

CONFERENCE

Last Orders Please

Spring is in the air and we've nearly cleaned up from the floodwaters that submerged the bronze beavers on the edge of the river that flows through what was once called "Beavertown"!

Registrations are rolling in but accommodation is getting tighter as we'll be sharing Blenheim with a net-ball tournament so the age range of visitors will be fairly wide.

The election campaign is likely to be in full swing as we meet and it will be interesting to see if the major parties will be able to step outside their PR minders' guidelines to address tax-cuts, infrastructure financing, law and order, education, health and more growth and wealth.

But the complexities of the environmental consequences of the global trading patterns and increasingly fragile monetary systems that we all participate in are unlikely to get a detailed airing because short sound bites and slogans will restrict discussion and debate.

I'm looking forward to us gathering and having the opportunity to again explore the interface(s) of philosophy, spirituality, religion and politics in a less hurried way in Marlborough.

John Craighead, Chairperson, Arrangement Committee

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting of the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) (Inc) will be held at 4.00pm on Saturday 27th of September 2008, at this year's Annual Conference Venue: The Clubs of Marlborough, Blenheim.

Remits for the AGM should be sent to the secretary by September 14th. They will then be circulated in the Conference packs.

Please note that only financial members may submit a remit, or vote during the AGM.

Mary Boekman, Secretary, 138 Rata St, Inglewood, Taranaki, 4330 e-mail: bboekman@clear.net.nz

ENQUIRIES

Details were incorrect in the Registration Pack

**SOFN Conference Registration Coordinator:
Elizabeth Duncan,
Registration Coordinator,
SOFNZ Conference 2008,
73 Brooklands Rd, Atawhai, Nelson 7010
Phone: (03)545-2003
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STEERING COMMITTEE

The Steering Committee of the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) has a minimum membership of eight Members who are elected during the AGM at Conference. Membership is for a maximum period of four years. This means that every year some members have to resign from the Steering Committee, in addition to those who resign for personal reasons.

Currently we need some new blood to help with the direction of Sea of Faith NZ. We are especially in need of a Secretary. Its not an onerous job: taking minutes at the monthly one-hour telephone conference, (at no cost to the members), a one day weekend meeting in February (usually in Wellington), and whatever other work you wish to put in.

If you would like to be part of the Steering Committee then please contact Mary Boekman (our outgoing Secretary) at email bboekman@clear.net.nz or myself at nely@clear.net.nz

Thanks,
Norm



A Review by Ian Crumpton

*God and the New Atheism:
A Critical Response to Dawkins, Harris, and
Hitchens*

by John F. Haught
Westminster, John Knox Press © 2008

John Haught teaches at Georgetown University, a long established Catholic and Jesuit institution in Washington, DC. He specialises in the relationship between science and religion, and in this small volume he offers an eloquent and readable theological critique of recent books by the three authors: Richard Dawkins's *The God Delusion* (Refer to the "Workshop Section" of the website for a Power-point-like tutorial presentation), Sam Harris's *The End of Faith* and *Letter to a Christian Nation*, and Christopher Hitchens's *God is not Great: How Religion Poisons Everything*. He refers to other recent works that might be included in this category as well – especially philosopher Daniel Dennett's *Breaking the Spell: Religion as a Natural Phenomenon* and Steven Weinberg's *Dreams of a Final Theory: The Search for the Fundamental Laws of Nature*.

Haught's main thesis is that the three authors, drawing their concept of God and religion from fundamentalist and literalist religion, produce a similar kind of atheism: superficial, literal, and lacking engagement with the long-standing intellectual traditions of the Western religions. He recognises a far more thorough-going atheism in the likes of Nietzsche, Camus, and Sartre. He finds in the "New Atheism" no understanding of the thinkers who have helped shape his own faith – including Paul Tillich, Alfred North Whitehead, Rudolf Bultmann and many others. He lists the "shrinkages" of religion that the new atheists perpetrate as reducing ..

- ... the entire monotheistic religious population to scriptural literalists, dogmatic extremists, escapists ... and fanatics.
- ... the cultural role of theology to the systematic underwriting of religious abuse.
- ... the meaning of faith to whatever has no evidence
- ... the meaning of "evidence" to whatever is

available to science.

- ... the whole of reality to what can be known by science.
- ... the idea of "God" to an Hypothesis."

