



Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 114, September/October 2014

THE ISLAMIC STATE DEMAND FOR A CALIPHATE

IT'S ABOUT POWER, NOT RELIGION

Extracted from an article by William Dalrymple, The Guardian 13 July 2014

On 3 March 1924, the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul was surrounded by Republican Turkish troops. Inside, the last Ottoman caliph, Abdülmecid II, was reading the essays of Montaigne. Late that night, the prefect of police came to tell him that Ataturk's new assembly in Ankara had just voted to abolish the caliphate and that he was to leave the country at dawn.

Photographs of the last caliph show an elderly, intellectual figure in a fez, kaftan and pince-nez, absorbed in the books of his library. Here he composed classical music and read the complete works of Victor Hugo, while cultivating his gardens and painting portraits of his family. But the following morning, he and his family were escorted into exile in Europe aboard the Orient Express, eventually settling in Nice. He was never allowed to return.

A few years later, the last caliph was spotted by the correspondent of *Time* magazine. "He may be seen strolling with a mien of great dignity along the beach near Nice," the reporter wrote, "attired in swimming trunks only, carrying a large parasol."

His daughter married into the family of the Nizam of Hyderabad, and whatever the dreams of the Islamic world, there has been little interest among Abdülmecid's family to revive the office that Ataturk took from them.

In the absence of a descendant to fill the vacancy, the position of caliph was claimed by Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi during midday prayers [on June 29, 2014] in Mosul.

Al-Baghdadi is the elusive leader of **ISIS**, the group formerly known as **Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant**, which has self-contracted itself into the **Islamic State**. A detailed description can be found at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_State_of_Iraq_and_the_Levant#cite_note-Du.27a-368

WHAT IS A CALIPH?

When the Prophet Muhammad died (June 8, 632 CE), Abū Bakr succeeded to his political and administrative functions as *khalīfah rasūl Allāh*, "successor of the Messenger of God," but it was probably under 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second caliph, that the term *caliph* came into use as a title of the civil and religious head of the Muslim state. In the same sense, the term was employed in the Qur'ān in reference both to Adam and to David as the vice-regents of God.

[At the time of compiling this Newsletter, the United States is conducting air strikes against the Islamic State over atrocities that it has perpetrated in northern Iraq.]

Clad in black robes, al-Baghdadi cut a rather different figure from his predecessor, whose favourite reading was the *Revue des Deux Mondes*. Instead, during his hour-long sermon in which "Caliph Ibrahim" announced his elevation, the only literary references given were to the Qur'an and the Hadiths.

The restoration of the caliphate has been a dream of Islamic revivalists since at least the 1950s, when Hizb ut-Tahrir began calling for its resurrection. The Taliban leader Mullah Omar went as far as claiming for himself one of the caliph's traditional titles, Amir al-Mu'minin, the commander of the believers; the restoration of the caliphate was often

mentioned by Osama bin Laden as his ultimate goal.

But al-Baghdadi is the first Islamic leader since Abdülmecid to take the title, which, for many Muslims, distils deep millennial dreams of a great, just, pure multinational empire of faith – the nearest thing the Islamic world has ever seen, so the Islamists will insist, to heaven on Earth. Nostalgia for



Abdülmecid II (29 May 1868 – 23 August 1944): the last Sunni Caliph of Islam from the Ottoman Dynasty.

this lost world is directly associated with the golden age of early Islam, when under the leadership of the first four caliphs – the successors [of Muhammad] – Islam expanded from the Hejaz out through the Levant to borders of Sindh in the east and southern France in the west.

As Edward Gibbon put it in one of his most celebrated passages: "A victorious line of march had been prolonged from the Rock of Gibraltar to the banks of the Loire; the repetition of an equal space would have carried the Saracens to the confines of Poland and the Highlands of Scotland; the Rhine is not more impassable than the Nile, and the Arabian fleet might have sailed into the mouth of the Thames. Perhaps the interpretation of the Qur'an would now be taught in the schools of Oxford, and her pulpits might demonstrate to a circumscribed people the truth of the Revelation of Mahomet."

Yet, beyond this first century, the history of the caliphate is far more troubled, bloody and contested than many realise.

