

*Celebrating 20 Years of SoF in New Zealand*

# Sea of Faith

## The National Religious Discussion Network

[www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz)

NEWSLETTER 102, SEPTEMBER 2012

# What Jesus Didn't Say

An interview with author Gerd Lüdemann

Reprinted from the March-April 2012 edition of *The Fourth R* with permission of Westar Institute. The interviewer was Tom Hall.

**The Fourth R:** What led you to write a book focusing exclusively on sayings that cannot credibly be assigned to Jesus?

**Gerd Lüdemann:** First, because many of these sayings have played a central role in defining Christianity and are therefore widely cited and taken at face value, they tend to be thought immune to critical analysis. Second, it needs to be iterated and reiterated that the inauthentic sayings greatly outnumber the authentic ones—if only to remind people that much of the New Testament record is fiction. Third, while the criteria for authenticity have become reasonably familiar to many, the arguments against authenticity have been neither clearly canvassed nor stringently applied. In short, these inauthentic sayings have been unduly neglected, and I thought it was high time to take a careful look at the subject.

**4R:** To what degree did this book grow out of *Jesus After 2000 Years*, the book you published in 2001 that was essentially your personal version of *The Five Gospels*?

**GL:** In that volume, as the subtitle indicates, my primary aim was to determine "what Jesus really said and did." Indirectly, I suppose, the present book is to some degree the other side of the coin, inasmuch as it focuses on what he did *not* say.

**4R:** Another question along the same line: What role, if any, did your later volume, *Intolerance and the Gospel* play in your decision to examine what Jesus didn't say?

**GL:** Indeed the one did, though indirectly, lead to the other. In that study of the pseudonymous and pseudepigraphical epistles I identified a great many false sayings that early Christian writers used against one another in order to establish their authority or that of other church leaders. Therefore, it was a natural sequel to take a separate look at the false sayings found in the gospels as well as their settings.

**4R:** Once the idea for this book began to take shape in your mind, did working on it require a good deal of further study and research, or did the text more or less write itself?

**GL:** In the big book (*Jesus After 2000 Years*) I had pretty much determined the extent of the false sayings. But then I had to rethink and rewrite most of the text because the false sayings deserved a study in their own right and a special look into their settings.

**4R:** Why do you think it is important to demonstrate something that most scholars and well-informed non-specialists are already pretty certain of—namely, that Jesus didn't really say most of the things that are attributed to him?

**GL:** Demonstrating the degree of authorial invention uncovers the considerable amount of forgery to be found in the texts of the New Testament, and thus undermines the almost unlimited authority that is commonly accorded them. In doing gospel studies we should always be suspicious, remembering that the

text in front of us has gone through the hands of "Christian authors" who, supposedly inspired by the Holy Spirit, edited and falsified large parts of the four gospels. Only by subjecting their work to strict canons of historical criticism will we be able to catch a few glimpses of the real Jesus.

**4R:** It seems to me that this new book is an integral part of your ongoing work. Do you agree?

**GL:** Indeed I do.

**4R:** How would you characterize that work, then? What is at the center of it—or to use a favorite metaphor of yours, what is the golden thread that runs through it? Is it perhaps the business of applying the historical-critical method to Scriptural exegesis?

**GL:** I would add only one word to that: it the business of *fully* applying the historical-critical method to Scriptural exegesis.

**4R:** That being so, it would seem as if you and the Jesus Seminar are pretty much on the same page: like *The Fourth R* you are trying to promote religious literacy; and as previously noted, your *Jesus After 2000 Years* is a close parallel to *The Five Gospels*.

**GL:** Yes, and even before I joined Westar, I was very grateful and excited when in 1994 I found out that a group of New Testament scholars in North America was both asking and producing honest answers to the same questions that I have been asking since my student days. Now, after more than a decade as a Fellow, after having Polebridge publish several of my books, and especially since I have retired to Nashville, I feel even more at home.

**4R:** To what degree did you consciously adopt a contentious attitude when, in 1998, you placed your "Letter to Jesus" at the beginning of *The Great Deception*? Is it perhaps significant that the subtitle of that book—*What Jesus Really Said and Did*—seems to have an echo in your present title.

**... within a few decades of  
Jesus' death,  
the New Testament traditions had  
already falsified his original voice.**

**GL:** My purpose in placing the letter to Jesus at the beginning of my book was to underline the point that, within a few decades of Jesus' death, the New Testament traditions had already falsified his original voice. In my letter I confronted 'Jesus' with this deplorable fact and explained why, in view of this, no thinking person could remain a traditional Christian. Because of their lack of accurate information, their different audiences, and their diverse personal theological agendas, Paul and the several evangelists created a number of different 'Jesuses' as well as often conflicting versions of his message.