So, for example, the idea of God as a hypothesis "... reduces the infinite divine mystery to a finite scientific cause" and, he adds, "to worship anything finite is idolatrous." It seems to me that many of Haught's criticisms of the new atheism are pertinent whether you understand God in a theistic way, or as a richly nuanced symbolic representation of all we hold to be good, true, and right. Indeed, Haught usually uses such phraseology himself when referring to the Divine: "Faith," he says, "is neither an irrational leap nor belief without evidence. It is an adventurous movement of trust that opens reason up to its appropriate living space: namely, the inexhaustibly deep dimension of Being, Meaning, Truth, and Goodness. Faith is not the enemy of reason, but its cutting edge ... Without the clearing made by faith, reason withers, and conduct has no calling. Faith is what gives reason a future, and morality a meaning." (p. 75)

One of this book's most important insights is to show how all human enterprise, even that which works in a fully rational or scientific way, must be based on a prior trust, or faith, that is not scientific, not rational. There must be faith in a consistent, ordered, discoverable universe; faith that the universe can be intelligible, that truth is worth seeking, and that we can trust our minds as we reach towards deeper understandings and truth.

The book is an elegant and systematic demolition of the three works in question: it is Christian apologetics at its finest. Under chapter headings such as "How atheistic is the new atheism?" "Does theology matter?" "Is God a Hypothesis?", and "Why do people believe?" Haught exposes the deficiencies of the new atheism, without sanitising religion to any degree. Much of [atheists'] criticism of religion has been known for decades by theologians

themselves: that the scriptures are humanly constructed documents; they are often inconsistent, they present a wide range of understandings of the divine, from vengeful and genocidal to the embodiment of love itself.

Religion and religious scripture are always multi-layered, heavily nuanced phenomena, embodying many ways of understanding: mystical, practical, poetic, mythic and symbolic,

New Atheism is “superficial, literal, and lacking engagement”

to name but a few.

In his second to last chapter entitled “Is God personal”, Haught shows how this concept has become difficult for people to find meaningful since the Einsteinian depersonalisation of the universe by physics, and the Darwinian biologists' demystification of life. Yet he claims, “Ultimate reality, the deepest dimension of being, cannot be less than personal if it is to command our reverence and worship... Experiencing ultimate reality only as an impersonal “It” rather than also as a personal “Thou” would leave the believer in God psychically, socially, and religiously unsatisfied. In one sense God is the ultimate in Being, Meaning, Goodness, and Beauty, but unless these impersonal absolutes are animated by the pulse of personality, they cannot attract personal beings at the deepest levels of our existence.” (p. 88)

For myself, those animations are provided in the rich tapestry of saga, legend, ritual, story and song which comprise the sacred scriptures, traditions and liturgies of the Abrahamic Faiths.

Notwithstanding this, I found Haught's apologetic a coherent and erudite presentation of these monotheistic faiths in general, and above all, a well reasoned critique of the three books in question, and the fundamentalist religion that gave rise to them.

Ian Crumpton, Christchurch

**WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW
ABOUT YOUR SUBSCRIPTION**

1. Your subscription pays for your membership of the national SoF (NZ) body.

Local groups sometimes make an additional charge to cover their operating costs.

2. The Newsletter is a benefit of membership. The way in which we send it to you explains a variation in Membership cost as show below.

3. These are the membership rates based on how you receive your Newsletter:

- a) Inland New Zealand mail: \$20 per year
- b) Overseas mail: \$30 per year
- c) Anywhere by email: \$15 per year. The files are about 1mB so you will need broadband: (Save those trees!)

4. If the date on the envelope in which this Newsletter came is less than 2009, your subscription is due. We will let email recipients know by email.

5. If you are into Internet Banking then you can renew your subscription electronically into our account number 38 9000 0807809 00

The accompanying Renewal Form (to 'paper' subscribers) gives additional details.

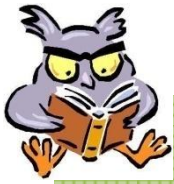
You can contact the Membership Secretary at pcowley@paradise.net.nz

**OOOPS ... DETAILS MISSED FROM
THE INFORMATION PACK**

Dr. Juliet Batten is well known as a writer, artist, psychotherapist and teacher who has led rituals and workshops throughout Aotearoa/New Zealand. She has a PhD in English, has taught Environmental Studies at Auckland University and was a director of the Q E II National Trust for ten years. She has written many books on spirituality, including the award winning *A Cup of Sunlight: Discovering the Sacred in Everyday Life* (2005), and *Celebrating the Southern Seasons: Rituals for Aotearoa* (1995; revised and expanded 2005).

Her writing reflects her commitment to personal, community and ecological well being, and her passion for reconnecting people with nature. She has meditated for 25 years and is a meditation teacher and trainer.

