



## Fire!

*David Boulton started his address at the Conference with this anecdote ....*

.... Which prompts me to tell the story of the ecumenical gathering where someone rushes in shouting "The building's on fire!"

The **Methodists** immediately gather in a corner and start a prayer meeting.

The **Baptists** cry out, "Where's the water?"

The **Congregationalists** shout, "Everybody for themselves!"

The **Presbyterians** mumble, "No problem! We are the brands predestined to be plucked from the burning."

The **Fundamentalists** bellow, "Flee from the wrath to come! - Matthew 3:7"

The **Salvation Army** make a joyful noise, praising God for the blessing fire brings.

The **Plymouth Brethren** send the women out to tackle the fire while they get on with splitting into more factions.

The **Lutherans** nail a notice to the door giving 95 reasons why the fire is not justified.

The **Quakers** say they will not be moved, till moved by the Spirit.

The **Unitarians** get up, and both leave in different directions.

The **Roman Catholics** form a procession and march out in grand style.

The **Anglicans** — wake up.

The **United Church Council of New Zealand** appoints a chairperson who will in due course arrange for a committee to look into the matter.

The **Sea of Faith Network** argues that fire is a human concept without objective reality, and should be understood as metaphorical, symbolic and expressive.

**Don Cupitt** is heard to whisper to his neighbour, "There's another book in this!"

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## Conference CDs

You should have received  
an Order Form  
with this Newsletter.

It is also available  
on the website at  
[www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz)

## TWO NEW BOOKS BY SIR LLOYD GEERING

**Available Now**

### COMING BACK TO EARTH

#### *From The Preface:*

Between 2001 and 2008 I delivered a number of lectures in response to requests from the Westar Institute, St. Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society, and the New Zealand Sea of Faith Network. At the time I regarded these lectures as independent compositions, and that is why an occasional expression or quote may appear more than once in this book. Not until my friend and very efficient editor Tom Hall drew my attention to the fact, did I realise that when read in chronological order of composition, these lectures constitute a distinct unity.

No doubt the reason for these discoveries is that the same themes were occupying my attention over a period of years, and each time I wrote or lectured I developed them a little bit further. ... **It has been my continuing concern to find the most convincing way of relating the Christian tradition to the modern secular world.**

As a theological student I was fortunate to be taught Church History by Helmut Rex, a refugee from Nazi Germany. Starting with a lecture on the philosophy of history he engendered in me a love of the subject that that I had not previously had. I began to understand Christianity as a living tradition that has evolved and changed, and I now see that any religious tradition that becomes static has already begun its death throes. Of course, it took many years for me to understand the full significance of this valuable insight, and for quite some time I defended the credal structure of Christian orthodoxy as if that were an unchangeable essence.

In the forties and fifties I was able to do this the more readily because the liberal Protestant theology of about 1880-1950 was already rapidly accommodating itself to our new and more secular understanding of the world we live in. Indeed, it was my attempt in the sixties to make some small contribution to this ongoing process that involved me in the New Zealand theological controversy that came to a climax in the so-called heresy trial of 1967. Although acquitted of the charges laid against me – teaching false doctrine and disturbing the peace of the church – I nevertheless found that my efforts bore little immediate fruit. **The mainline churches simply continued in the path advocated by my accusers, while I found myself regarded by many in the churches as a maverick who had departed from the Christian way.**

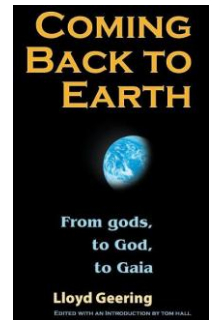
In my view they had it back to front, for while most in the churches seemed to be anchored to a past that was fast becoming outdated, I was endeavouring to be faithful to the Christian path of faith as it moved into a radically changing future.

Nonetheless, I have come to the conclusion that ... the reason for the now rapid decline of the mainline churches in the Western world is that they are "all out of step" with the modern secular world. The reason for this is not so much the supposed renegade behaviour of the secular world as the failure of the church to take the next challenging steps in its four thousand year old path of faith. Whereas Abraham is said to have left his idols behind to go out into the unknown by faith alone, the churches reveal a lack of faith and insist on retaining the support of an infallible Bible and a set of unchangeable doctrines tailored to a worldview that has become obsolete.

Jesus is said to have warned his followers not to become "blind guides" ... but that is what the churches are in great danger of becoming. Instead of continuing to walk the ever-changing path of faith from Abraham onwards, the churches have put their trust in idols that they have accumulated on the way and have become blind to the cultural situation they have now entered. This prevents them from seeing that the modern secular world, far from being the enemy of Christianity is the legitimate continuation of the Judeo-Christian path of faith in the modern era. The modern global and secular world has emerged out of Western Christendom; moreover, in doing so it has increasingly though yet incompletely manifested Christianity's central doctrine – the Incarnation, the enfleshment of "God" in the human condition. **God has indeed come down to earth!**

This is the constant and developing theme of this series of lectures. I am grateful to Tom Hall for his suggestion that they be published as one book and to Polebridge Press for responding to his suggestion.

Lloyd Geering



**Available Early 2010**

### SUCH IS LIFE!

**My Encounter with  
Ecclesiastes**

#### **Part I - Introduction**

The Forgotten Book of the Bible.  
Engaging with Ecclesiastes.

#### **Part II – The Dialogues**

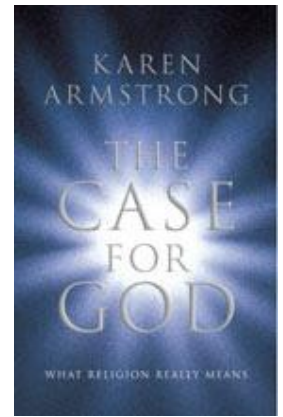
- 1: Who are you?
- 2: What do you mean by 'God'?
- 3: Nature and Us
- 4: Is Life unfair?
- 5: Is Death the end of us?
- 6: Chance or Purpose?
- 7: Why search for Wisdom?
- 8: Your Conclusions about Life.

#### **Part III**

Full text of Ecclesiastes in a new translation.  
Epilogue

# What Religion Really Means

**The Case for God**  
**Karen Armstrong**  
**Bodley Head**



**Don Feist of Dunedin writes:** *"I've just bought Karen Armstrong's latest book, **The Case for God**. I'm quite excited by how many insightful and very-well-said things there are in the Introduction - which is as far as I've read so far. If the rest of the book is as good, it's a real gem. Here are some of the bits I've marked"*

"There is a tendency to assume that, even though we now live in a totally transformed world and have an entirely different world-view, people have always thought about God in exactly the same way as we do today. But despite our scientific and technological brilliance, our religious thinking is sometimes remarkably underdeveloped, even primitive".