Along this line, let me note two other things. First, in the course of writing the present book I discovered that the number of invented sayings is greater than I had previously recognized, and that in them we encounter a Christianity that "spins" and distorts whatever does not fit the preconceived mold. I fear it is an uncritical commitment to belief in the risen Christ that has unfortunately lifted the faith tradition out of the human world to which it belongs.

Second, this new book of mine undertakes, for what I believe is the first time, to emphasize the full extent of New Testament

invention by pointing to the last book of the Bible as yet another source of fictitious sayings attributed to Jesus—or rather to the risen Christ. Heretofore the existence of inauthentic sayings has been deduced from the contents of the gospels, together with structural and rhetorical considerations. Now we can see that the first three chapters of Revelation further certify what scholars have long concluded: that the invention of sayings to be put into Jesus' mouth went on for some while after the gospels had been written.

**4R:** That letter to Jesus, as it turned out, led to a hornet's nest of professional and personal problems for you. Could you describe them briefly and comment on how they affected your career?

**GL:** The University of Gottingen at first attempted to fire me, arguing that one who professed such "heretical" views was unfit to teach students preparing for the ministry. When my status as a tenured professor raised legal barriers to that, and the expressed outrage of a number of scholars—not least among them Bob Funk and many Westar Fellows—resulted in an embarrassment to the university, I was demoted from my chair in Theology of the New Testament to that of History and Literature of Early Christianity and stripped of my right to supervise dissertations. Further, since my new chair did not carry with it an approved curriculum, nobody would be interested in studying with me because they would not earn academic credit. The result was that all my doctoral students (nine gifted scholars) left me in order to look elsewhere for a suitable advisor. Equally painful, I was professionally isolated, and since the local and national German newspapers covered the case in great detail, my wife was shunned and our four children, three of whom attended school in Gottingen and one studied law, were all but ostracized. Things got so bad that one of our daughters was told to go home and tell me that I should "shut up."

**4R:** In short, the University of Gottingen tried with some success to marginalize you and your work, and I suppose that had something to do with your decision to retire to Nashville, where you formerly lived and taught.

**GL:** I am sad to say that you are quite correct. I will never completely understand why a great University with a long-standing and prestigious reputation like that of Gottingen would give in to the demands of the Lutheran church of Hannover.

**4R:** To what degree did your bad experience with the University's insistence on the appearance of religious orthodoxy sour you on Christianity and lead you to focus on exposing its scriptural and doctrinal flaws?

**GL:** I must confess that I suddenly sensed hypocrisy springing up everywhere, with most of it based on orthodox doctrines that my colleagues themselves knew had long been shown to be false. I concluded that we need a second enlightenment, a commitment to a search for truth that has not decided in advance the results that it will discover. To this effort I mean to dedicate my career in retirement.

**Gerd Ludemann is Professor emeritus of History and Literature of Early Christianity at Georg-August-University, Gottingen, Germany, and Visiting Scholar at Vanderbilt Divinity School, Nashville, Tennessee. He is the author of many books including *What Jesus Didn't Say* (2011).**



## 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. We recently clarified our purpose by rebranding ourselves as “Sea of Faith: The National Religious Discussion Network” and “Exploring Spirituality, Religion and Ethics.”

We follow similar organisations in both the UK and Australia in taking our name from the 1984 television series and book by the British religious academic, Don Cupitt.

The TV series both traces the decline of traditional Christian influence in the West in the past 250 years and invites the viewer to consider what might replace it. In New Zealand the Sea of Faith Network provides a forum for the continued exploration.

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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.

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Our national **Steering Committee** publishes a Newsletter six times each year, maintains a website at [www.sof.org.nz](http://www.sof.org.nz), assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference. We have five **Life Members**: Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK), Noel Cheer, Ian Harris and Alan Goss.

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, phone (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 **Peter Cowley** ([pcowley@paradise.net.nz](mailto:pcowley@paradise.net.nz)) your mailing details.

Members may borrow books, CDs, etc. from the **Resource Centre** which is managed by **Suzi Thirlwall** ([susanthirlwall@yahoo.co.nz](mailto:susanthirlwall@yahoo.co.nz)), phone (07) 578-2775

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, phone (04)236-7533 email: [noel@cheer.org.nz](mailto:noel@cheer.org.nz)

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## JOSEPH CAMPBELL'S TEN COMMANDMENTS FOR READING MYTHOLOGY

1. Read myths with the eyes of wonder: the myths are transparent to their universal meaning, their meaning transparent to its mysterious source.
2. Read myths in the present tense: Eternity is now.
3. Read myths in the first person plural: the Gods and Goddesses of ancient mythology still live within you.
4. Any myth worth its salt exerts a powerful magnetism. Notice the images and stories that you are drawn to and repelled by. Investigate the field of associated images and stories
5. Look for patterns; don't get lost in the details. What is needed is not more specialized scholarship, but more interdisciplinary vision. Make connections; break old patterns of parochial thought.
6. Re-sacralize the secular: even a dollar bill reveals the imprint of Eternity.
7. If God is everywhere, then myths can be generated anywhere, anytime, by anything. Don't let your Romantic aversion to science blind you to the Buddha in the computer chip.
8. Know your tribe! Myths never arise in a vacuum; they are the connective tissue of the social body which enjoys synergistic relations with dreams (private myths) and rituals (the enactment of myth).
9. Expand your horizons! Any mythology worth remembering will be global in scope. The earth is our home and humankind is our family.
10. Read between the lines! Literalism kills; Imagination quickens.