She is currently completing a new book entitled *Seasons of the Soul*.



SCIENCE AND SOUL

CHARLES BIRCH

(U.N.S.W PRESS.)

A Review by Alan Goss, Napier, 2008

Charles Birch is an 89 year Australian biologist and theologian with established credentials who has lectured and written widely and whose broad aim is to bring together a deeper understanding of both religion and science.

The first part of the book contains brief pen-portraits of those who have shaped his thinking over the years, including those theological giants Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr (do students, does anyone, read them now?)

The second part outlines Birch's philosophy of life under the twin headings of pansubjectivism and panentheism which, when teased out, offer a more gentle and ecological way of looking at the world.

The author describes how our world and universe is made up of entities from humans right down to elementary particles (quarks, atoms etc.) which are not 'bits of stuff like billiardballs' cannoning off one another but moments of experience which rapidly succeed one another. These entities, even tiny particles like atoms, have a 'mentality', or at least a potentiality for mentality; they are not mere objects but are 'mind stuff' which fills the whole universe. This 'mind stuff' also has the potential to become something different as its environment changes and as it relates to other entities — hydrogen atoms relate to oxygen atoms forming water (H₂O). The world is not a giant machine with God the chief mechanic adjusting the nuts and bolts from somewhere outside the machine. God is in the world but is not to be identified with it (Pantheism). Birch is making the point that we need to see and experience the world from a more subjective, 'feeling' position, to give it value for what it is and not just for what it can give to us. In Shakespeare's King Lear the King asks the Duke of Gloucester who is blind how he sees the world. Gloucester replies, "I see it feelingly". Or as Julie Andrews expressed it, "The World is Alive with the Sound of Music".

In the final section of the book Birch suggests how this view of the world contributes to our understanding of God and how God acts in the world.

- **God is persuasive, not coercive.**
Everything in the world from the smallest particle right through to humans has a degree of freedom and autonomy. Nothing is programmed nor is it robotic. So it is with God. God is not responsible for tragic events like floods or earthquakes. Intelligent or Divine design is misleading because it eliminates freedom.
- **God acts from within creation and is not external to it. God is not an external force**

imposing a divine will on the world.

As a fisherman entices a fish with a lure, so God 'lures' us to add value to the world in both our public and private lives. God is the gentle persuader who gives the freedom to choose. Conflict is therefore inevitable — it is part of creation.

- **God 'feels' with the world and thereby saves it.**
Our feelings — of joy, suffering, serenity and pain — are like tributaries which flow into one great river of feeling, the divine life. God reacts to the world, suffering or rejoicing with it, as it is created moment to moment.
- **God's nature is not fixed for all time but is changed from day to day by new events and experiences.**

God today is different from the God of all our yesterdays, e.g. the Big Bang, and shares with all his creatures the whole process of creativity.

Whether God's presence in the world as set out by Birch refers to an actual reality, or whether God is a myth or metaphor or symbol for the total ongoing creative process — "God making the world make itself" (Chas Kingsley) — is a matter for each person to decide. Either way, panentheistic views have had a long and illustrious following and Birch's case deserves a hearing.

A question remains. If God is everywhere and fills the world do we now need institutional religion and an institutional church? And we certainly don't need an official religion, in both cases they tend to stifle the freedom to think for ourselves. The centre of gravity for religion is changing, it is slowly but inevitably 'going global', looking for a common set of values which are centred on the future welfare of the earth. That is the arena where people live their lives and where they participate in the life of God. That is where we all share the mystery and wonder of life and where we can all celebrate that life with one united voice — "Yes!"

The future religious quest will therefore locate itself in smaller, open, more diverse groupings concerned to re-evaluate all areas of human and natural life. **A reconstructed religious platform from which to do this is slowly but surely being laid.**

"While *pantheism* asserts that God and the universe are coextensive, *panentheism* claims that God is greater than the universe and that the universe is contained within God. Panentheism holds that God is the 'supreme affect and effect' of the universe."

Wikipedia

“AN OPEN LETTER AND CALL ...”

DONALD FEIST OF DUNEDIN GETS TO KNOW THE QUR'AN

Earlier this year, I came across “An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders to Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere”.

It is available at www.acommonword.com

The generous and irenic tone of this letter, and its view of the relationship of Islam and Christianity are in such marked contrast with what we hear about how Osama bin Laden and sundry other terrorists interpret the Qur'an, that I decided it was time I found out a bit more about the scriptures of Islam.

