different view of history. They were less interested than we are in what actually happened, but more concerned with the meaning of an event. Historical incidents were not seen as unique occurrences, set in a far-off time, but were thought to be external manifestations of constant, timeless realities. Hence history would tend to repeat itself, because there was nothing new under the sun. Historical narratives tried to bring out this eternal dimension. Thus, we do not know what really occurred when the ancient Israelites escaped from Egypt and passed through the Sea of Reeds. The story has been deliberately written as a myth, and linked with other stories about rites of passage, immersion in the deep, and gods splitting a sea in two to create a new reality. Jews experience this myth every year in the rituals of the Passover Seder, which brings this strange story into their own lives and helps them to make it their own. One could say that

unless an historical event is mythologized in this way, and liberated from the past in an inspiring cult, it cannot be religious. To ask whether the Exodus from Egypt took place exactly as recounted in the Bible or to demand historical and scientific evidence to prove that it is factually true is to mistake the nature and purpose of this story. It is to confuse mythos with logos.

Logos

Logos was equally important. Logos was the rational, pragmatic, and scientific thought that enabled men and women to function well in the world. We may have lost the sense of mythos in the West today, but we are very familiar with logos, which is the basis of our society. Unlike myth, logos must relate exactly to facts and correspond to external realities if it is to be effective. It must work efficiently in the mundane world. We use

this logical, discursive reasoning when we have to make things happen, get something done, or persuade other people to adopt a particular course of action. Logos is practical. Unlike myth, which looks back to the beginnings and to the foundations, logos forges ahead and tries to find something new: to elaborate on old insights, achieve a greater control over our environment, discover something fresh, and invent something novel.

Both Indispensable

In the premodern world, both mythos and logos were regarded as indispensable. Each would be impoverished without the other. Yet the two were essentially distinct, and it was held to be dangerous to confuse mythical and rational discourse. They had separate jobs to do. Myth was not reasonable; its narratives were not supposed to be demonstrated empirically. [But] rational arguments could make no sense of tragedy. Logos could not answer questions about the ultimate value of human life. A scientist could make things work more efficiently and discover wonderful new facts about the physical universe, but he could not explain the meaning of life. That was the preserve of myth and cult.

Logos Dominant

By the eighteenth century, however, the people of Europe and America had achieved such astonishing success in science and technology that they began to think that logos was the only means to truth and began to discount mythos as false and superstitious. It is also true that the new world they were creating contradicted the dynamic of the old mythical spirituality. Our religious experience in the modern world has changed, and because an increasing number of people regard scientific rationalism alone as true, they have often tried to turn the mythos of their faith into logos.

[We plan a review of *The Battle for God* in the next issue. Henryk Skolimowski (*The Participatory Mind* et al) uses the term **mechanos** to cover some aspects of Armstrong's logos - ed].

"Unless we find some significance in our lives, we ... fall very easily into despair."



REVIEW: *Is Nothing Sacred?*

Is Nothing Sacred? The Non-Realist Philosophy of Religion

Don Cupitt

(Fordham University Press, NY, 2002)

An edited review by Nicholas Rundle, an Anglican Priest and Quaker fellow-traveller who lives in the Adelaide hills. Copied, with permission, from the Sea of Faith in Australia "Bulletin" Feb 2003.

Don Cupitt is one of the world's most controversial theologian-philosophers.

In his popular and, some would say, subversive BBC TV series of the 1980s, *The Sea of Faith*, Cupitt asserted that religion, in order to survive, must free itself from supernatural beliefs and be seen instead as a form of human cultural expression.

Cupitt has been described by some as a Christian atheist and he has not been afraid to attack the church and theologians. In his 1980 book *Taking Leave of God* Cupitt accused the church of exercising 'psychological terrorism',¹ and defined his own role as that of a rescuer. Jesus is to be rescued from dogmatic captivity and God from metaphysical captivity. Jesus, the 'ugly little man', has in his more recent books, such as *Reforming Christianity* returned to centre stage where Kingdom religion — the religion of immediacy preached by Jesus — must emerge from the 'rusty and oppressive' machinery of the mediated religion of the Church.² Cupitt exhorts his readers to a beliefless religion where worship and belief in a supernatural realm are replaced by a definition of religion as a way people relate themselves to life and celebrate life.