**"... some of the greatest Jewish, Christian and Muslim theologians ... subverted normal patterns of thought and speech to help the faithful understand that the words we use to describe mundane things were simply not suitable for God. 'He' was not good, divine, powerful or intelligent in any way we could understand. We could not even say God 'existed' because our concept of existence was too limited."**

"During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, ... Western people began to develop an entirely new kind of civilisation, governed by scientific rationality and based economically on technology and capital investment. Logos achieve such spectacular results that myth was discredited and the scientific method was thought to be the only reliable means of attaining truth. This would make religion difficult, if not impossible. .... In particular the meaning of the word 'belief' changed, so that a credulous acceptance of creedal doctrines became the pre-requisite of faith ...".

**"Today we live in a society of scientific logos, and myth has fallen into disrepute ... In the past, myth was not self-indulgent fantasy; rather, like logos, it helped people live creatively in our confusing world, though in a different way."**

"From a very early date, people re-enacted their myths in stylised ceremonies that worked aesthetically upon participants, and, like any work of art, introduced them to a deeper dimension of existence. Myth and ritual were thus inseparable ..... Without ritual, myths made no sense and would remain as opaque as a musical score, which is impenetrable to most of us until interpreted instrumentally. Religion, therefore, was not primarily something that people thought, but something they did ...".

**"It is no use magisterially weighing up the teachings of religion to judge their truth or falsehood, before embarking on a religious way of life. You will only discover their truth - or lack of it - if you translate these doctrines into ritual or ethical action. Like any skill, religion requires perseverance, hard work and discipline."**

"The early Daoists saw religion as a 'knack' acquired by constant practice ..... People who acquired this knack discovered a transcendent dimension of life that was not simply an external reality 'out there' but was identical with the deepest level of their being."

**"In their desire to produce a wholly rational, scientific faith that abolished mythos in favour of logos, Christian fundamentalists have interpreted scripture with a literalism unparalleled in the history of religion."**

"One of the conditions of enlightenment has always been a willingness to let go of what we thought we knew, in order to appreciate truths we had never dreamed of. We may have to unlearn a great deal about religion before we can move on to a new understanding."

**I look forward to an offer of a comprehensive review of this magnificent book - ed**



# Ship of Fools



**Jenny Chisholm writes:** At this year's Sea of Faith conference I couldn't help wondering whether there were any shipmates present from the Ship of Fools – The Magazine of Christian Unrest. It's a website where I hang out for a while most days, and some of its appeal is similar to what I find in the Sea of Faith environment.

Visitors to the website (<http://www.ship-of-fools.com/>) usually begin by browsing the Mystery Worshipper reports, reading one of the columns, or having a laugh at the wacky Gadgets for God. But inevitably they go on to lurk on the discussion boards, until they discover a topic that provokes a response, in which case they have to sign on as an Apprentice.

Of the active boards, Heaven is light-hearted, Purgatory is the place for serious discussion, and Hell is for rant — with no language barred — while All Saints is for friendly chatting, especially on the Ozblog thread, where Kiwis and Australians keep in touch.

Then there is Ecclesiastics, where ritual is discovered in sometimes (for non-conformist) incredible detail, Kerygmania, for in-depth biblical study, and The Circus, where word games and similar diversions abound.

As I began to recognise contributors, I realised that the majority were Anglican, and many were clergy; on the other hand, every Christian denomination is represented, except, I think, the Exclusive Brethren, along with the odd Buddhist, a Baha'i, some atheists, and a number of folk who have questioned their involvement with the church and are looking for support as they work out their beliefs. It is illuminating to read Orthodox or Catholic expositions of their position, while a Salvation Army representative's offer to answer questions about the SA produced a lot of illumination.

There are a number of New Zealand 'shippies'; I've had breakfast with a couple, and lunch with three of the local members when I was in Perth.

As a protestant, I have been bewildered by some of the feeling generated by topics in Ecclesiastics, like the endless responses to someone's reporting of a newspaper article that showed a vicar wearing an alb and a blue stole, or the recent sharing of practice involving the lamp to be kept burning before the reserved Host in the sanctuary: red or white? candle, oil lamp or electricity? is there a prayer to be said when it's gone out and been re-lit? what if the Host is taken home to be used for a sick-bed eucharist: do you light a lamp before it or just put it in the fridge? Someone professing 'just a nonunderstanding from my low-church background' came back in response to 'they're not just wafers but the body of Christ' with 'Thanks for the explanations – I can't really understand it but thanks for trying to explain.' My sentiments exactly.

There's a good chat about Heresy going on in Purgatory, and other threads headed 'Not feeling comfort in the Christian message', 'Liberal? Nonconformist?', and 'Should we still bother with the Canon?'. Someone in Ecclesiastics asks 'What inspired you in church this week?', another asks for experiences of Café Church, and I am dumbfounded to read of the huge crowds all over the UK going to venerate the relics of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux (a thigh-bone and some pieces of one foot).

While some topics of discussion are from my point of view totally irrelevant, I can be impressed by the wisdom of contributors whom I know to be much younger than I am.

I'm puzzling over totally alien beliefs, meeting minds that I can easily relate to, and sometimes chipping in to more down-to-earth topics in Heaven: from both sides of the Atlantic as well as Down Under, everyone remembers Mother telling them not to wash the windows when the sun's on them or they'll dry streaky.

**Jenny Chisholm, Wilton, Wellington**

**But Wait, there's more:** Soldier Of Fortune, Special Operations Forces, Society of Fellows, Statement of Facts, Source Of Funds, Show of Force, Signature on File, Statute of Frauds, Solidarity of Feminists, Strength Of Function, Supervisor Of Flying, Save Our Future, Souls on Fire, Songs of Freedom, Strategic Offensive Forces, Share of Freehold, Save our Families, Statement of Functionality, Subtlety or Force, Society of Feminists, Switching Office Functionality and we are grateful to Tom Hall for ...  
**Subverter of Fundamentalisms**

**[ed]**



# Nelson Group Book Review

Some mini-reviews offered at a recent group meeting.



## Ageing and the Higher Autobiography

Quite recently I became aware of a new literary genre: autobiography masquerading as fiction. Of course, ever since the invention of the novel, fiction writers have included snippets of their own lives in their writings and one is always interested in trying to identify these, but it took Martin Amis in his memoir *Experience* to draw my attention to the emergence during the latter years of last century of this as a full-blown genre, something he called 'Higher Autobiography'.