## BODHINYANARAMA

**Situated in a 51 hectare wooded valley near Wellington is a Buddhist monastic sanctuary.**

It is the focus for a thriving community and serves a variety of functions. While principally a residence for those wishing to participate or train in the monastic lifestyle, the large public area and meeting hall are used for religious festivals, public meetings and retreats. The forested area with remote lodgings provides a suitable environment for seclusion. The senior monks instruct in meditation, teach Buddhist

principles, lead retreats and provide religious services for the Buddhist community, both at the monastery and at other venues in New Zealand and elsewhere. More: <http://bodhinyanarama.net.nz>

## BOOK NOTES

**While we look forward to reviews of these books, these notes will at least introduce them to you:**

***The Power of Parable* by John Dominic Crossan. (SPCK London 2012)**

With Robert Funk, Crossan co-founded The Jesus Seminar. He has written extensively on the historical Jesus ("social revolutionary, Jewish Socrates, political troublemaker").

He brings those themes together in this book which invites us to see the Gospels themselves as mega-parables. This book is subtitled "How fiction *by* Jesus became fiction *about* Jesus." In neither use of the term "fiction" is it intended dismissively. Fiction is an essential vehicle for transmitting truth.

Crossan's treatment of parables – riddle, example and challenge – leads on to the suggestion that the Gospels are indeed parables but some of them unjustifiably attribute rhetorical violence to Jesus. The classic example, though not on the lips of Jesus, is as at Matt: 27:25 where we see the gospel writer sowing the seeds of anti-Semitism.

Several writers, including Crossan, credit Jesus with perfecting the parable as a rhetorical style.

***The Last Testament* by Don Cupitt (SCM Press 2012).**

In the Preface to this book, Don rates two other of his books, *Solar Ethics* (1995) and *The Fountain* (2011), as his best. The first Part of this book invites us to give up on the 'Baroque' approach to religion that the church has maintained and to be involved with '[j]ust religion, without self-deception.'

Don uses "Last" in contrast to "New" because, he says, the NT steered us off into unprofitable directions of other-worldliness, to the age of the **Church** (with this world seen as merely penultimate, like an airport transit lounge) instead of the "promised age of the **Kingdom** of God on earth" (with people living their present life as their last.) The mode of living that each choice entails has enormous consequences for how we 'do religion'.

The second part reproduces some of Don's lectures of the last decade.

Don has been promising us a 'last book' for some time but, at the end of this Preface, he formally surrenders to the inevitability of yet more.

**Noel Cheer**



# GETTING THE RELATIONSHIP RIGHT

Our current economic system—which assumes endless growth and limitless potential wealth—flies in the face of the fact that the earth's resources are finite.

## *Right Relationship:*

### *Building a Whole Earth Economy*

Peter Brown, Geoffrey Garver

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009 - 216 pages.

The following is a “publisher’s blurb”.

[This book ...]

- Outlines a bold new model for a just and flourishing earth
- Analyzes why so many well-meaning reform efforts fall short
- Explains what everyone can do to make this new model a reality

Our current economic system—which assumes endless growth and limitless potential wealth—flies in the face of the fact that the earth's resources are finite. The result is increasing destruction of the natural world and growing, sometimes lethal, tensions between rich and poor, global north and south. Trying to fix problems piecemeal is not the solution. We need a comprehensive new vision of an economy that can serve people and all of life's commonwealth.

Peter G. Brown and Geoffrey Garver use the core Quaker principle of “right relationship”—interacting in a way that is respectful to all and that aids the common good—as the foundation for a new economic model. *Right Relationship* poses five basic questions: What is an economy for? How does it work? How big is too big? What's fair? And how can it best be governed?

The authors expose the antiquated, shortsighted, and downright dangerous assumptions that underlie our current answers to these questions, as well as the shortcomings of many current

reform efforts. They propose new answers that combine an acute awareness of ecological limits with a fundamental focus on fairness and a concern with the spiritual, as well as the material, well-being of the human race.

Brown and Garver describe new forms of global governance that will be needed to get and keep the economy in right relationship. Individual citizens can

and must play a part in bringing this relationship with life and the world into being.