I felt sure that to start by reading the Qur'an itself, even in translation, would not help my understanding of Islam very much. So when Amazon advertised “The Qur'an – a Biography”, by Bruce Lawrence, in the same series as the very good little book by Karen Armstrong, “The Bible – a Biography”, I ordered it.

The book gave me more detail than I really wanted about half a dozen commentators on the Qur'an from the 8th to the 19th Centuries — but had no clear summary of what was distinctive or important about each of them. Lawrence however did make it clear that because of the cryptic or elusive nature of the text, commentators on the Qur'an have been more influential than has been the case with commentators on the Bible. The Qur'an seems to be more like the Book of Revelation than most other parts of the Bible, in that it is impossible to establish that any one approach – literal or metaphorical or allegorical – is definitive or correct to the exclusion of other interpretations.

The most enlightening part, for me, was where Lawrence quotes one of the leading figures of the Nation of Islam in 20th Century USA, who aimed to help those who want to be both good Muslims and good Americans:

“The Constitution of America is influenced by Qur'anic teachings. Even the capitalist concept of business is influenced by Qur'anic teachings. The idea of human dignity that the Constitution expresses is more in accord with the concept of man in the Qur'an than it is with the concept of man in the Bible.”

“Allah says, in the Qur'an, that righteousness isn't in turning our face East or West. Righteousness is in being God-fearing, in obedience to God. righteousness is in kind, charitable treatment of the next of kin, to the near relative. And also to the widows, the orphans, and to the person on the road who has

no place to stay the night. All of that comes from the definition of righteousness in the Qur'an.”

I felt I had had little help from Lawrence's book, so I tried the Public Library. There I found “The Koran – a Very Short Introduction” by Michael Cook, published by Oxford University Press in 2000. This book gave me much more what I wanted. A section on “The Interpretation of the Koran” gives specific examples of how modern scholars have worked on various significant verses in order to relate the Qur'an to a scientific world view, to tolerating the beliefs of others, and to the equality of men and women.

A chapter on “The Very Idea of Scripture” explains how it is that the authority of the Qur'an has not been undermined for Islamic believers in the way the authority of the Bible has been in the West. Among us, the growth of science, and in particular the application of ‘higher criticism’ to be Bible on the same terms as to any historical or literary text, has led to widespread acceptance as fact that the Bible is the product of its time. Muslims recognise that the Qur'an reflects the time in which it was written, but it remains for them the Word of Allah, not a product of any man or any time or culture.

Secondly, under the onslaught of science on Christianity, most people in the West have settled for ‘soft belief’. Cook describes them as “satisfied with salvaging a residual religiosity”.

Nothing like this has happened within traditional Islam — nor is there any sign of any such dilution happening. One result of this is that there is more common ground between Islamic fundamentalists and mainstream Islam, than is the case with fundamentalist and mainstream Christians. The Muslim Open Letter which has led me to these two books, could, I believe, make a significant contribution to the cause of peace in the 21st Century — provided it receives some positive response. To my mind, the silence to date of the New Zealand churches is shameful, and anyone who put some pressure on them to make a positive response would be doing something for a peaceful future.

Unfortunately, the ‘Open Letter’ is lengthy. It begins with many addresses, goes into scholarly exegesis of passages of the Bible and the Qur'an, and then gives footnotes and references, and finally pages of signatures. But the heart of it is to be found in about 30 lines under the heading “Between Us and You” on pages 15 and 16.

Donald Feist

COMMON GROUND

An item from www.acommonword.com
supplied by Donald Feist:

"Finding common ground between Muslims and Christians is not simply a matter for polite ecumenical dialogue between selected religious leaders.

Christianity and Islam are the largest and second largest religions in the world and in history. Christians and Muslims reportedly make up over a third and over a fifth of humanity respectively. Together they make up more than 55% of the world's population, making the relationship between these two religious communities the most important factor in contributing to meaningful peace around the world. If Muslims and Christians are not at peace, the world cannot be at peace. With the terrible weaponry of the modern world; with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world's inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. The very survival of the world itself is perhaps at stake.

And to those who nevertheless relish conflict and destruction for their own sake or reckon that ultimately they stand to gain through them, we say that our very eternal souls are all also at stake if we fail to sincerely make every effort to make peace and come together in harmony. God says in the Holy Qur'an: *Lo! God enjoineeth justice and kindness, and giving to kinsfolk, and forbiddeth lewdness and abomination and wickedness. He exhorteth you in order that ye may take heed* (Al Nahl, 16:90). Jesus Christ said: *Blessed are the peacemakers* (Matthew 5:9), and also: *For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?* (Matthew 16:26).