**Sandy Arcus**

## Three Cups of Tea by Greg Mortenson

The astonishing, uplifting story of a real-life Indiana Jones and his humanitarian campaign to use education to combat terrorism in the Taliban's backyard. Anyone who despairs of an individual's power to change lives has to read the story of Greg Mortenson, a homeless mountaineer who, following a 1993 climb of Pakistan's treacherous K2, was inspired by a chance encounter with impoverished mountain villagers and promised to build them a school. Over the next decade, he built fifty-five schools — especially for girls — that offer a balanced education in one of the most isolated and dangerous regions on earth. As it chronicles Mortenson's quest, which has brought him into conflict with both enraged Islamists and uncomprehending Americans, *Three Cups of Tea* combines adventure with a celebration of the humanitarian spirit.

**Elizabeth Duncan**

## A Woman in Charge by Carl Bernstein

Hilary Clinton is variously portrayed as elaborately prepared, loose with the facts, relatively soulless, no feminist saint, nor even — for someone often described as having been Bill's ideological edge — particularly emblematic of her generation's leftist ideas.

Yet Bernstein also concedes that she is clever, quick and capable of very impressive things; like Bill, too, the record suggests that Hillary has been driven less by arrogance than by a profound sense of self-justification.

This book also offers strong judgments on both the president-in-waiting's celebrated spouse and, especially, her other outsize male influence — her father Hugh Rodham — a "belittling, impossible-to-satisfy drill instructor", a confrontational putz and, simply, a "bullshit artist".

After interviewing numerous family members and poring over primary documents, such as Penn State newspaper records, Bernstein discovers, for instance, that the old man's claim to have been a football scholarship student — Americanese for what New Zealanders might call working-class cred — is patently untrue, despite his daughter's milking the myth for all it's worth.

**Elizabeth Duncan**

## The Monster and the Saint by Richard Holloway

It is the human condition to be divided. As a species, we are capable of appalling cruelty: we deliberately degrade people, turning them into mere things, objects of our own greed, lust and hunger for domination. But we are also capable of sympathy, forgiveness, pity and gratitude. In his latest book, Richard Holloway illuminates the divided spirit of man, drawing on his own wisdom and on the insights of numerous writers and philosophers, as well as the words of the King James Bible. This is a book that is designed to make us see and feel what it is to be human.

**Lindsay Vaughan**

## Musicophilia by Oliver Sacks

I found it a fascinating read on how brain alterations (and I hesitate to use the words 'defect' or 'damage' now) can dramatically affect the appreciation and performance of music. Equally how music can have profound effects, usually positive, but also occasionally negative, on people with mild or quite serious disabilities as a result of illness or accident. Sacks is a brilliant and entertaining writer, drawing on a huge number of case studies, both from his own work and that of others.

**Don Grant**

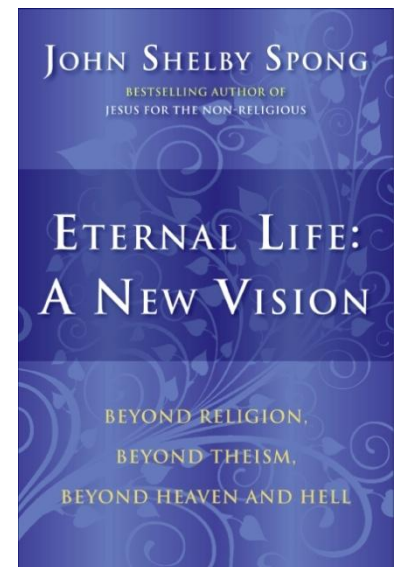
# Beyond Religion, Beyond Theism, Beyond Heaven and Hell

## Eternal Life: A New Vision by Bishop John Shelby Spong

Drawing on a lifetime of wisdom, New York Times bestselling author and controversial religious leader John Shelby Spong continues to challenge traditional Christian theology.

In this spiritual autobiography about his lifelong struggle with the questions of God and death, he reveals how he ultimately came to believe in eternal life.

To order a paperback copy for delivery in February 2010, send an email to Liz Robinson at [robinson.howard@xtra.co.nz](mailto:robinson.howard@xtra.co.nz)



*From page 211:*

“When I die I will rest my case in the ‘being’ of which I am a part. That is where my faith has taken me. I can see more than I can say. I can experience more than I can describe. That is as far as words can carry me. I step beyond words at this point into the wonder of a wordless reality.”

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*An interview with Bishop Spong was found at*  
[http://media.libsyn.com/media/truthdriven/TDT80\\_2009-09-15\\_Spong.mp3](http://media.libsyn.com/media/truthdriven/TDT80_2009-09-15_Spong.mp3)

In it he said that his preferred title for this book was *Dancing With Death, Laughing With Life* but that the publisher prevailed and that the three “Beyond” statements were a compromise.

He also said: “God is not a concept that human words can ever embrace. All human words can finally do is to articulate how a human being believes he or she experiences God. ... When I talk about God I try to talk about what my experience of God is. My experience of God is the source of life, the source of love and the ground of being. If God is the source of life, then I worship God by living. If God is the source of love, then I worship God by loving. If God is the ground of being, then I worship God by having the courage to be everything that I am capable of being.”

## To Prepare for Death — Live!

"My commitment, which I see as the heart and meaning of worship, is to live as completely as I can and to drink in the sweetness which that particular day has to offer. While I am alive I will plumb life's depths, scale life's heights, and share my life and my love with those who are fellow pilgrims with me in my time and space."

John Spong *Eternal Life* HarperOne (2009) p210

"The only sensible way to prepare for death is to live life to the full, *really* to the full. Just by so living one is doing all there is to do about death. One is making the best of the time one has left."

Don Cupitt *The Way To Happiness* Polebridge Press (2005) p33.

# Memories of Hamilton

This supplement contains excerpts from the five addresses given at the Conference. They can be read in full on the website. Audio versions of these and the concluding Panel Discussion are available on CD. The special Omnibus CD contains all addresses in audio form (as mp3 files) and in written form as (pdf files.)

## Lloyd Geering: from “Do We Need Jesus?”

Humanism is any philosophy which recognizes the value or dignity of the human condition, makes mankind itself the measure of all things and takes human nature, with its limits and interests, as its theme.

This positive and creative potential in the human condition had long been denied by Christian orthodoxy, which emphasized *ad nauseam* the sinful condition of the human species. The Renaissance scholars, perhaps to their surprise, discovered this human potential in the Greek and Latin classics of pre-Christian times; thereafter the study of these classics simply became known in the universities as ‘The Humanities’.

The Renaissance humanists began to ask - How is it that the great thinkers and writers of pre-Christian Greece and Rome could be so creative? The humanists were not anti-religious and certainly not atheistic, yet they were beginning to undermine the most basic doctrine of Christian dogma - the doctrine of sin. Not surprisingly, therefore, the humanists were condemned by church authority. The great scholar Erasmus is a case in point.