Ultimately the economy, as indeed life itself, is a series of interconnected relationships. An economy based on the idea of “right relationship” offers not only the promise of a bountiful future but also an opportunity to touch the fullness of human meaning and, some would say, the presence of the Divine.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Moral Enhancement

A similar, but more detailed, argument is advanced at [http://philosophynow.org/issues/91/Moral\\_Enhancement](http://philosophynow.org/issues/91/Moral_Enhancement)

*Excerpt:* “...evolutionary pressures have not developed for us a psychology that enables us to cope with the moral problems our new power creates. Our political and economic systems only exacerbate this. Industrialisation and mechanisation have enabled us to exploit natural resources so efficiently that we have over-stressed two-thirds of the most important ecosystems.” BTW: there's an underscore between “Moral” and “Enhancement” in the address. It is obscured by the general underscore.

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*While we're on the subject of our shortcomings and vulnerabilities. This time its insecurity, malleability and relativism ...*

## The West is Laid Back and Relativistic

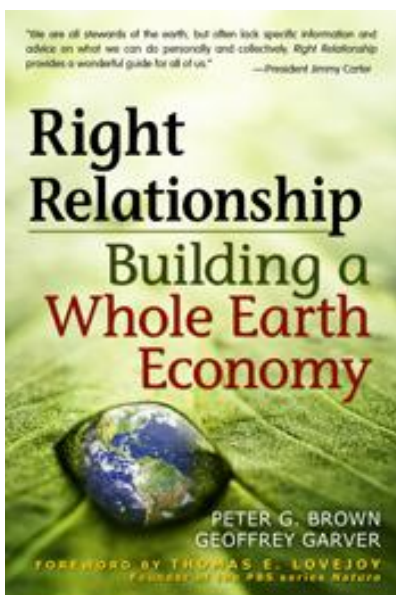
The weekly magazine, *The Economist*, in its August 29, 2009 edition, featured a review of the book *Reflections on the Revolution in Europe: Immigration, Islam and the West* by Christopher Caldwell.

“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.”**



# BICENTENARY OF GOSPEL BEGINNINGS IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

## 2012 HISTORY CONFERENCE

27-29 November 2012

IWI – CHRISTIANITY – TAUIWI

**Re-evaluating Christianity's Influence  
in Shaping Aotearoa New Zealand  
c.1800 to c.1860**

### 27 November 2012, 4pm:

Pōwhiri, Welcome & Opening at Te Whare  
Rūnanga, Waitangi Treaty Grounds, Waitangi,  
Bay of Islands.

### 28-29 November 2012:

Plenary sessions:  
Copthorne Hotel, Waitangi, Bay of Islands,

## TWO YEARS FROM NOW

Planning is underway for events that will commemorate and celebrate the partnership of Ruatara and Marsden in the first recorded proclamation of the Christian Gospel at Oihi on Christmas Day in 1814.

The events of 1814 are seminal not only for church life in our nation, but also for the foundation of the bicultural life of our nation. We all seek to grow in our understanding of one another and the place of the gospel message as we look towards 2014.

This website ([www.gospel2014.org/](http://www.gospel2014.org/)) will continue to develop over the period leading up to the bicentenary day itself, providing information on events around the country and recounting the history of 1814 and beyond.



## BEING SECULAR Dialogue with Modernity

In May 2012 in London, Don Cupitt and Stephen Batchelor took part in a chaired dialogue that looked at the secular aspects of their respective faith positions, which might be styled as “post-Christian” and “secular Buddhism”. Some excerpts are below. A loose transcript and other supporting material can be seen at

<http://secularbuddhism.org/2012/08/02/batchelor-cupitt/>

**JB:** “As a secular Buddhist my concern is primarily how we respond to the world in which we live now. I am not interested in how we got here, particularly in some metaphysical sense, through rebirth or whatever, and nor am I particularly interested in what will happen after my death.”

“I am concerned therefore that the Buddhist tradition somehow engages in a dialogue with modernity, not just a dialogue with other religions, but begins to somehow get to grips with the secular world, secular culture of which we are a part.”

“I feel myself to be a religious person, but I feel that to be more the case in terms of the sorts of questions that most deeply motivate me. What is this life, what is death? Rather than religious in the sense of adhering to a particular set of dogmas or doctrines or beliefs. In some ways this is a sense of religion that is quite close to the old Greek understanding of philosophia, of the love of wisdom, of philosophy.”

**DC:** I am a person for whom our language gives us only one world and it is this world, and only one life and it is this life. Our language was developed by us, language was not taught to men by the gods originally. We developed our language amongst ourselves for certain purposes of our life in this world and we cannot usefully pretend to be able to jump right out of this world and talk sense about the supposed invisible, supernatural world above.”

“We try to become completely satisfied with our own outpouring transience. We live by self-outing and self-giving. We live a dying life, burning like a candle until we burn out. We live all-out, completely identified with and even affirming our own transience. It's to live in an eternal now, as God was said to do.”