So let our differences not cause hatred and strife between us. Let us vie with each other only in righteousness and good works. Let us respect each other, be fair, just and kind to another and live in sincere peace, harmony and mutual goodwill. God says in the Holy Qur'an:

And unto thee have We revealed the Scripture with the truth, confirming whatever Scripture

was before it, and a watcher over it. So judge between them by that which God hath revealed, and follow not their desires away from the truth which hath come unto thee. For each We have appointed a law and a way. Had God willed He could have made you one community. But that He may try you by that which He hath given you (He hath made you as ye are). So vie one with another in good works. Unto God ye will all return, and He will then inform you of that wherein ye differ. (Al-Ma'idah, 5:48)

**Wal-Salaamu 'Alaykum,
Pax Vobiscum.**

THE QUR'AN IN TRANSLATION

John Maindonald from Canberra draws our attention to the June 21 issue of the *Guardian* and a review of a new translation by Tarif Khalidi. Read it at <http://books.guardian.co.uk/reviews/classics/0,,2286791,00.html>

"The reviewer makes numerous comparisons with Dawood's Penguin 1956 translation [including these:]

"It [Dawood's Penguin 1956 translation] has been a great source of discomfort for Muslims, who see in it deliberate distortions that give the Qur'an violent and sexist overtones. **It is the one most non-Muslims cite when they tell me with great conviction what the Qur'an says.**"

"While Dawood's [Penguin 1956] translation presents the Qur'an as a patriarchal, sexist text, Khalidi brings out the gender-neutral of the original."

Some of the contrasts are stark. If Khalidi is right (and it appears to me that he is), Dawood's translation did a great disservice to the Muslim world."

John Maindonald

"The Qur'an is cryptic, often requiring addition of parenthetical words that are not in the literal Arabic to explain the meaning. ... the meaning of words can differ between classical and modern Arabic. ... the Quran must be understood in terms of the context of the words in Muhammad's own time." Read more at: www.prophecyfellowship.org/archive/index.php/t-167647.html

The Waikato Liturgy

Dear Norman,

If I remember a request was made to inform you or someone of what the Branch was up to.

Earlier in the year we reviewed Lloyd's video from 2007 where he concludes that if we worship a god it should be the planet. In that spirit we held a mid-winter dinner in which we set out to celebrate the winter solstice, remember the birth of Jesus and the new life he opened our eyes to, and place the whole in a New Zealand context by including the Maori celebration of Matariki.

The dinner was to be Middle Eastern and a feature was that the main dishes were cooked by the Dean of the Waikato Cathedral, Jan Joustra. Ngahuia Dixon from the Maori Department of the University was to address us but was called away to a tangi. Stephen Warnes stepped into the breach.

I attach for your interest the "liturgy" we created for the occasion, the menu and the two short addresses that punctuated the meal.

With best wishes

Fred Marshall

Preamble

Although the SoF has no collective creed and abhors dogma, we recognise the beauty and wisdom of the teachings of Jesus and revere his willingness to die in witness to the truth he found. The European Church has chosen to celebrate his birth at the winter solstice, marrying his message to the hope and joy of the new season. Let this be our purpose too as we sow seeds for our new spring.

The Grace

Jesus, who lived the life of our humanity, asked us to remember him when we share food together. Let us therefore at this meal honour his message in the words of an ancient prayer freely adapted. "Let us who have been blessed, give thanks and pass the blessing on. Amen"

The Life of Jesus

(presented by Jock Crawford.
See "Documents" on the website.)

Matariki in Maori lore.

(presented by Stephen Warnes:
see page 8 of this Newsletter)

The Solstice Celebration

Great Spirit of the Universe

For the faithfulness of the sun, returning every day, for the faithfulness of the seasons returning every year, we are thankful.

For the beauty and bounty of our earth, for the joy of living and loving we are thankful.

We pledge ourselves to love and cherish the earth and all its creatures, We pledge ourselves to love and cherish each other.

With wonder and awe we accept the responsibility of collaborating in the work of creation.

Now charge your glasses and let us drink a toast to our planet

**To the earth and
all who orbit on her!**

Why Not Matariki?

... asks Stephen Warnes of the Waikato Group.

Matariki may be interpreted as “small eyes” (*mata riki*) or as “God’s eyes” (*mata Ariki*). It is the name given to the constellation called ‘Pleiades’ in the West and which can be seen – at some time of the year or other – in all parts of the world. Ancient civilisations have focussed rituals on the Pleiades.