Cupitt's latest book, *Is Nothing Sacred?* needs to be read against the background of the radical Sea of Faith movement as well as the controversy and vituperation that has followed him as he has sought to promote his non-realist Christianity from within the Church.

In the introduction to *Is Nothing*

Sacred? (p XI) Cupitt defines non-realism in this way:

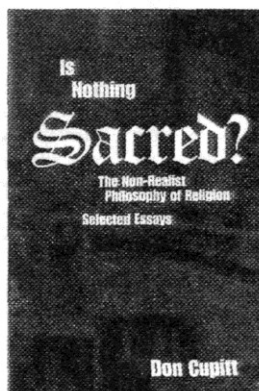
Suppose we become acutely aware of our own human limits: we realise that we are always inside human language, and only ever see the world through our human eyes. All that is ever accessible to us is the relative god, my god. As I see this, metaphysics dies and I am left knowing only my god, my guiding religious ideal. And this is the non-realist philosophy of religion in a nutshell.

The value of the Introduction lies not only in the succinct way in which Cupitt summarises his thought but the chronological account of the way his ideas have developed; a kind of chronological apologia. Until now only

equally radical thinkers because he has drawn attention to the stultifying insularity of the British academic and ecclesiastical establishments. It is perhaps appropriate that his latest book of essays has appeared in a series on continental theologians because Cupitt has been a pioneer in the exploration of continental European thought and its implications for the way in which life is lived.

Is Nothing Sacred is comprised of a series of essays from the period 1980–2000. They explore themes from Kant and Nietzsche, and sketch Cupitt's vision for radical religion. I appreciated the essay in which he explores the history of religious art. Cupitt is particularly knowledgeable about art. He traces the dissolution of any kind of division between sacred and secular art in the modern and post modern eras. He notes the move towards the abstract and to postmodern art which seeks to disturb and confront, rather than to console or uplift the observer who can no longer remain only a contemplating observer but is drawn into the emerging flux of being.

Cupitt, much I suspect to the annoyance of the retiring Archbishop of Canterbury, remains a priest. As an Anglican priest myself I note in this book and in others, Cupitt's real pastoral concern for his readers and hearers to find their own way to liberation. The old style religion of mediated salvation is replaced by religion as therapy which serves to divest people of an addiction to be what Bishop Richard Holloway has called in public, 'meaning junkies'. In chapter six Cupitt explores therapy as a way of freeing people to accept life as it is, rather than turning life into a weapon to make ourselves unhappy. He focuses on the Buddha as the best exponent of the therapeutic approach. Cupitt has at times been content to call himself a Christian Buddhist. In this chapter he encourages his readers to see religion as reconciling us to what is and might be in this world, rather than providing us with information about illusory worlds or Platonic ideals. It is no wonder that Cupitt's style of theologising has profoundly influenced novelists like Philip Pullman and Iris Murdoch.



Scott Cowdell's 1988 book, *Atheist Priest* (SCM) provided any kind of guide to the themes which have emerged from Cupitt's earlier books as he journeyed from Christian orthodoxy to a radical empty humanism and a love of transience. Cupitt quotes with a touch of humour the English establishment figure, Baroness Warnock who bracketed together the philosophers, Derrida, Rorty, and Cupitt as enemies of objective truth and public morals (ix). However the reader also gets a sense of how difficult Cupitt's journey has been for him and how hurtful he has found the accusations that his philosophy is, "simply a euphemism for sheer and shameless unbelief." (xv). Perhaps Cupitt has received more opprobrium than other

The turn to life, a theme that emerges in Cupitt's more recent books, is summarised in an article entitled, 'The Value of Life' in which he explores the requirement to develop an appropriate environmental ethic. He draws attention to the nostalgic utopian tendency in conservation movements and traces this to western assumptions about an unchanging morality 'out there' needing only to be grasped and applied rather than an "ever-renewed creative activity though which we give our life worth and keep the human enterprise going." (p 124)

In the final two chapters of the book Cupitt reprints two essays in which he responds to criticisms by two British Anglican theologians, the establishment liberal David Edwards and Rowan Williams, soon to become the leader of the Anglican Communion. In his disputation with Edwards Cupitt attacks theological liberalism at its weakest point. Cupitt sees the liberal project as one of cleaning up the language and presentation of the faith in the hope that the result will more than satisfy a post Christian world, hungry for spirituality as well as restore passion and commitment to the mainstream Church. Cupitt rejects these liberal aspirations and calls for root and branch reform by appealing to the feminist critique of Christianity and to Jesus' radical this-world ethic. Here the reader gets a sense of Cupitt's determination to staying within a Church in which many regard him as an ecclesiastical cuckoo. The last words of this book have him reiterating a promise to change the Church from within and claiming his own place within the Church. His vision of the future Church, reiterated in many of his books is of democratic undogmatic Quaker style non-realist communities fired by a solar ethic. Individuals and communities live like the sun pouring themselves out for others without hope for spiritual reward. Can we see the shadow of Kant's ethics in Cupitt's solar ethic?