# THE STEERING COMMITTEE

## It needs “topping up”

### The Network Structure

The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Inc. is structured as follows:

- It is an Incorporated Society and a Registered Charitable Body.
- The Constitution outlines the principles on which the Network is based.
- Membership is made up of individuals who pay an annual subscription, or have been awarded Life Membership in recognition of their significant contribution to the Network.
- All members have the right to elect the Steering Committee which acts as a National Body supporting members in meeting the aims of the Network through the provision of a Newsletter, Website, Resource Centre and Annual Conference.
- Local groups are formed by members in local areas who meet to share in activities related to the aims of the movement. These may include those who are not Sea of Faith members, but who have interest in pursuing the aims of the Network.

### The Steering Committee

The Constitution allows for between 8 and 12 members on the Steering Committee elected by the membership at each Annual General Meeting.

Steering Committee members may serve up to four years, with the exception of the Treasurer who may be reappointed each year by the Steering Committee to serve up to eight years.

The Steering Committee is responsible for facilitation of the Network including:

- Ensuring that all legal obligations related to Incorporated Society and Charitable status, and arising in the Constitution, are met.
- Oversight of the organisation of the Annual General Meeting and conducting elections.
- Ensuring the maintenance of a current membership list.
- Accountability for the finances of the Network.
- Review of membership subscriptions and policies as the need arises.
- Ongoing support and coordination of local groups including providing financial support to local groups in meeting the aims of the Network.
- The financing and support of a Resource Centre of books, papers, DVDs, CDs and other material available to members.

- Providing resources and information to advance the aims of the Network and to ensure communication with membership through:
- Publication of a National Newsletter.
- Maintenance of a National Website.
- The sale of appropriate material produced for the Sea of Faith (NZ).
- The financing and support an Archive of historical documents.
- The appointment, annual confirmation, acknowledgement, and ongoing support of those who undertake voluntary roles within the Network. These are:
  - Resource Centre Manager.
  - Archivist.
  - Web Master.
  - Newsletter Editor and Publication and Distribution Volunteers.
- Oversight of the organisation of the National Conference including:
  - Support of the Local Group organising and hosting the Conference.
  - Determining Location, Time, Theme and Speakers for the Annual Conference.
- The mutual support of the work of those who fill Steering Committee Roles.

### Candidates for election at the 2012 Annual General Meeting

#### Laurie Chisholm (Christchurch)

Laurie Chisholm has been involved in the Christchurch group for many years. He has been its newsletter editor, web master and coordinator. He led the local arrangements for Conference 2011 in Christchurch and was an advocate in favour of the recent proposals to rename/rebrand the Sea of Faith. He works part-time as a technical author for Tait Limited, is married and has twin teenage sons.

Laurie trained as a Presbyterian minister, worked for a time in parishes, studied theology for a year in Germany, and worked for the German Protestant Church. He returned to New Zealand to be the Ecumenical Chaplain at Otago University. He values the Sea of Faith as a safe, neutral space in which fundamental convictions can be explored. He contributes periodically to the Newsletter and is keen to see the Sea of Faith move beyond the rational rejection of traditional Christianity towards a deepened understanding of religion in a broad sense as a dimension of human existence.



### **Bernadette Krasso (Hawkes Bay)**

I understand the purpose of religion and discourse about values to be the on-going attempt to create a framework in which our experiences make sense of the world. I've been involved in religious study and discourse on a regular basis since I was a child. My parents were Catholics in Communist Hungary where my uncle was the village priest, and where claiming religious affiliation was a political stance. After immigrating to the United States, I attended Catholic elementary and high schools, as well as a Catholic women's university. During my years as Training Director for Citigroup, I took delight in thinking I was likely the only person at corporate gatherings with four years of theology courses on her transcript. Moving away from the certainties encapsulated in the Baltimore Catechism (green cover) to my current beliefs evolved from the time I was sixteen until my forties. During that time I was a member of two book clubs and two dinner groups which embraced discussions of values and current events. I was also an active member of the Unitarian Universalist church in Kansas City, a congregation with a strong focus on humanism and social justice which provided a forum to consider religious and moral issues without the constraints of established doctrine. In our search for a similar group of folk in Hawkes Bay who, in the words of the Unitarian Universalist covenant "seek the truth," my husband and I found the Sea of Faith. I welcome the chance to participate in the work of SOF at the national level.

### **Jock Crawford (Waikato)**

Jock Crawford has been involved with Sea of Faith in Hamilton for well over a decade and has for the last couple of years been fulfilling the role of facilitator-by-default for the group which has some 30 plus financial members.

He spent the first part of his life as a sheep and beef farmer in the Morrinsville and Raglan districts but for the last 40 years or so has been involved with printing and publishing. He and his wife, Lee, have been steadily printing and binding a variety of short run books and small publications at their home premises in Hamilton since moving there 17 years ago.

They are both still active members of St Alban's Co-operating Parish, Chartwell, which has a small liberal component.