Maori lore has it that when **Ranginui** and **Papatuanuku** (sky father and earth mother) were prised apart by their children, the god of the winds (**Tawhirimatea**) was so angry that he tore out his eyes and threw them into the sky, where they continue to exist as the stars of Matariki.

Matariki are first seen in the skies of Aotearoa/New Zealand towards the end of May or early June. They appear about half an hour before dawn on the north-east horizon.

Traditionally, Maori would be up early to watch for the first appearance of Matariki as an indication that the seasons were turning. The first new moon after the sighting of Matariki began a time of celebration of the new year.

The Maori first remembered those who had died during the previous year; and then those who had been born during that year. It was a time to remember the past and what it had meant, and to look to the future and to what it would bring. It was also a time for planting crops for the new year, and also engaging in other domestic and cultural pursuits.

We may want to consider how appropriate it would be to have an annual public holiday at this time – which also is close to the winter solstice – in order to share food and rituals, and to review the past and face the future.

It seems more appropriate to do this than to have “mid-winter Christmas” which relates to the conditions of the northern hemisphere.

Stephen Warnes



Faith In Cyberspace

Theological Editions

Aimed at an intelligent audience and updated four days a week, **Theological Editions**, is an independent, New Zealand-based, web publication with a large collection of selected religion-related news, views and review links from most of the world's leading English language news sources and from numerous religious journals and periodicals.

Find it at <http://www.theologicaleditions.com/>

Speaking of Faith

A weekly national programme in the USA since July 2001, *Speaking of Faith* is not so much about religion *per se*, but about drawing out compelling and challenging voices of wisdom on the most important subjects of 21st-century life; thereby creating a different kind of in-depth, revealing, illuminating dialogue than can be elicited by traditional journalistic treatments and debates. Topics range from "Einstein and the Mind of God" to "The Spirituality of Parenting" to "Diplomacy and Religion in the 21st Century."

These are audio items that can be downloaded as mp3 (go to the Archives page) or as Podcasts — go to that page for a full tutorial.

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/>



This service covers free, full text, quality controlled scientific and scholarly journals.

www.doaj.org/doaj?func=expand



The Forum on Religion and Ecology highlights the important roles that religions play in constructing moral frameworks for

interacting with other people and the environment.

The Forum invites academic and engaged discourse on the intersection of religious studies, science, and environmental policy.

<http://religionandecology.org/>

IN MY VIEW

NORM ELY, CHAIRPERSON 2007–2008

In the last Newsletter I discussed Mathew Arnold's poem "Dover Beach".

I ended with these comments:

"It seems to me that as members of the Sea of Faith that whilst most of us have not "Lost our Faith" as described in stanza four, we are certainly in a very similar position to that of the followers and/or believers in Victorian Darwinism. Having left behind our "Traditional Faith Group", be it a Christian Church or other group, because we see the contradictions; the cynicism, the dogmatism; the polarisation and persecution of minority groups of the traditional faith groups or for whatever other reason. We are faced with the question of where do we go to explore and seek a better way.

I cannot side with the agnostic view of Arnold as set out in the later part of the fifth stanza. I believe there is more than:

**"Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."**

It seems to me that the first part of the fifth stanza ...

**"Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! for the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new, "**

... needs to have a more forward, positive, far reaching view of our future world in it's last lines.

These new last lines still have to be written for the present and future Sea of Faith members. In doing so these lines need to accommodate new members disaffected from traditional faith groups as they seek a better new way of life and faith."

As the traditional faith groups continue down a path closer to the last part of the fifth stanza of Arnold's poem rather than a more forward, positive, far reaching view of our future world, we and others of similar fortitude must recreate a new progressive and evolutionary last part of the fifth stanza.

My interpretation of the first part of the fifth stanza,

"Ah, love, let us be true

is that it should be a lead in to looking to a future where Humanity has the opportunity to build a world that is self supporting and advantageous to all species that inhabit this planet.

Maybe therefore from a non agnostic point of view the last part of the fifth stanza should read something like

....

**So various, so beautiful, so new,
is to be protected for those that follow.**

**We are on this open plain with all before us and the opportunity lies like
a duty within our grasp to leave not a Sea of Faith but a world of equality, love, harmony and guardianship of all things in this world.**

To do this we have to have worldwide consensus that cynicism, dogmatism, polarisation and persecution of all inhabitants of this planet are reprehensible and not to be tolerated. Equally we have to have worldwide consensus that we have to achieve a means for ongoing care for our planet.

We must look to our past to be able to look to our future but we should not dwell in the past. We must look to how we can move forward and take others with us. We must find our Gaia to take us forward and protect the Planet for the future.