In his reply to Rowan Williams, Cupitt employs the metaphor of the dance to describe the ambiguity of

religious claims to truth, which must at the same time be negated. He quotes Derrida in defence of a playful use of language that is ultimately incapable of definition. Cupitt finds much in common with Williams, both writers seeking to employ language as play, an arena for meaning making in this world although Cupitt believes that nothing can lie beyond language. Cupitt defends himself by a discussion of the void, or Nihil, a common theme in his writings. Cupitt is taking the path of many mystics by saying that faith is not information gathering or belief but a radical death into unknowing, a kenotic embrace of the void rather than a retreat into a closed circle of certainty. Cupitt accuses Williams of taking the side of a nostalgic

emerge from the wreckage of institutional Churchianity.

I found *Is Nothing Sacred?* a valuable and important addition to my knowledge and appreciation of Cupitt. I have found Cupitt's writings enormously influential in the development and maturation of my own faith. Unlike Cupitt I am prepared to be open (most days) to a faith in a transcendent God beyond the god of human imagination and creativity to which humans can relate as I/Thou. I certainly believe that Cupitt deserves to be more widely read in an Australia. More and more people are struggling to find a way through a post modern world where the old nostalgia often peddled by political and religious leaders seems less and less convincing and

where the void of loss leads many to nihilist despair. Cupitt also speaks powerfully to the condition of many post Christians and post theists who still want to value the transformative potential of religion without God. He challenges those who want to escape into Harry Potter fantasies where the

"Suppose we become acutely aware of our own human limits: we realise that we are always inside human language, and only ever see the world through our human eyes. All that is ever accessible to us is the relative god, my god. As I see this, metaphysics dies and I am left knowing only my god, my guiding religious ideal. And this is the non-realist philosophy of religion in a nutshell."

from the Introduction

easygoing Christendom-type religion rather than seeking to make connections and learn the language of the world which only comes by entering the place of dark unknowing. He urges Williams to come out of the religious closet and declare himself a non-realist.

I hope that Williams and Cupitt will continue the dance of debate and that voice of radicals like Cupitt and the Sea of Faith will be as much valued and respected as the voices of powerful lobby groups. In every area of contemporary life, the Church included, conservatives and liberals continually squabble about the moral high ground. They usually make common cause only to suppress the unpopular radical who points out the real state of the Emperor's robe-less condition.

Perhaps it's worth recalling that in the Gospel the sworn enemies Pontius Pilate and Herod made friends in order to crucify Jesus. One hopes that the prophetic Cupitt will keep the radical nature of faith alive in the Church of the Kingdom which may yet

truth is out there somewhere waiting to be decoded, delivered by Santa or downloaded from the Internet.

This book is a good introduction to most of the major themes that Cupitt has wrestled with since his turn to non-realism in 1980. If you have not before read Cupitt and engage with *Is Nothing Sacred?* you may well discover why the Adelaide-based scientist and author Paul Davies calls Cupitt as one of the most exciting theologians of our era.³ You may not agree with Cupitt but I think you might discover in the questions he is asking a powerful antidote to the religious pulp fiction that so often passes for theology, spirituality, personal group and other meaning-making genres in our era.