Yet the long-term influence of the Renaissance humanists continued and can hardly be overestimated. They provided the conditions that were to lead to the birth of modern empirical science. They also indirectly initiated the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation in turn led to the Enlightenment.

Whereas the Protestant Reformers challenged the Church hierarchy by appeal to the Bible as the Word of God, the leading thinkers of the enlightenment challenged Christian orthodoxy by appeal to human reason. This was when humanism began to triumph.

As a result the Bible itself became subjected to human critical reasoning. Reimarus (1694-1768) produced the first critical study of the Gospels. When the first fragments of this were published after his death, they caused such a sensation that further publication was forbidden. In 1835 David Strauss published his famous *Life of Jesus*, said (by the scholarly Bishop Stephen Neill) to be a turning point in the history of Christianity.

From that time onwards it has become necessary to distinguish ever more sharply between the Jesus Christ expounded in Christian orthodoxy (now often referred to as the Christ of Faith) and the historical figure who lies hidden behind him (often called the Jesus of history). Although the Christian dogmatic system did not change all that much, the focal point began to change in some of the new hymns being written. Less and less was Jesus seen as the Saviour hanging on the cross and more and more as the great hero who was leading his army of Christian soldiers into a new kind of world in the here and now. The humanity of Jesus was coming to be emphasized more than his divinity.

The nineteenth century saw a vigorous search for a reliable account of the historical Jesus until Albert Schweitzer in his epoch making book of 1906, *The Quest of The Historical Jesus*, showed how fruitless it was.

Indeed Rudolph Bultmann, arguably the greatest New Testament scholar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, concluded that we know practically nothing for certain about Jesus except that he was crucified. Yet he believed that does not really matter. What remained important for Bultmann was what he called the *kerygma*, the preached or proclaimed message about Jesus. Yet he conceded that even that had to be demythologised, by which he meant ‘reinterpreted into today’s cultural non-mythological or non-supernatural context.

Then came the Jesus Seminar. In the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century this community of scholars, using modern historical methods, meticulously examined all the ancient records — biblical and non-biblical — and produced two important works: *The Five Gospels: What did Jesus really say?* And *The Acts of Jesus: What did Jesus really do?*

The best they could offer to us by way of reliable information about the historical Jesus is what they called “the voice prints and the footprints”. These can by no means be set lightly aside and I shall be drawing upon them. Nevertheless the very scantiness of the reliable material has brought into ever-sharper focus the question - “Do we need Jesus?”. Do we need a Jesus about whom we know so little?

**.... Do we need Jesus? I still do not know how to answer that. But I am pretty confident the modern secular world would not be as good as it is if it were not for the original input from Jesus of Nazareth. In any case, should we not rather be asking - Do we need to love our enemies?**

Lloyd Geering



## David Boulton: from “Is Jesus Still Worth Standing Up For?”

**David presented two points of view and then asked his audience to vote. This is the case 'against'.**



Jesus lived two thousand years ago, a child of what in the eastern Mediterranean was still the late Iron Age. His was a small world in a three-tiered universe: a flat disc of Earth sandwiched between Hell in the dark depths below and Heaven beyond the bright blue sky. In Heaven dwelt the God of Israel, surrounded and served by his holy angels. Its mirror image, the dark Underworld, was the home of evil spirits. Man had his dwelling-place in the filling of the sandwich, a piggy-in-the-middle destined to be a plaything of supernatural forces from above and below. Man was never free from the attentions of God and his angels, and the Devil and his demons. This was an enchanted world, where unseen forces were forever shaping a person's life and destiny: a world of ghoullies and ghosties and long-legged beasties and things that go bump in the night. But a world, too, of epiphanies, of inner voices, of daily encounters with Providence. Jesus was a child of his time, of his place, of his ethnic origins, of the religious and cultural traditions into which he was born.

His was a very young world: perhaps four thousand years old, a mere seventy generations since Adam was made out of dust on the sixth day of the creation of the universe. And it was a very small world, barely mapped beyond the Mediterranean, the 'Sea in Middle Earth'.

Jesus' world was a pre-scientific world. Medicine, for all but the elite, was in the hands of holy men, the spiritual healers and exorcists who made up the rudimentary health services. Physics, chemistry and biology were unknown disciplines. Jesus spoke a northern dialect of Aramaic. It is doubtful whether he was literate, or whether he had any knowledge of Greek or Latin, or of other cultures beyond his Jewish horizons. Intellectually as well as geographically, his was a tiny, restricted world.

In the two thousand years since his death, that world has been transformed. Exploration and discovery, the printing revolution, the Enlightenment, the scientific, industrial and technological revolutions, the democratic revolution; revolutions in our knowledge and understanding of cosmology, geology, medicine, psychology, religion, philosophy, communications, trade and commerce, not to mention the evolution of species, women's rights, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights... we could spend a whole weekend adding to the list.

From the Iron Age of Jesus' time we have passed through the Imperial Age, the Dark Ages, the Feudal Age, the Mercantile Age, the Early-Modern Age, the Modern Age, the Postmodern Age, the Space Age... We live in a very different world, and in every sense a vastly bigger world, than the one that Jesus knew and understood!

### ***This is the case 'for'***

I want to give you three reasons why this Jesus still matters.

First, I shall argue that what we can reasonably authenticate as the message of Jesus 2000 years ago is as relevant to our world as it was to his. Yes, the world has changed almost beyond recognition: and yet, there are some things that haven't changed at all.

Then I shall argue that this message still has a visionary 'saving power', by which I mean the power to inspire, liberate and enable.

Thirdly, I shall argue that if we are ever to challenge the churches' conception of a superhuman Jesus, a misty-mystic Jesus, both a Friend for little children above the bright blue sky and the all-powerful Son of God who will return to judge saints and sinners "when the trumpet of the Lord shall sound and time shall be no more", we may find, paradoxically, that our trump card is the human Jesus of history.

... Jesus matters because he needs rescuing from those who have distorted his person, his message, and his revolutionary challenge. Robert Funk puts it starkly in his book *Honest to Jesus*: "Give Jesus a demotion", he urges. "He asked for it, he deserves it, we owe him no less. As divine son of God, co-eternal with the Father, pending cosmic judge seated at God's right hand, he is insulated and isolated from his persona as the humble Galilean sage. In the former there is not much left of the man who loved to laugh and talk at table... who never seemed to maintain a trace of social distance in the conversation. A demoted Jesus then becomes available as the real founder of the Christian movement. With his new status he will no longer be merely its mythical icon, embedded in the myth of the descending/ascending, dying/rising lord of the pagan mystery cults, but of one substance with us all. We might begin by turning the icon back into an iconoclast."