Norm

Dover Beach Revisited

In the previous Newsletter, Norm invited readers to submit some more optimistic concluding lines for Mathew Arnold's poem.

Dame Laurie Salas of Wellington rose to the challenge:

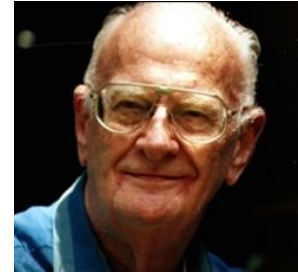
**[...so beautiful, so new]
So full of promise, challenging
Our unassisted selves to explore
The realms of *human* lore.
Symbols and stories from a bygone age
Are there to guide our new adventurous stage,
Extending man's capacity
To live in hope and peace and harmony.**

And so did Shirley Dixon of Titahi Bay:

**Ah, love, let us be true
To one another!
For the whole world lies before us,
And though life can be harsh and sad,
And our days can be burdened with worry,
We can, together – you and I,
With family and friends,
And with goodwill to all we meet –
Work to create joy and compassion,
Forgiveness, peace and help for pain.
Enfolding our lives
In love and light and laughter.**

1917-2008

A SPACE OPTIMIST



Excerpts from the prestigious science journal "Nature" recalling the life of Arthur C. Clarke, who died on March 19th 2008.

Legend has it that [during WW2] when Clarke and his friends from the British Interplanetary Society heard a V2 while drinking in a pub, they stood and cheered the space age that was about to begin. Such optimism comes from an ability to look beyond the obvious, an ability that served Clarke, as both a writer and a prognosticator.

Clarke, who founded his writing in rigorous science, foresaw not just the technology of the geostationary communications satellite, but also the effect that such distance-denying technologies would have in drawing the world together. As he said with typical optimism to the dignitaries signing the agreements in 1964 that created the Intelsat system, "You have just signed the first draft of the Articles of Federation of the United States of Earth."

Clarke's aim in his writing was mostly to inspire wonder, specifically the wonder of transcendence — the wonder in gazing into a featureless artefact and reporting back, stunned, "My God, it's full of stars!". In that moment from *2001: A Space Odyssey*, as in many other instances, Clarke showed his readers the wonder of the scientific threshold about to be crossed, the cosmos about to be joined. Yet he did so with a humanity that insisted that his readers were not insignificant in the face of such immensity — or rather, that their insignificance did not diminish them, perched as they were forever on the shores of what was to come.

[In the book *Moonwatcher*] Clarke was saying that we are always on the brink of the beginning, always

in some way pre-historical. Seeing the whole dazzling day to come in the first thin cord of the Sun was his great delight.

It is a rare gift — although one potentially shared by any scientist — to find satisfied joy in being poised before the transcendent, filled with hope by the wonders that the intellect, rather than blind faith, promises to those who explore it. Clarke devoted himself to passing on that gift, and we should cherish it.

Nature Vol 452 / Issue no. 7186 / 27 March 2008

Arthur C. Clarke's Three "Laws of Prediction"

1. When a distinguished but elderly scientist states that something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong.
2. The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible.
3. Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic.

Source: Wikipedia

Although Clarke was an avowed atheist, a correspondent in the NY Times (Edward Rothstein, March 20, 2008) wrote:

"Mr. Clarke's writings were the most biblical, the most prepared to amplify reason with mystical conviction, the most religious in the largest sense of religion: speculating about beginnings and endings, and how we get from one to the other."

This illustrates how elastic is the term "religious". – ed

There is a Time

Barbara Calvert c.1998

Donald Feist of Dunedin writes: “Many Sea of Faithers will remember Barbara and her husband, Dick Calvert, who were active members of the Dunedin group, and regular attendees at Conference for as long as they were able.

The family have asked that the poem not be copied without permission.”

The small child found the face of Death
A wholly horrifying sight -
She saw some open glassy eyes
Grey furrowed flesh
Mouth wide open
Rows of teeth
The child saw but the face
No body
This horror came to her
From having seen a picture in a book.

In the long years that followed
the horror went away.
Just sadness stayed for death:
What lived and moved was still,
No longer moved,
Was neither sad nor friendly,
Nothing.
The ending of a story.
But people hardly ever died
Mostly cats and birds and hedgehogs.
The green-eyed Darkie with the black silk fur
Run over by a car.
The friendly dog called Brick, grown old and
blind.
And taken to the vet.

Ten, twenty, thirty years
Went faster and still faster.
Death happened more and more.
To people she had known,
To people close, to people loved.
Nearly always peaceful. Sad.
A time for tears. She began to think
Some day I shall be the one who dies.
I do not want to be the one.