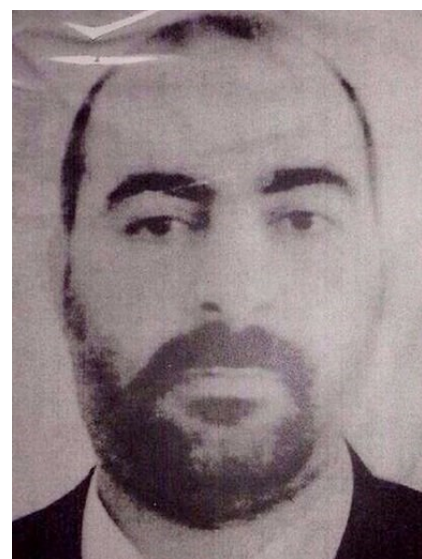
For most of Islamic history the title of caliph has been disputed by a succession of Muslim leaders who were anxious to give sacral legitimacy to conquests already achieved – what the Israelis like to call "facts on the ground". As ever in the Middle East, religion is a useful

mask assumed by the powerful as a way of holding on to power.

By the early 10th century, the title of caliph was contested by the two leading Islamic polities of their day – the Shia Fatamid empire based in Cairo and the Sunni Abbasid caliphate of Baghdad. After Baghdad fell to the Mongols in 1261 and the last Abbasid caliph died in the sack of the city, the title was claimed by the Mameluks in Egypt on the basis of one stray descendant of the last Abbasid who had made his way to Cairo.

When the Ottomans took Mameluk Egypt in 1517, they claimed the caliphate for themselves, though this was soon disputed by their rivals, the Great Mughals of India. In 1579, the Mughal emperor, Akbar, declared himself khalifatu'l-zaman, the caliph of his time, and khalifa remained one of the imperial titles of the Mughals right up to 1858, when the last Mughal, Bahadur Shah Zafar, was packed off to exile in Rangoon by the British.

In addition to these imperial leaders of huge Muslim empires, throughout Islamic history there has been a succession of eccentric millennial Islamist mystics who have briefly declared themselves caliph – the leaders of the Sokoto caliphate in 19th century Nigeria, for example – before being declared heretical and falling from power.



This rare image of Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi was released by the Iraqi interior ministry

It is too early to say to which of these traditions al-Baghdadi belongs and whether Isis represents a brief interlude of Islamist anarchy or marks the beginning of a permanent new jihadistan which will succeed in establishing itself on the map.

Nevertheless, for all the eccentricity of the self-declaration or its flimsy legal basis, it cannot but have great resonance through the Islamic world, coming at a moment of such destabilisation, with Syria and Iraq ablaze, Egypt restive and Israel slaughtering the people of Gaza afresh. It will inevitably attract jihadis from across the globe to the Isis banner.

It is no comfort that the terrible tragedy of Iraq is entirely a mess of our own creation.

William Dalrymple is a writer and historian. He is on the International Advisory Board of Critical Muslim
<http://criticalmuslim.com>

ALL ABOUT US

SEA OF FAITH: EXPLORING VALUES, SPIRITUALITY AND MEANING

We are an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint.

Our formal name is The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) Inc.

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

“Sea of Faith” 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.

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 each year, maintains a website at 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 Fred Marshall.

[note: recent corrections in red]

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To offer a comment on material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact The Editor, 26 Clipper St., Titahi Bay, Porirua 5022, (04) 236-7533 or 0274-483-805 or email to noel@cheer.org.nz

Deadline dates for submitted Newsletter copy in 2014 are:
14 July, 25 August, 27 October.

Members may borrow books, CDs, and DVDs from the Resource Centre which is managed by (07) 578-2775 susanthirlwall@yahoo.co.nz. Refer to the catalogue on the website.

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 and not on paper.

To join, send remittance and details to The Membership Secretary (listed above) or Internet bank to 38 9000 0807809 00 and tell pcowley@paradise.net.nz your mailing details. **Bonus:** If you already receive the paper version then you can receive the email version in addition, *at no charge*. Send an email requesting that to pcowley@paradise.net.nz

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THE ARRANGEMENTS COMMITTEE WELCOMES YOU TO DUNEDIN

The Arrangements Committee is eagerly anticipating a stimulating and enjoyable Conference in Dunedin from October 3 to 5. Full details accompanied Newsletter 112 and also appear on the website at www.sof.org.nz

Please remember to bring warm clothing because, although a very warm welcome awaits you, our changeable climate may not oblige. We do however have the advantage this year of having everything under the one roof.