Notes

1. As described by T. Beeson *Rebels and Reformers* (SCM 1999) p.171.
2. Cupitt, D *Reforming Christianity* Santa Rosa California 2001 Polebridge Press p 7
3. Davies, P 'The Ingeniously Ordered Universe' p 38 in Wallace, Fisher et al (eds) *Time and Tide* (John Hunt, 2001)

Local Groups

Dunedin

In preparation for their March meeting with Dennis Povey introducing a discussion on "Being rich; being poor", they asked their members to think about the following:

- There was a time when people could say: "God has rewarded me for my virtue [or hard work] by trusting me with money and property" or "it is the will of God that I should be poor now — but in heaven the tables will be turned". If we today cannot honestly say such things, what can we say about being wealthy, or being poor?
- How comfortable or uncomfortable you are about the words: "Blessed are you poor" or "Blessed are the poor in spirit" and: "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich [person] to get into the kingdom of heaven".
- Do we tend to distance ourselves from both terms, so that "poor" means "other people poorer than me" and equally "rich" means "people richer than me"?
- Do we tend to assume that being as rich as I am is OK — it is due recognition of my virtue and/or hard work — but that people who are markedly richer than me are more than likely greedy and unscrupulous? And equally, do we tend to think that being as poor as I am is an indication that I'm commendably unconcerned about money, but people who are markedly poorer are more than likely lazy and unmotivated?
- St Paul claimed: "... I have learned to be satisfied with what I have. I know what it is to be in need, and what it is to have more than enough. I have learned this secret, so that anywhere, at any time, I am content.....". Can I say the same — or do my self-image and my identity depend (to some degree at least) on money and possessions?
- Then we might want to get on to what the Church has had to say about money, wealth and poverty.

Contact: Donald Feist, (03) 476-3268
feist@clear.net.nz

Hawke's Bay

They report: "We enjoyed the convivial company of around twenty-five people at our first regular meeting for the year on Sunday March 16, including a number of people new to the Sea of Faith.

Keith Fuller led a discussion on ritual, with a view to using the ideas generated by our discussion in a presentation at the conference in New Plymouth.

We spent a useful few minutes reflecting on the

(then) impending war in Iraq, enabling people to voice their views and concerns if they wished.

At our tea meetings (a recent innovation - you can't fail with food!) in May and September we will host Lloyd Geering and Noel Cheer (respectively). We are also mothering (nurturing, fostering??) a new group in Central Hawke's Bay this year, beginning with two meetings in Dannevirke.

We are embarking on a busy, and we think productive, year.

Contact: Keith Fuller (06) 842-0254
jeanluc@xtra.co.nz

Nelson

They plan to have Richard Nunns for their first meeting in 2003. Richard was a teacher who became deeply involved in pre-European Maori instrumental music in New Zealand. He is now recognised as one of the leading performers and presenters of Maori musical instruments and has been increasingly in demand on the national and international circuit with a variety of groups. He will be talking about how he came to be involved in this work and the links between music and spirituality.

Contact: Lindsay Vaughan (03) 548-4778

Christchurch

They planned a "Symposium on Iraq" for March 28 and a viewing of a video about unemployment in NZ for April 11th. Anzac Day sees them dealing with "Buddhism Today". In May there will be an evening of Members' own contributions and an address for The Peace Movement in Aotearoa.

Contact: Ian Crumpton (03) 342-5375

Auckland Central

In February they were addressed by Jocelyn Armstrong, Head of Religious Studies at Auckland Diocesan School. She talked about Religious Studies as an NCEA subject at that school and the four significant developments that shape it:

- the bicultural church of the '90s
- the global upheaval in education (witness our NCEA)
- the transformation of our culture by computers and information technology
- the global movement of people due to war and violence

Barrie Allom spoke to them on March 2 about his life since leaving the Anglican Ministry. [His book *Beyond Belief* is detailed in Newsletter 49, p9 - ed]

Philip Culbertson spoke on "Understanding the Middle East Conflict" on March 16th. He is not optimistic about the Israeli/Palestinian standoff — its the intransigence of *mythos* in the face of *logos* — "we cannot fight symbolism with logos". [see p3 - ed]

They also plan a talk by Ivan Pickens which will ask the question "Is religion there to make us happy and, if so, how does it do so? If its doesn't, then what does make us happy"

Contact: Derek Pringle (09) 489-3589
annderek@actrix.co.nz

THE SEA OF FAITH in Auckland
Invites you to
A ONE DAY CONFERENCE
Saturday 7 June, 2003,
from 9.30 a.m. to 4.30 p.m.
Somervell Church Centre
497 Remuera Road, Auckland

CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT GOD

Christianity is a living, and hence ever-changing, complex stream of culture. By its central doctrines of the Incarnation and the Holy Trinity, Christianity prepared the way for the emergence of the global, secular and humanistic world. Today the concepts of a supernatural deity and divinely inspired scriptures have become not only false but positively dangerous, leading as they so easily do to fundamentalism, fanaticism, and even terrorism.