### **You?**

**The above-mentioned people have already put their names forward. We need more. How about you?**

## **AGENDA** **Annual General Meeting**

**of**  
**The Sea of Faith Network NZ (Inc)**  
**to be held at**  
**St Cuthbert's College, Epsom,**  
**on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> October at 7pm**

1. Welcome
2. Apologies
3. Minutes of the 2011 Annual General Meeting
4. Matters Arising from the 2011 Minutes
5. Reports
  - a) Chairperson: Natali Allen
  - b) Treasurer: Peter Cowley
  - c) Local groups Coordinator: Bev Smith
  - d) Archivist: Alison Eng
  - e) Resource Officer: Suzi Thirlwall
  - f) Webmaster/Newsletter Editor: Noel Cheer
6. Election of Steering Committee members
7. New Business
8. Conference 2013

## **MORE SNIPPETTS**

Selected from the first 100 issues of this Newsletter

### **Ventilation**

"Ah, snug lie those that slumber  
Beneath Conviction's roof.  
Their floors are sturdy lumber  
Their windows weatherproof.  
But I sleep cold forever  
And cold sleep all my kind  
For I was born to shiver  
in the draft from an open mind."

Phyllis McGinley *A Pocket Full of Wry* NL65

### **Five Simple Rules for Happiness**

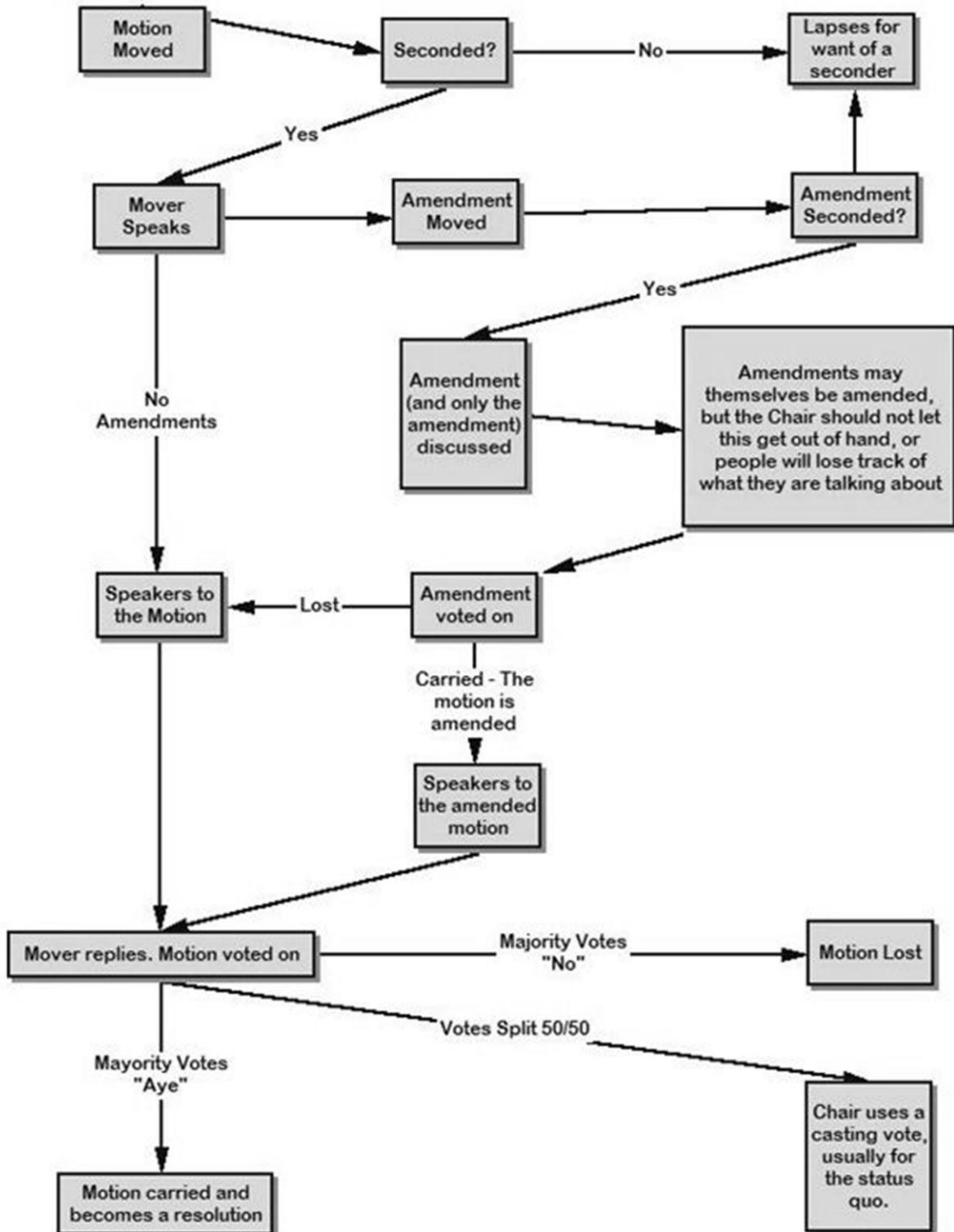
1. Free your heart from hatred.
2. Free your mind from worries.
3. Live simply.
4. Give more.
5. Expect less.