Forty, fifty, sixty years.

They say a time is coming
When people's lives can last
Even to a hundred and fifty years.
How splendid!

Now I am eighty. Splendid it once seemed
To live another seventy years.
But now, please no.
I'll gladly go
Before the days and weeks and months and years
Shrivel to shreds as every year grows shorter,

And each new day less new.
And why should I be greedy
For more declining years
When there are every year so many more
To share an earth that grows no bigger?
I have used my share.

Death is a door to peace..
I will go through that door..
Let my eyes close,
My tired body rest.
Nor beyond death do I still wish
To join the others who have died before:
Parents, friends and foes, the happy throngs.
One life is gift enough for me, and then
Let the same atoms go back into use
For other lives in turn,
For people, plants or animals.
Nor do I ask that all should be explained,
Made rational for me.
I do not need to know, as once I tried to know
The truth, whatever truth might mean,
About whatever I have seen -
How limited such knowledge then would be
If one small brain like mine in one brief life
Could come to know all that there was to know
Of anything -
And nothing more remained to know!

Let mystery remain.

And truth -
If such a thing exists beyond the bounds
Of little minds like mine -
stay hidden till the end of time.

With the years that passed,
The twenty, thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, seventy years,
The face of death has in the end become
A friendly, gentle face, The End, a time
For celebrating life, to which belong
Both birth and death, and all that is between.
Life is a gift more precious
Without eternity; And death is simply part of that
same gift.

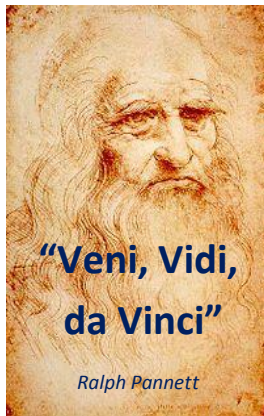
**Barbara Calvert
1918—2008**

The family have asked that the poem not be copied without permission.

THE DA VINCI MODE

There is to be an exhibition in Wellington of the inventions of Leonardo da Vinci: finely crafted machines by the internationally acclaimed *Artisans of Florence - Teknoart*. The Exhibition presents over sixty machines based on the original drawings of Leonardo da Vinci, featuring his amazing flying machines, nautical, hydraulic and architectural innovations, groundbreaking applications of civil engineering and incredible war machines.

Housed in a custom built Pavilion based on sketches by Leonardo da Vinci himself, the Exhibition will be located in NZ Academy of Fine Arts Galleries, at the entrance to Queens Wharf, a few minutes walk from the railway station and Lambton Quay.



See it between November 8, 2008 and February 1, 2009

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NEXT NEWSLETTER

Donald Feist is keen to recommend a new book: *Thank God for Evolution - How the marriage of science and religion will transform your life and our world* by Michael Dowd, published in the US by Viking.

Amazon's price is \$US16.47. A review will appear in a later Newsletter.

CONFERENCE 2008 FROM THE CHAIR

Once again it is time for the Annual Sea of Faith NZ Conference.

You will all have received a Registration Form by now. If you haven't or if you need another — perhaps for a friend — you can get one on the website www.sof.org.nz [The error in Elizabeth Duncan's address has been corrected, and see page 1 of this Newsletter – ed]

This Conference is one of some import to our daily lives as well as to whatever faith tradition we follow. Regardless of which side of the scientific fence you sit on in respect of Global Warming, our ability to live and survive in relation to our environment and in cohabitation with other plant and animal species is crucial to us all.

There will be a range of excellent speakers and all are sourced from within New Zealand. We have Prof. Lloyd Geering, Dr Carolyn King and Craig Potton presenting their view of the Theme “**The Ecological Imperative – Is Tomorrow's God Gaia?**” They will be ably supported in the plenary session by Juliet Batten and Bevan Tipene-Matua. Add to that a choice from five workshops and you have a Conference of some note.

And then there's the Saturday Night Dinner at a very good local winery. Owing to the cost the Steering Committee are covering part of the cost for each attendee to the dinner.

This really is a Conference not to be missed, not only for the Theme, the Speakers, the Dinner but also the camaraderie that goes along with a Sea of Faith Conference.

We are in the last stages of accepting registrations. Remember, there is a Netball Tournament on in Marlborough leaving tight accommodation, so the earlier you book the better your chance of being close to the Conference Venue.

The Steering Committee is looking forward to another good attendance and to meeting you all again in late September.

Norm