Please also remember to bring your own towel.

For those of you who are arriving by car, there is limited parking in the grounds. You are welcome to unload at the front entrance but we would ask you to leave the parking spaces for the disabled and keynote speakers. There is street parking nearby in a quiet street.

We look forward to welcoming you to Tolcarne and our city in October.

Marjorie Spittle, Chair of Arrangements Committee 2014

WHERE DID GOD GO?

Ian Harris

“WHERE did God go?” asked a *Time* magazine cover a few years ago, signposting an article about the decline of traditional Christianity in Europe.

It's a searching question, though not as provocative as the one *Time* posed back in 1966: “Is God dead?” If the answer then had proved to be ‘yes’, of course, there would have been no ground to ask the new question decades later, which at least assumes that God is still around to go somewhere.

Dramatic as the questions are, the answer to both has to be: “It depends what you mean by God.” Here are five possible responses to that later question, all confining themselves (as does *Time*) to Christianity: other faiths and their followers would have their own take on it.

God has not gone anywhere. Even in Europe, where church attendance has dwindled and people's general knowledge of Christianity has shrivelled, God remains in this view the creator and sustainer of the universe, the source of all that is good, and our surest hope for the future.

Though people may have abandoned God in their millions, traditionalists would say, it does not follow that God has abandoned them – if he had, he would not be the Christian God. So it is business as usual . . . except that everyone in the church and out of it knows it is not.

God has given up on the old established churches and is to be found among newer, less hidebound groups. *Time* notes a religious vibrancy in informal gatherings, many of them small. This is especially so where people find it safe to explore their thoughts and doubts without being dumped on, where they are free to develop more intimate and reflective styles of worship and, among immigrant groups, where they can be themselves among their own people.

God has gone south. American history and religious studies professor Philip Jenkins sees Christianity as far from moribund, but a huge shift has occurred in its presence around the world – a shift that has gone largely unnoticed in the West. There are, for example, more practising Anglicans in Nigeria than in England, and the disparity is growing.

However, the kind of Christianity rooted among the billion-plus Christians in Latin America, Asia and Africa is not as liberal or open as in much of the West.

It is generally orthodox in outlook, supernatural and often pentecostal in emphasis, conservative in morality, and authoritarian in style. So God as traditionally understood is alive and well on what were once the missionary continents.

The question is invalid: there never was ‘a’ God (understood as a being apart from the world and humanity) to go anywhere. However, there will always be concepts of God (or Godness), developed in response to the deepest human experiences. These have proved enormously valuable over the centuries – and they have of necessity evolved as knowledge has expanded, society has developed, and people's worldview and life experience have changed. New

times repeatedly bring forth new concepts and/or new emphases about God.

English scholar of religions Karen Armstrong puts it this way: Ever since the prophets of Israel started to ascribe their own feelings and experiences to God, monotheists have in some sense created a God for themselves . . . Today many people seem to have lost the will to make this imaginative effort.

“This need not be a catastrophe.

When religious ideas have lost their validity, they have usually faded away painlessly: if the human idea of God no longer works for us in the empirical age, it will be discarded.” And, I would add, new human ideas about God can then slowly take shape.

In other words, while the old theistic God has moved right out of the minds of many Westerners, that spells doom for the churches only if they lack the ability – or the nerve – to think and feel their way through to a new understanding of what the word God can mean for secular people in a secular world.

One such prospect is:

God is being re-imagined in a non-realist way.

That is, for many people God is no longer understood as a real or objective being existing beyond the world and periodically intervening in it, but as a subjective, life-orienting force in human experience.

‘Non-realist’ because while not real in the usual sense of the word, God is still very much ‘for real’, still capable of being re-imagined (or re-created) and experienced in our brave new world.



Ian Harris, Otago Daily Times July 11, 2014
*Ian is a founder member and a Life Member
of Sea of Faith Network in New Zealand*

Faith in Cyberspace

Open Yale Courses: Made available under a Creative Commons Licence

OPEN YALE COURSES

The courses provide free and open access to a selection of introductory courses taught by distinguished teachers and scholars at Yale University. This listing provides access to complete video recordings of undergraduate courses at Yale. Details are available at <http://oyc.yale.edu/>

We are grateful to Ruth Walker of Auckland for providing this listing.

RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Introduction to the Old Testament (Hebrew Bible)
<http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rilst-145#overview>

Introduction to the New Testament History and Literature <http://oyc.yale.edu/religious-studies/rilst-152>

YALE DIVINITY SCHOOL

Yale Divinity School also has a number of excellent videos including the Yale Divinity Bible Study Series. (Some of the videos have not been uploaded in the correct order in the play list here.) These conversations demonstrate how academic integrity and faith can work together.
<http://www.youtube.com/course?list=ECBAB8086DE927F07F>

THE SHAFFER LECTURES

The Shaffer Lectures given by **John P. Meier** OP form a good introduction to his four volume work *A Marginal Jew*.

- *The Jewish Jesus on Jewish Divorce:*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tSDZRomO1rU>
- *The Jewish Jesus and the Sabbath:*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ucaoM-Wmj0c>
- *The Jewish Jesus and Purity Laws:*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pyJ0DZII3Os>

The Burke Lecture he gave at the University of California makes a good introduction to the three Shaffer Lectures:

- *Jesus the Jew: But What Sort of Jew?*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WxeKunPwmp4>

Bart Ehrman has also delivered the Shaffer Lectures:

- *Christ in the Early Christian Tradition: Christ Come in the Flesh*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLA6tU6-GY>
- *Christ in the Early Christian Tradition: Christ the Divine Man*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lpsmcSflxI8>
- *Christ in the Early Christian Tradition: Christ Against the Jews:*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hMI8WBG9HHo>

Ehrman has many more video and audio files on his website at <http://www.bartdehrman.com/>

A one off William Anderton Chisholm Lecture by **Susan Ackerman:**

- *Women and Ancient Israelite Household Religion:*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2kFmUoQ9Lpw>

Amy-Jill Levine is a Professor of New Testament Studies and Orthodox Jew. Here are two of her lectures:

- *Reassessing Jewish-Christian Relations (Burke Lecture):*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WGOobQiRAa8>
- *From Donation to Diatribe: How Anti-Jewish Interpretation Cashes Out (Harvard Divinity School):*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lksnynNv6UU>

The following course from New York University deals with the history of Ancient Israel. It is a good introduction to the debates within archaeology.

- *Daniel Fleming: Ancient Israel:*
<http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL49208CAE353159FA>

Francesca Stavrakopoulou's work is also fascinating. This interview from Classics Confidential gives a taste of the work she does:

- *Monotheism, Disbelief and the Hebrew Bible, an interview with Francesca Stavrakopoulou:*
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UrDT0gBfewk>

Richard Swinburne: This is a representative sample of his work from a conference at Notre Dame University.

- <http://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA80BAB602C35BD85>



Review of a Conference Speaker book by SoF Chairperson, Laurie Chisholm

ZOMBIES, THE CHINESE ROOM AND US

Falling for Science: Asking the Big Questions

Bernard Beckett (2007), 320pp

Pub. Longacre Press

Bernard Beckett is a New Zealand high school teacher who somehow manages to find time to write young adult fiction books as well. For this, his first non-fiction book, it helped that he was awarded a Royal Society fellowship, which gave him a year off teaching.

He is also a keynote speaker at this year's Conference.

The title is a deliberate double entendre. You can fall for science in the sense of falling in love with it but also in the sense of falling for it, being taken in and deceived by it. Beckett approaches his subject matter as a non-specialist, a non-academic who wants to explore the fundamental truth about things. In the first part, there is a lot of discussion of classical philosophers, which did not hold my attention as well as the second part, which deals with modern themes, including evolutionary biology and brain science. Generally, I liked his down-to-earth but thoughtful style and appreciated his clever use of analogies to make his points.

Proper science involves developing a model of reality and then making predictions to test the model. A classic example is Einstein's theory of relativity, which predicted that the strong gravity around stars would bend light. This unexpected prediction proved to be true. **By contrast, lots of what masquerades as science is better described as 'story,' narratives that may sound plausible and often claim scientific authority, but have no testable predictive power.** Evolutionary biology has a lot of this, for example the theory that men are less likely to ask for directions because in our evolutionary past, this would have signaled to the

other tribe that the person was vulnerable and suitable for tonight's dinner.