Author unknown NL65



# MOTIONS AND AMENDMENTS

Procedure followed at Sea of Faith Annual General Meetings



## EXPLORING RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY THROUGH POETRY

Offered by Natali Allen

The Blake Prize is presented each year by the NSW Writers' Centre and the Blake Society. It is named for visionary artist and poet William Blake, and was established to give Australian poets new possibilities to explore religion and spirituality in the twenty-first century.

Robert Adamson, the winner of the 2011 Blake Poetry Prize for his poem *Via Negativa, The Divine Dark* said, "Blake's poetry has nourished many souls over the years, and this prize reminds us that we do indeed have souls to keep. It is an honour to win the Blake because it symbolises the toughness one needs to be able to create that lasting thing – the visionary company of love."

### Via Negativa, The Divine Dark

*My Worthiness is all my Doubt—*  
Emily Dickinson

#### 1. A Poem Without Birds

This morning the tree-ferns woke and opened out  
as sunlight dispersed a thick mist—  
this morning in a memory incised

with old phrases. Mouthing  
words then uttering a sentence with your  
unfinished  
breath. Banana trees rustle,

a first breeze arrives, bringing the perfumes  
of the ebb—watermarks down on the mudflats  
begin  
to evaporate.

Morning turns its back on the sun  
then gradually night arrives. In the skylight,  
stars appear through the smoke screen from a  
burn-off,  
brilliant pin holes.

Stars are clustered trees, hung in the night sky.

Whose body, whose eyes? Look  
up into the heavens: the problem of suffering  
expands forever—Dust and light again,  
maybe time, if it exists.

On the table a cicada, flecked with flour,

opening its dry cellophane wings.

The cat flies across polished space illuminated  
by the  
kitchen's energy saving light bulb,  
a Philips 'Genie'.

Life like a dirty wind blowing straight  
through a snowy head, cat's eyes, tint of fur,  
rustling wings.  
Praise life with broken words.

#### 2. A Preliminary Sketch

*What I see not, I better see*  
Emily Dickinson

An old shack by the river, deserted for years  
now,  
haunted by mesh-nets and anchor rope,

wild apple trees grow out the back.  
A charcoal sketch of this scene unfurls before  
me

on a sheet of mist, I push aside tough vines of  
morning glory and then walk on, into the  
drawing,

it's difficult to move in this landscape—  
I have forgotten the names of most flora and  
fauna,

cross-hatched charcoal enfolds me.  
I become a part of the subject matter, my  
shape's

drawn carefully, sharp and figurative—  
however, precision no longer interests me

my attention is focused by smudges, the forms  
grown vague— just fifty years ago

a country of sandstone and gums, a second ago  
ferns and hardship—the heavy tidal swings

roll corks and drown fish caught by their gills  
in the smothering mesh. In the distance bushfire

writes its killer lines, orange loops, burning  
serifs,  
spill over the sandstone escarpments.

**I fished these tides when I was young  
and abstract—what rubbed off, what idea sunk  
home?**

**I rejected the lessons and feared my mother's  
God:  
the Christ I couldn't believe in. The friends**

**in those days, the ones I loved, are now drawn  
beside me in the margins. The Kirk**

**we attended appears, the place where the  
Minister  
refused tell me exactly what a soul might be—**

**although mine, come Judgment Day  
would be flung into Hell, along with the others**

**who weren't chosen. The Presbyterian soul  
is not mysterious, rather it's something we were**

**lumped with. Now I rise from the sketch,  
my face smeared with ink from years of  
sinning—**

**back on the river, my boat plows through fog.  
I'm looking hard. What form, shape or song**

**might represent a soul? What words, paint, or  
mud  
resemble such an intangible glow?**

**A stain of mist hangs above a black-butt tree,  
fan-brushed by the wings of a grey-headed  
flying-fox.**

**Robert Adamson**

[you can hear an interview or "conversation" with Robert Adamson by going to [www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/08/02/3559232.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/08/02/3559232.htm) ]

## **END-OF-LIFE CHOICES**

To what extent can we prepare for end-of-life and to what extent should we be permitted to determine when, where and how?

### **The Debate is on again**

Speaking personally (as an editor is sometimes privileged to do) I don't see an essential conflict between Assisted Suicide and Hospice Support. My own experience and reflection lead me to prefer hospice but to acknowledge that there are intractable situations in which Assisted Suicide is all that is available to deliver an adequate level of compassion.