Yes, in an ironic paradox, it will take a *demotion* to *promote* the historical Jesus, to turn the icon into the iconoclast, to make the real Jesus worth standing up for, to make him matter. Funk sees how deification of Jesus by magic, mythology, and systematic theology, far from glorifying, actually trivialises him. Another eminent scholar, Marcus Borg, shows how by separating out the historical Jesus from the deified Christ of Faith, we find ourselves "meeting Jesus *again* - for the *first time*!"

***For the record, the Conference attendees voted overwhelmingly 'for'.***

**David Boulton**



## **Greg Jenks: from “Who Needs Jesus? What value is a first-century Galilean holy man in today’s world?”**



Christianity itself is the main impediment to people appreciating Jesus today; and specifically the churches. That criticism includes those expressions of Christianity which pride themselves on their capacity to be ‘relevant’ as well as historic forms of Christianity with a more traditional demeanour.

Indeed, my personal hunch is that traditional forms of Christianity would have more ‘street cred’ if their counter-cultural religious forms were matched with consistent public performance when it comes to power, wealth, privilege and transparency. In particular, the scandal of sexual abuse within the churches and the matching scandal of sustained cover-ups and risk management, has seriously impaired the ancient churches’ capacity to speak about Jesus with authenticity.

In the case of the newer forms of Christianity, I see a basic lack of fit with the real world. Despite their comparative advantage as ‘clean skins’, the forms of Christianity that define themselves over against traditional churches have the problem of their own deep suspicion of, and antipathy towards, modernity. Beneath the veneer of contemporary culture—the pop music and the clever marketing—lies a hankering for a vanished past when the Bible dominated the cognitive landscape of the Western imagination and life seemed much simpler.

We no longer live in that kind of world, and in time the irrelevance of those who especially prize their capacity to be relevant will become obvious.

It seems Jesus is not well served by those who claim to have the franchise for his label in the spiritual marketplace of the twenty-first century.

.....

Finally, let’s briefly address the question whether Jesus can be meaningful to people with no religious faith; or at least people who have lost a living connection with the religious community of their childhood.

I would propose an affirmative answer.

One reason for asserting this is the way that Jesus has become a global icon of sacred wisdom.

Jesus remains respected and valued even by those without religious faith, including those who have no time for organized religion or for the churches that claim an exclusive franchise on the Jesus tradition. I have come across many people who are suspicious of the churches (and often for very good reasons), as well as others who have no time for religion more generally. However, it is rare for them to express a negative estimation of Jesus.

**Like some of the other great religious leaders of humanity, Jesus has a niche in the collective imagination. A contemporary secular person may not accept all the legends and religious baggage that have attached themselves to the figure of Jesus like barnacles on the hull of a boat, but they often continue to have considerable respect for the historical figure.**

I suspect this goes some way to explain the impact of the Jesus Seminar and the warm reception its findings were given in the public mind. Whether or not the reconstruction of Jesus offered by the Seminar is historically accurate, the underlying project resonates profoundly with the modern mindset.

We are deeply suspicious of religion and religious officials. We are ambivalent about claims to a spiritual dimension to reality. But we are almost naïve in our veneration of figures such as Jesus and the Buddha. The deep respect for the Dalai Lama, and even at times for the Pope, may also be an expression of this same dynamic.

In my own experience in the classroom, I have found the occasional atheist or agnostic student to be a most refreshing presence in a group of theological students. Such people are able to pursue questions without fear of the consequences for their faith, or their vocation. Since ‘their Jesus’ is a remarkable human being with profound insights into the human condition of his own time, they can appreciate Jesus of Nazareth in fresh and creative ways.

He can indeed function as an icon of sacred wisdom when freed from the shackles of Christology.

My final evidence for the continuing relevance of Jesus to post-religious people in the twenty-first century is the theme of this conference and our conversation here these past couple of days. What better argument could I make?

**Greg Jenks**

**Doug Sellman:**

**from “Who needs Jesus, when you’ve got drugs?”**

Before I begin answering this question from a research perspective, I need to make some comments about Jesus. The difference between Jesus, the historical figure and Christ, the Christian God (or at least a third of the Christian God) became such a nagging issue in my mind over time that in the end it motivated me to commission a painting from a friend and well-known super-photorealist painter Kees Bruin. The painting is titled ***Jesus Christ*** and it represents the conclusion of my own personal catharsis in relation to the Christian world; separating the earthly Jesus the real, from the heavenly Christ the delusional fantasy. What I’m interested in thinking more about and researching now is the place of therapeutic and spiritual experiences which help people make positive changes and cope better with life. Certain drugs may be of considerable help to some people. The irony is that this line of thinking and research is that it is about the induction of psychotic-like experiences; some of the very things I thought I’d previously rejected in stepping away from charismatic Christianity!

Science, the only ‘religion’ trying to prove itself wrong, is the best way we (homo sapiens) have found of advancing knowledge. However when it comes to complex phenomena, even with sophisticated methodologies and analyses, science becomes very limited as a way of understanding and explaining certain things; things like love and hope, human feeling and experience, and the meaning of life. Our human response to this limitation of science is expression and exploration in the arts – philosophy, music, poetry, and religion.

**But science is proving to be unrelenting and will continue to chip away at everything that has previously been the preserve of the arts, including the focus of religion and spirituality – the meaning of life and the experience of God.**



**Margaret Mayman:**

**from “Jesus, Justice and Community:  
A Progressive Christian Perspective”**

We are always located in our history and it is very easy to be seduced by the times in which we live. Protestant liberalism internalised the values of the 18th century enlightenment with too little criticism. The Enlightenment affirmed the rights of individual against oppressive societies.

Contemporary progressive Christians continue to affirm this. But we now recognise that the Enlightenment tended to understand societies only as aggregations of autonomous individuals and that it lost the historic human wisdom contained in the biblical tradition and in other religious traditions that emphasised our collectivity and our connectedness. The political and economic systems that we have today continue to promulgate extreme individualism. As community life has been eroded, we have to come to appreciate its value and regret our acquiescence to its erosion. The church, at its best, is not an aggregation of individuals. We strive to recover Paul's understanding that we are members of one another, one body, dependent on one another for life. In a time of ecological crisis, individualism is killing us, our children and our planet.

Another way in which liberal Protestantism idealised the enlightenment was the understanding of human norms in terms of the experience of the Christian, European male. It did not value the diversity of patterns of human social organisation, arrogantly assuming that all cultures should emulate western models, and enforcing that belief system with the missionary and the coloniser working hand in hand. The consequences of this imperialism continue today in global economic systems that are destroying the poor of the third-world.