SPEAKERS

Prof. Lloyd Geering, DD, CBE, PCNZM.
and

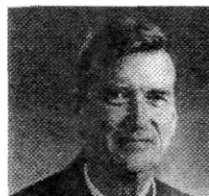
Rev. Dr John Salmon
Principal, Trinity Methodist Theological College,
Lecturer in School of Theology, University of
Auckland

Workshop discussions will follow the speakers.
The seminar will be chaired by Noel Cheer,
former Chairperson of SoFN (NZ) and current
Newsletter Editor.

FOR ENQUIRIES PLEASE PHONE
(09) 630-2933 or (09) 489-3589

For Wellington Region Readers

The St Andrews Trust for the Study of Religion and Society (SATRS) has already held a similar one-day event in Wellington and plans to repeat it on June 14th. For enquiries call St Andrews during office hours on (04) 472-9211



John Spong

The last lecture visit
to New Zealand, will feature

A New Christianity
for a new World

A Christian Perspective
on Assisted Suicide

Auckland
November 2 and 3
Wellington
November 5 and 6
Christchurch
November 7 and 9

further details to be announced

Address enquiries to
Liz Robinson
10 Westhill Road, Point Howard,
Eastbourne, Lower Hutt
Phone: 04 5682794
Fax: 04 5687294
email: robinson.howard@xtra.co.nz

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Whirlwind Distribution
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\$34.95
includes p&p

WHO IS CURRENTLY WHO IN SEA OF FAITH (NZ)

Chairperson: Frank Gaze: 2 Telford Tce, Oakura (New Plymouth) 4650, Phone 06-752-7447 e-mail gaze@clear.net.nz

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Members: Marjorie Cox (Auckland); George Dodd (Auckland); Lyle Miller; (Bay of Plenty); Keith Fuller (Napier); Yvonne Curtis (Wellington); Ian Crumpton, (Christchurch); Don Feist (Dunedin); Bruce McMillan (Dunedin);

Non-Committee: Life Members Lloyd Geering (from 2001) Don Cupitt (from 2002)

Non-Committee: Resource Centre Curator: Suzi Thirlwall, 34 Briarley St., Tauranga, Phone/Fax 07-578-2775, e-mail Sthirlwalls@clear.net.nz

Non-Committee: Archivist Alison Eng, 163 Rangiora-Woodend Road, Woodend, North Canterbury, Phone/Fax 03-312-7227, e-mail alison.eng@paradise.net.nz

IN BRIEF

What Do We Believe?

The Sea of Faith Network, whether in the UK or Australia or New Zealand has no creed. It is impossible to be ex-communicated from SoF! Each of the networks — which are independent of each other but have a lot in common — has issued a sort of positioning statement so that prospective members can have some idea of what they are letting themselves in for:

- **UK:** "to explore and promote religious faith as a human creation"
- **New Zealand:** "to explore religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint"
- **Australia:** "to openly explore ideas of religion, faith and meaning".

And Still Flows The Don

According to Sea of Faith in Australia (SoFIA) Don Cupitt advises that he has two books coming out this year: *Life, Life* (some parts of which he used in his 2002 Australian tour) and *Radical Theology*, a collection of his writings from 1972-2002. Also, Polebridge Press plans to publish a study of Don's work in two volumes written by SoFIA's Contact for West Australia, Nigel Leaves. The first of these is titled *Risking All: The Theology of Don Cupitt*.

For those with misgivings about Gulf War II

"The last time a man listened to a Bush, he had to spend forty years in the wilderness"

(Internet anon)

Ah Choo!

The consciousness [which is] free of ego will be like ... the consciousness when you are sneezing and you forget everything for a second or longer.

(from an article on Tibetan Buddhism)

Why kill the Buddha?

Because the Buddha you meet is not the true Buddha, but [rather] an expression of your longing. If this Buddha is not killed he will only stand in your way.