At the time when this Newsletter was in preparation, a Private Member's Bill promoting Assisted Suicide sponsored by Labour M.P. Maryann Street was waiting to be drawn from the Parliamentary Ballot while, in apparent rebuttal, Hospice New Zealand was sponsoring public meetings which explain their methods and (almost total) capacity to alleviate end-of-life suffering.

In addition, National North Shore Member of Parliament, Maggie Barry, recently announced the formation of an All Parliamentary Group on Palliative Care established in partnership with Hospice NZ and the palliative care sector. Its inaugural meeting was addressed (by phone) by Baroness Finlay of Llanduff who was in New Zealand in support of Hospice New Zealand.

### **What You Can Do: Advance Care Planning**

*Much of the section below comes from promotional literature issued by the Ministry of Health.*

The development of medical knowledge and tools has dramatically changed medical care – how we can be sustained or mended. These medical breakthroughs have also changed how and where we die.

Think about this:

You have a life-threatening illness or have been in a serious accident. Your mind or body, or both, are badly affected and you were close to death.

What would you want medical treatment to do for you? Keep you comfortable, control your pain and treat any other unpleasant symptoms while allowing a natural death to occur? Or prolong your life with active life-support medical treatments such as surgery, drugs, drips and feeding tubes – even though you have little hope of returning to what you'd consider 'a good life'?

Also consider, when would you want the focus to change from life support to comfort care? And who would you like to have there, to talk to medical staff about what you want?

You can read about this programme and download a free document at [www.health.govt.nz/publication/advance-care-planning-guide-new-zealand-health-care-workforce](http://www.health.govt.nz/publication/advance-care-planning-guide-new-zealand-health-care-workforce)

### **More Websites**

Hospice New Zealand [www.hospice.org.nz/](http://www.hospice.org.nz/)

Voluntary Euthanasia Society [www.ves.org.nz](http://www.ves.org.nz)

Organ donors [www.donor.co.nz](http://www.donor.co.nz)



## FROM THE CHAIR

In 1993 Henryk Skolimowski in his book *A Sacred Place to Dwell*<sup>1</sup> introduces three groups of values which he describes as follows:

- Religious values, which regulate relationships with God and other human beings,
- Secular or scientific-technological values which determine human relationships with objects, and
- Ecological values described as universe and life centred, based on a perception of all life as unity, and leading to reverence for other people, cultures and life at large. These are based on solidarity and justice, and Skolimowski suggests, could become “the spine of a new world order”

The following year in *The Participatory Mind*,<sup>2</sup> he introduces ten strategies and principles which he offers as a guide to new understandings. These include:

- Becoming aware of one’s conditioning, deep assumptions, and values and how these guide our behaviour action and thinking.
- Recognising undesirable values and assumptions and how actions and behaviors are influenced by them.
- Articulating alternative assumptions and values; and imagining behaviour, actions and thinking which would arise from these.
- Deliberately trying to bring about behaviours, thinking and actions based on desirable values and assumptions.

**Clearly responses to Skolimowski’s ideas could offer almost unlimited thought and discussion at this year’s Conference.** At the same time the Conference programme suggests equally stimulating ideas from speakers introducing their thoughts about the values which guide and direct the world in which we live, and the lives which we lead within it. With potential for discussion about the evolution and source of values, relationships between values, religion and society, and values for the future, Conference promises, if not to answer, to raise questions for all of us.

**This year’s Conference celebrates 20 years of the Sea of Faith in New Zealand** and with the Archival Display to jog memories there will be opportunity for recalling and reminiscing with old and friends about the experiences we have had along the way. Perhaps each of us could begin now by thinking about the highlights of

both membership in Local Groups and at Annual Conferences since 1993.

**The Annual General Meeting** will be held at 7pm on Friday 5th October and the Agenda for the meeting appears in this Newsletter along with a summary of the procedure to be used in the discussion of any remits brought to the Meeting. The Newsletter also has the profiles of those who have so far been nominated for the Steering Committee. It is still possible to make further nominations if there is someone at Conference who can speak to the nomination, so if you know, or are, someone who is interested in contributing to the future of the Network in this way please complete the nomination form and ensure that it gets to Alan Jackson ([alanjackson@xtra.co.nz](mailto:alanjackson@xtra.co.nz)) before the Annual General Meeting.

**We all thank the Auckland Arrangements Committee** who have worked hard to make this an interesting and stimulating Conference in a comfortable and beautiful setting close to Cornwall Park and once again we can look forward to an enjoyable weekend.



**Natali Allen, Chairperson 2011-2012**

# STOP PRESS!

## Heaven is Now Open To All SoF Members

Well, not quite yet – but we’re working on it. In the meantime the Steering Committee has extended the 2012 Conference Registration time and removed the late fee.

So we can receive your Conference Registration up to **September 15th** – and there’s no late fee.

<sup>1</sup> P. 40 -41

<sup>2</sup> p. 140-1