The Enlightenment heritage has been particularly harmful in its anthropocentrism and its dualistic understanding of humanity and nature, contributing as it has done to the global ecological crisis. This philosophy of anthropocentrism and dualism has also shaped the natural and social sciences and it has been deeply internalised in the liberal Protestant tradition.

**Liberals were seduced by modernism and its accompanying belief that reason will reveal truth unconstrained by history. The limits of modernism have begun to be clear, especially its positing of universal theories and claims for universal truth. These have been brought into question by a postmodernism that relishes complexity, fluidity and plurality. As progressives we do not want to be sucked into postmodernism as liberals were to modernism, but it offers some useful correctives.**



Margaret Mayman

# MYTH-MAKING

## The “True Cross” as an example.

While not many readers of this Newsletter would seek out and venerate what are believed to be parts of the cross on which that Jesus was executed, the legend of The True Cross offers an instructive example of how a myth (often called a ‘legend’) can come into being by the process of assembling fragments of existing stories. We might even say that the components may be ‘true’ but the compilation is not.

*The Golden Legend*, (*Legenda Aurea*), was a collection of saints' legends published in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by the Dominican Jacobus da Voragine, Archbishop of Genoa.

In the late Middle Ages and Early Renaissance, there was a wide general acceptance of the origin of the True Cross and its history preceding the Crucifixion, as recorded by Voragine. This general acceptance is confirmed by the numerous artworks that depict this subject, culminating in one of the most famous fresco cycles of the Renaissance, the *Legend of the True Cross* by Piero della Francesca, painted on the walls of the chancel of the Church of San Francesco in Arezzo between 1452 and 1466, in which he reproduces faithfully the traditional episodes of the story as recorded in *The Golden Legend*.



Adam, on his deathbed, sends one of his sons, Seth, to Archangel Michael, who gives Seth a seed from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The seed was placed in Adam's mouth at the moment of his death.

The tree that grew on Adam's grave was chopped down in King Solomon's time, but its wood could not be used for anything, so it was thrown as a bridge across a stream. The Queen of Sheba on her way to the King Solomon was about to step on the bridge when, by miracle, she knew that the Savior would be crucified on a Cross of that wood. Instead of stepping on the wood she knelt and expressed her adoration.

The Queen then hurried to Solomon to tell him about her revelation.

After Solomon learnt about the divine message he understood that the wood would cause the end of the kingdom of the Jews, and ordered the bridge be removed and the wood be buried.

Centuries later Mary received the angel's message that she was chosen to give the birth to the Saviour. Solomon's precautions did not help - the wood was found and Jesus was crucified on a Cross made of it.

Three centuries later the Roman Emperors Constantine and Maxentius were struggling for power over the Roman Empire. Just before the battle of the Milvian Bridge, Constantine received a message in a dream that he would be given a victory if he converted and went into the battle as a Christian.

Constantine heeded the prophecy and went into battle holding a cross in front of himself.

After Constantine's victory his mother, Helena, deeply moved by her son's conversion, went to Jerusalem to find the True Cross. Only one man, a Jew called Judas, knew the whereabouts of the Cross, but he revealed the secret only after torture.

Judas took Helena to the temple of Venus under which the three crosses of Calvary were hidden. Helena ordered the temple destroyed and under it the crosses were discovered.

The True Cross miraculously resurrected a dead youth and thus it was identified.

Another three centuries passed and in 615 A.D. the Persian King Chosroes stole the Holy Cross, setting it up as an object of worship. The Emperor of Byzantium, Heraclius, started a war against Chosroes and defeated him in 628 A.D. at a battle on the Danube. Chosroes was executed and the True Cross recaptured.

Heraclius took it to Jerusalem and carried it, barefoot, just as Christ once did; Christians hurried to meet and adore the relic.

When confronted with that story, we are now able to separate out the independent elements in a process similar that used by scholars of The Jesus Seminar in their attempts to find the authentic words and actions of Jesus. It now seems likely that isolated events or story fragments had been turned into a narrative by the inclusion of fictional, though reasonable, linking passages making it not unlike an historical novel — a process which may apply also to other religious narratives, such as the Gospels.

## THE ABRAHAMIC FAITHS



Victoria University of Wellington and the Wellington Council of Christians and Jews  
present a Public Seminar

### Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Middle East: Is religion the problem or the solution?

**Speaker: Rabbi David Rosen**

International Co-President, World Council of Religions for Peace, Former President,  
International Council of Christians and Jews, Former Chief Rabbi of Ireland

8pm, Wednesday 25 November 2009 Council Chamber,  
Victoria University of Wellington

**Moderator: Archbishop John Dew**

**Chair: Professor Paul Morris**

**Dave Moskovitz, Jewish Co-Chair, Wellington Council of Christians and Jews**

dave@ccj.org.nz / Tel +64 27 220 2202

more: <http://ccj.org.nz/>

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#### Islamic self-confidence

##### The West is laid back and relativistic

The weekly magazine, *The Economist*, in its August 29th edition, featured a review of the book *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West* by Christopher Caldwell.

“Mr Caldwell argues that Western Europe became a multi-ethnic society in a fit of absence of mind. European policymakers imported people to fill short-term job shortages. Today immigrants account for about 10% of the population of most west European countries, and up to 30% in some of Europe’s great cities.”

“Policymakers were even more mistaken about culture than they were about numbers. They assumed that immigrants would quickly adopt the mores of their host societies. But a surprising number of immigrants have proved ‘unmeltable’.”

Europe is no match for Islamic self-confidence: “When an insecure, malleable, relativistic culture meets a culture that is anchored, confident and strengthened by common doctrines, it is generally the former that changes to suit the latter.”

#### Doing Well By Doing Good

##### The pragmatic value of virtue

“For all three Abrahamic faiths ... tolerance and even amity across ethnic and national bounds have a way of emerging as a product of utility; when you can do well by doing good, doing good can acquire a scriptural foundation. This flexibility is heartening for those who believe that, in a highly globalized and interdependent world, the vast majority of people in all three Abrahamic faiths have more to gain through peaceful coexistence and cooperation than through intolerance and violence. If ancient Abrahamics could pen laudable scriptures that were in their enlightened self-interest, then maybe modern Abrahamics can choose to emphasize those same scriptures when it’s in *their* interest.

And if some people find it dispiriting that moral good should emerge from self-interest, maybe they should think again. At least, the Abrahamics among them should think again. The Hebrew Bible, considered a holy text by all three Abrahamic faiths, sees the pragmatic value of virtue as itself part of divine design.”