(from an article on Buddhism)

SEA OF FAITH DOCUMENTARY

The National Steering Committee has sent copies to Local Groups of the documentary which was made by the ABC as part of their "Compass" series. It was taped at last year's Conference in Timaru, with the crew "living-in". It doesn't cover the Conference as such, although several of our members are interviewed. The documentary is a good exposition of the origins of SoF and it positions it well. There are extended interviews with messrs Cupitt, Geering and Batchelor and some useful parallels with Buddhism. I sent the producer, Peter Kirkwood, an email of congratulations. This is from his reply:

"It was a bit of an experiment for me — I hadn't made a documentary quite in this format before, where the vision really had little to do with the ideas — but the stunning visuals offered by South Island NZ, and the intellectual content were so rich, I could hardly go wrong. ... please can you pass on to all in Sea of Faith NZ ... my deep thanks for your collective generous participation and hospitality."

This comment is from Greg Spearritt, Editor of the SoFIA "Bulletin":

"The sleepy little SoF network in Australia (SoFIA) has had a rude but very welcome awakening, courtesy of the ABC Compass program filmed at last year's SoFN NZ Conference. We've been feverishly responding to email enquiries from folk who had no idea we existed and who think they may have found a spiritual home! In Sydney alone we had a hundred people respond, out of which we look like having three new groups start up (two in Sydney, one on the NSW Central Coast). New groups are possible also in Adelaide, Canberra and on the Sunshine and Gold Coasts in Queensland. My local Brisbane group had 26 new faces show for our last meeting. We're grateful to NZ SoF and particularly to Lloyd Geering and visitors Don Cupitt and Stephen Batchelor who put the message of SoF over so well!"

Reported by Noel Cheer

**LIFE IS UNCERTAIN —
EAT THE DESSERT FIRST**
Author Unknown

TEXTUAL CRITICISM OF THE KORAN

The Atlantic Monthly Online offers a glimpse into the process of subjecting the Koran to academic scrutiny. The following are brief extracts from a three-part article on the subject which appeared in the SOFIA Bulletin December 2002. This item uses the spelling "Koran" instead of "Qur'an".

In 1972, during the restoration of the Great Mosque of Sana'a, in Yemen, laborers working in a loft between the structure's inner and outer roofs stumbled across a remarkable gravesite, although they did not realize it at the time. Their ignorance was excusable: mosques do not normally house graves, and this site contained no tombstones, no human remains, no funereal jewelry. It contained nothing more, in fact, than an unappealing mash of

"The Koran, after all, is currently the world's most ideologically influential text."

old parchment and paper documents — damaged books and individual pages of Arabic text, fused together by centuries of rain and dampness, gnawed into over the years by rats and insects. Intent on completing the task at hand, the laborers gathered up the manuscripts, pressed them into some twenty potato sacks, and set them aside on the staircase of one of the mosque's minarets, where they were locked away — and where they would probably have been forgotten once again, were it not for Qadhi Isma'il al-Akwa', then the president of the Yemeni Antiquities Authority, who realized the potential importance of the find...

Some of the parchment pages in the Yemeni hoard seemed to date back to the seventh and eighth centuries A.D., or Islam's first two centuries — they were fragments, in other words, of perhaps the oldest Korans in existence. What's more, some of these fragments revealed small but intriguing aberrations from the standard Koranic text. Such aberrations, though not surprising to textual historians, are troublingly at odds with the orthodox Muslim belief that the Koran as it has reached us today is quite simply the perfect, timeless, and unchanging Word of God.

The mainly secular effort to reinterpret the Koran — in part based on textual evidence such as that

*placing the Koran in history,
will provide fuel for an Islamic revival of sorts*

provided by the Yemeni fragments — is disturbing and offensive to many Muslims, just as attempts to reinterpret the Bible and the life of Jesus are disturbing and offensive to many conservative Christians. Nevertheless, there are scholars, Muslims among them, who feel that such an effort, which amounts essentially to placing the Koran in history, will provide fuel for an Islamic revival of sorts — a reappropriation of tradition, a going forward by looking back.

Thus far confined to scholarly argument, this sort of thinking can be nonetheless very powerful and — as the histories of the Renaissance and the Reformation demonstrate — can lead to major social change. The Koran, after all, is currently the world's most ideologically influential text.

"The impact of the Yemeni manuscripts is still to be felt," says Andrew Rippin, a professor of religious studies at the University of Calgary, who is at the forefront of Koranic studies today. "Their variant readings and verse orders are all very significant. Everybody agrees on that. These manuscripts say that the early history of the Koranic text is much more of an open question than many have suspected: the text was less stable, and therefore had less authority, than has always been claimed."

FAITH IN CYBERSPACE

Meta-Religion

All you could ever want to need or know:

<http://www.meta-religion.com/HomeEnglish.htm>

Thumbnail Descriptions

of religious traditions:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>

What is SMACA?