**Robert Wright “One World, Under God”**

[www.theatlantic.com/doc/200904/globalization-religion](http://www.theatlantic.com/doc/200904/globalization-religion)



# THE GOD, SCIENCE AND EVOLUTION DEBATE

A review by Alan Goss

The Westar Institute's magazine *The Fourth R* which advocates religious literacy reviews in its latest issue a book by Stewart A Kauffman *Reinventing the Sacred: A New View of Science and Religion* (Basic Books 2008). The review by John Van Hagen reflects ideas about the science and religion debate which have appeared in this Newsletter, also in books and papers presented at Sea of Faith Conferences.

The author's aim is to articulate a philosophy of evolution based on science. The emergence of life on earth will always be mysterious and those life-giving processes cannot be completely explained by physics or natural selection. Nor by simply positing a supernatural Creator. Built into the universe is an inherent creativity which Kauffman calls "the sacred". This is explored under three headings: science, reason and religion.

## Science

Reality cannot be understood by reducing it to its simplest elements which are explained by basic laws. Kauffman calls this reductionism. If everything is reduced to basic elements and how they are interact, then "the more we comprehend the universe the more pointless it seems". Inquiry needs to move to another level, to processes in nature like self-organizing and self-propagating that help us better understand life itself. Kauffman proposes that these natural processes make meaning in themselves.

## Reason

Reason, as the cornerstone of the scientific approach, has its value but it also has its limits. Certain evolutionary developments in the biosphere defy reason and could not be predicted, e.g. how the jawbones of fish become the workings of the human inner ear. Experiments from medicine strongly suggest that our brains have evolved in a way that unites both emotion and reasoning. This produces a guidance system that helps us figure things out. New discoveries or theories, e.g. a theory of everything, to explain some things that are not now known are possible, but reason is not enough. Kauffman shares a view that "the development of positive emotions is the key to our cultural evolutionary progress". As co-evolutionists we should therefore take seriously our role in shaping the future.

## Religion

Kauffman argues that because we find meaning within the natural world, the intervention of, say, a Creator God is not necessary. Rather he focuses on the mystery and creativity in the universe itself. His hope is that an appreciation of the sacred in nature may help to heal the divisions separating faith and science. God is the name Kauffman gives to creativity in the universe. As we evolve into an unknown future reason may be of some help but faith and courage are also needed. Kauffman, therefore offers a natural religion that builds on science but also includes spiritual beliefs that are flexible and adaptive. He believes that an appreciation of a more scientific view of evolution can contribute to a global ethic that meets the challenge of our times. The evolutionary emergence of moral responsibility and moral reasoning are therefore tools to be used as we move into the future. Faith and courage in the face of the unknown are sacred, they are "our persistent choice for life itself". They reinforce a scientifically based argument that sees purpose and meaning in our evolution as both people and a planet.

Van Hagen concludes his review "While I doubt whether the schism between religion and science can every be truly healed, I do believe that any religious perspective is challenged to integrate the modern scientific world view offered by Dr Stewart Kauffman.

Alan Goss, 13.9.2009

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Karen Armstrong writes in *The Case for God* (p211) "The scientific method has dealt brilliantly with objects but is less cogent when applied to people or the arts. It is not competent to assess religion, which is inseparable from the complex human beings who practise it, and, like the arts, cultivates a perception based on imagination and empathy. A scientist will first form a theory and then seek to prove it experimentally; religion works the other way round, and its insights come from practical experience. Where science is concerned with facts, religious truth is symbolic and its symbols will vary according to context; they will change as society changes and the reason for these changes must be understood. Like the arts, religion is transformative. Where the scientist is supposed to remain detached from the object of his investigation, a religious person must be changed by his encounter with the symbols of his or her faith - in rather the same way as one's outlook can be permanently transformed by the contemplation of a great painting."

Noel Cheer

## Coming Attractions

*At this year's Conference I was persuaded by speakers at the AGM that it was worthwhile to include in the Newsletter notices of forthcoming Local Group meetings even though the meetings would be over by the time the Newsletter was read. It was suggested that such material would provide ideas for other groups. The following is from a recent notice from the Dunedin Group.*

*Noel Cheer*

Margaret Feist will discuss Lloyd Geering's [Conference] talk. He said that Biblical criticism has forced us to distinguish between the Christ promoted by the Church – about whom we know a great deal – and the historical Jesus – about whom we can know little with certainty. As the influence of the Church, and the credibility of the Church's Christ recede, what is the future, in the 21st Century, for the Jesus of history?

Two questions to think about:

1. How is it that the main topic of the teaching of Jesus was the Kingdom of God, and yet the great creeds never mention it?
2. Which of these statements is closest to your own thoughts:
  - The secular world and Christianity are totally incompatible.
  - There is some conflict between the secular world and Christianity, but there is good in both, so the conflict must be resolved.
  - The secular world is more Christian than we thought.

Alan Jackson will discuss David Boulton, who invited us to be a jury, and to vote on two questions, using four categories from red (strongly yes) through pink and grey to black (strongly no):

1. Is Jesus still important to you?
2. Does Jesus have importance for the man in the street ?

Alan will invite us to discuss these, too.

Marjorie Spittle will look at what Greg Jenks told us on his topic: What value is a first-century Galilean holy man in today's world? He said it was very important to first establish which Jesus we are talking about and outlined some difficulties that changing ideas on Jesus pose for us today. He outlined a number of allusions to Jesus made in Judaism, Islam and the East and ended by asking if Jesus has meaning for people of no religious faith. She will ask us to discuss:

1. How would you feel if you had only the historical Jesus?
2. To what extent do you think Jesus is relevant to people with 'no religious faith'?

## 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 national Steering Committee publishes a Newsletter six times per year, maintains a website, assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference.

We have three Life Members: Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK) and Noel Cheer.

The Chairperson is Natali Allen, P.O. Box 120, Rawene, Northland. Phone (09) 405 7755

The Secretary is Alan Jackson, 55 Evans St, Opoho, Dunedin (03) 473 6947.

Membership of the national organisation costs \$20 per household per year (\$30 if outside NZ). Both charges drop to \$15 if the Newsletter is emailed. Send remittance and details to The Membership Secretary, PO Box 15-324, Miramar, Wellington 6243 or Internet bank to 38 9000 0807809 00 and tell pcowley@paradise.net.nz.

Members may borrow books, tapes etc. from the Resource Centre managed by Suzi Thirlwall phone (07) 578-2775) See the website at [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz) for a catalogue and for further details about us.