An e-Zine ["electronic magazine", what, you didn't know?] produced by St Matthew-in-the-City Anglican Church Auckland, "A progressive Anglican church with a heart for the city and an eye to the world."

SMACA is a forum for progressive Christianity, philosophy and social issues, as well as personal life and faith matters.

Find it at <http://www.stmatthews.org.nz>

The CG Jung Page

It was founded in 1995 to encourage new psychological ideas and conversations about what it means to be human in our time and place.
<http://www.cgjungpage.org/>

ALL ABOUT US

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. We draw our members from people of all faiths and also from those with no attachment to religious institutions.

Our home page is at
<http://sof.wellington.net.nz>

Our Steering Committee publishes a regular Newsletter, maintains a website, assists in setting up local discussion groups, and organises an annual Conference.

The current **Chairperson** is Frank Gaze, 2 Telford Tce, Oakura (New Plymouth) 4650, Phone 06-752-7447

For membership requests and for the address of your nearest local group, contact the **Membership Secretary**, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Northland, Wellington phone 04-934-8054.

Members may obtain tapes, books etc from the **SoF Resource Centre** at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga (there is a catalogue on the website).

To offer a comment on any material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact the **Editor**: Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay, Phone 04-236-7533, Fax 04-236-7534, email: noel@cheer.org.nz

The only copy appearing in this Newsletter that may be construed as reflecting Sea of Faith policy is that which is accompanied by a by-line of a member of the Steering Committee.

In addition

"SoF" is 28 page A4, six-times-a-year magazine produced by the UK Sea of Faith Network. They offer it to New Zealand Sea of Faith members currently at \$NZ65 for a year's subscription.

To subscribe for a year, send \$65 to "The Membership Secretary, SoF, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Wellington". Write your cheque to "SoF (NZ)".

Many of the study booklets referred to in this Newsletter are available from The St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society:

www.standrews.org.nz/satrs/

This product is 99% fatwa-free

LAST WORD FROM THE CHAIRPERSON MAKING WAR - MAKING PEACE

The traditional "just war" criteria are:

- that the cause be just,
- the expected good of the war exceed the expected evil,
- the party waging war do so with proper authority,
- the party do so with "right intention,"
- the party's aim be a proper peace,
- the war have a reasonable chance of success, and
- the war be a last resort.

In regard to how war is waged, "just war" theory imposes two conditions:

- "noncombatants must be protected from direct, traditional attack," and
- "the specific means of force must be at a level and of a type appropriate to the task."

The truism that it is easy to be wise after the event does not negate the value of running this measuring-tape over wars past as much as wars present or wars future.

One person doing some thinking about a past war and its consequent peace is **Derek Evans** of the Naramata Centre, British Columbia, Canada. As a member of an Amnesty International delegation, he was involved in helping the parties to the Sri Lankan Civil War to plan a "proper" peace. He is to be the first Keynote Speaker at this year's Conference.

Quite original thinking about appropriate behaviour for societies caught up in war was that of Te Whiti o Rongomai, one of the leaders of the Parihaka Community in Taranaki in the 1870s. His addresses have been preserved in Maori manuscript documents written by members of his community, and they are the constant study of **Te Miringa Hohaia**, who will be our second Keynote Speaker. Previously Te Miringa contributed a chapter on traditional waiata to the book about Parihaka published in conjunction with the Wellington City Art Gallery show in 2001.

The same New Zealand Land Wars began in 1860 over land in Waitara. That peace was never made "properly", and there is a negotiation going on at present between the resultant parties: the descendants of the original owners, other Maori hapu, the resident leaseholders (a sizeable proportion of the population of the town of Waitara) and the residual nominal owners the New Plymouth District Council. Local councillor and historian, **Clive Pryme** has researched this issue for several decades and is a key participant in present attempts to bring a final conclusion to the discussions after nearly 150 years. He will be our third Keynote Speaker.

These three papers will make up a fascinating picture of "Making War - Making Peace" against the backdrop of the global discussion about making the war and building the peace in the Middle East.

Make sure your accommodation and travel bookings are already confirmed; next Newsletter will carry programme details, and registration costs and form. The total registration cost will be around \$100, including programme, morning and afternoon teas and essential transport.

Frank Gaze, Chairperson 2002-2003