To offer a comment on material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact the Editor: Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay, (04)236-7533 [noel@cheer.org.nz](mailto:noel@cheer.org.nz)

# From The Chair

## The First Opinion Column from our new Chairperson, Natali Allen

Recently our small local group met in Rawene to report and review the 2009 Sea of Faith Conference in Hamilton. One hundred and sixty people had met, drawn by the quality of the speakers and the topic for consideration: *Who Needs Jesus? Life in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*.

For us in the far North, the Conference was a resounding success in the quality and focus of the papers and their presentation, the potential that we saw in continuing group discussions, and the setting — the picturesque surroundings, the beautiful concert in a splendid hall, and the comfortable accommodation and good food.

Our thanks as a group, and I am sure those of all who attended, go again to Fred Marshall and Peter Cowley, and all those who assisted in the organisation; and to the speakers and group leaders for the quality of the thought and discussion that they introduced and supported. In all it was a very enjoyable, thought-provoking and energizing experience.

The Conference papers are now all easily accessed on the web site and are well worth further study and thought. However, here is as a short summary to whet the appetite again:

On Saturday morning, **David Boulton** concluded his paper "Does Jesus Matter Any More?" by asking the audience, reconstituted as a jury, to consider the questions "Does Jesus matter today? Does he still speak to our condition? Is his dream relevant in the modern secular world?"

Following the group discussions, the response from the majority of those present was "Yes, Jesus is relevant today". In the two days of the Conference we then went on to expand the discussion a wide range of related questions in closely focused thoughtful papers and discussion.

- **Who needs Jesus ?**
- **Which Jesus ?**
- **What did he really say? What did he really do?**
- **Who Needs Jesus, When you've got drugs ?**
- **How relevant can Jesus be after 2,000 years in a secular world ?**
- **What does Christianity bring to a secular world? Can people be religious anymore?**
- **Does Jesus need us? Do we choose to need Jesus? What for? Why?**
- **Who/What is Jesus in Jewish, Islamic, Ancient Chinese Christian literature?**
- **Is the question rather - Do we need to love our enemies?**

In a series of well focused papers we were offered the opportunity to explore the world, life and person of Jesus, what other traditions report, and the little we can verify about him and his teaching.

**David Boulton** described the tiny restricted area of a flat earth occupying a three tiered universe in which Jesus lived, with the God of Israel above — a pre-scientific world limited intellectually and geographically. In comparison there is the world we find ourselves in today, and we ask the question "What on earth does a late Iron Age teacher in an obscure corner of the long-defunct Roman empire usefully have to say to those of us who live in the post-modern Space Age a couple of millennia after his death?"<sup>1</sup>

**Greg Jenks** sought to clarify which Jesus — *whose* Jesus — we were considering, and introduced us to Jesus in early Jewish, Islamic and Ancient Chinese literature – an exciting wealth of poetry, perceptions and insights about Jesus through the eyes of other cultures and religions.

Then back in the Christian tradition, we were able to consider the impetus to create a Being to meet particular needs and situations – amongst others a Saviour to overcome humanly identified and introduced sin; and to recognise that "If there is no alienation between God and man, man has no need of a Saviour and historical Christianity is a mere illusion"<sup>2</sup>.

This in turn introduced thinkers who sought to distinguish between the orthodox Christian Christ (the Christ of Faith) and the historical figure (the Jesus of History) — to emphasise humanity rather than divinity.

**Doug Sellman** was able to illustrate perceptions of the human Jesus and the idealized Christ in a picture which he had commissioned from a painter friend Kees Bruin<sup>3</sup>. The painting is titled "Jesus Christ" and it represented for him the "separation of the earthly Jesus the real, from the heavenly Christ the delusional fantasy" He then went on to explore the place of therapeutic and spiritual experiences which help people make positive changes and cope better with life<sup>4</sup>.

As a conclusion to this debate, **Don Cupitt** was quoted: "Jesus was an almost secular teacher, whose teaching was entirely concerned with attempting by all means to persuade his hearers to drop everything and commit themselves whole-heartedly to a quite new moral world, a human-life-world in which everything is open to view and is exactly what it presents itself as being, and a world ruled by love in which everyone lives from and by the heart."<sup>5</sup>

Both **Lloyd Geering** and **David Boulton** suggested that the human Jesus had a dream of a better world. In summary — a dream that can shape our values and orient our lives, alert us to new possibilities and ways of living and being human, empower us to take action, and to show a new consciousness in our lives. One that does not rely on naive assumptions that "all will be well", that ultimate justice is guaranteed, or that perfection is attainable, but a dream that can energise us to reach for the impossible, promising that paradise lies in the attempting the journey rather than in a guarantee of safe arrival. Martin Luther King had a dream *because* Jesus had a dream — one that is equally available to all people, and applicable in today's world.

We were then left to choose the meaning we take from the wealth of material available to us, to recognise the humanity of Jesus and to wonder whether "The modern secular world would today be affirming the values of love, peace, justice, compassion, personal freedom, human rights and self-sacrifice, even if Jesus had not lived and taught as he did?"<sup>6</sup> and "What would we lose if we ignore Jesus in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?"

**Margaret Mayman** suggested that the legacy that Jesus has left for us today is "A faith perspective that is unashamedly positive toward this world as our home. That means we are open to science, that we share values with others, that we see God present in many cultures, arts and philosophies, that we seek the healing of the world, that we appreciate the religious insights and longings of people of other faiths." ... and ... "If we try to take Jesus out of his political and religious context and apply 'the Golden Rule' to our comfortable lives, we will neglect to notice that for Jesus, the application of compassion came with the pursuit of justice that sought to turn the established order upside down"<sup>7</sup>.

At the end of the Conference, with all the 'evidence' presented, no doubt the audience/jury would still conclude that Jesus is relevant in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

We are left with the questions

- **How do we use the principles and values Jesus taught?**
- **How do we apply compassion and pursue justice in our secular world?**



**Natali Allen**  
*Chairperson 2009-2010*

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<sup>1</sup> Boulton, D. *Does Jesus Matter Anymore?* SoF NZ Conference, September 2009

<sup>2</sup> Geering, L. *Do We Need Jesus?* SoF NZ Conference, September 2009

<sup>3</sup> This painting can be viewed on page 12 of the *Sea of Faith Newsletter*, No 81, March 2009

<sup>4</sup> Sellman, D. *Who needs Jesus, when you've got drugs?* SoF NZ Conference, September 2009

<sup>5</sup> Cupitt, D. (2009) *Jesus and Philosophy*, SCM Press, London

<sup>6</sup> Geering, L. *Do We Need Jesus?* SoF NZ Conference, September 2009

<sup>7</sup> Mayman, M. *Jesus, Justice and Community: A Progressive Christian Perspective*. SoF NZ Conference, September 2009