Chapter 7 is of particular interest because there Beckett comes closest to the theme of this year's Conference, reflecting on the philosophers' debates on consciousness, particularly their thought experiments with 'the Chinese room' and with 'zombies.'

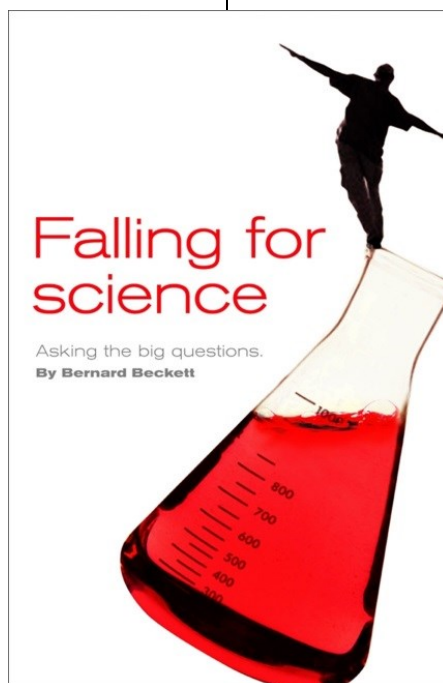
Beckett effectively deflates overblown claims for science and his conclusion is that science cannot

give us all of truth and that we need a combination of science and story.

"We can see ourselves simultaneously as forces, chemical reactions, living entities, cultural constructs, ideas. None of these aspects of our existence is more real or truer than any other. At some point we have to let the science go and simply tell ourselves stories, for it is from stories alone that we derive meaning, and without meaning, we cease to exist as individuals, we collapse into dots [a reference to an earlier analogy of someone who examines TV

'scientifically,' and can see very small coloured dots but not TV programmes]. When I wish to make a judgement regarding beauty and value, I must turn to my personal stories. When I wish to make a moral choice in the world, science is of no use to me. Again, the stories I tell myself will guide me." (p227)

Laurie Chisholm



There is a copy of this book in the SoF NZ Resource Centre with the catalogue number B181.

Suzi Thirlwall manages the Centre. You can find her contact details on page 3 of this Newsletter.

A STROLL THROUGH A GARDEN OF MISCELLANY

CHRISTCHURCH GROUP VISITS MOSQUE

The Christchurch group of the Sea of Faith received an invitation via a rather indirect path to join Muslims in a Ramadan celebration at the Christchurch mosque. We were told that people of all beliefs were welcome but we weren't quite sure what kind of celebration this was. It turned out to be the normal practice after sunset when the fast, which goes from sunrise to sunset, ends. (There is also a celebration marking the end of Ramadan, but it was explained to us that the date was determined by direct observation of the moon, so there is often little advance notice of when that is.)

First we were offered dates and other items, before being invited to the central area of the mosque for prayers. Local leaders explained the process and were available to answer any questions. Following prayers, we sat down to a delicious meal of chicken and rice with further conversations in small groups. When I asked about the press reports that Daryl Jones, an al-Qaida suspect killed in a drone attack, had been taught radical Islam at this mosque, it was explained to me that there is no Islamic school there and the only opportunity for teaching is during the imam's talk at Friday prayers, which everyone hears.

When I picked up some books, which turned out to be all in Arabic, I was handed a beautiful copy of the Qu'ran with English translation and detailed commentary, published in Saudi Arabia. When I left, I was surprised to see many small groups still in conversation outside the mosque. Islam gets a very bad press and this event seemed to me to be a wonderful way of disarming suspicion and making ordinary Muslims – and the way they express their faith – visible. I was grateful for the opportunity to participate.

Laurie Chisholm, Christchurch



LET'S BE KIND: EVEN TO THOSE WHO DISAGREE WITH US

This book was reviewed in Newsletter 105, April 2013.

Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious.

by Christopher Stedman,
published by Beacon Press.

Chris Stedman moved from a fundamentalist version of Christianity to atheism because he was marginalised for being gay. But, instead of a ranting bitterness, he looked for common ground between socially supportive Christians and atheists.

He tells his story in *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*. You can read a review at www.sof.org.nz/soflet105.pdf and borrow it from the Resource Centre (details on Page 3) by quoting its number B230. A sample from page 123:

I was also the youngest student at my school by a significant margin, and I struggled to reconcile the religious terminology I heard with my secular outlook.

The act of translating religious ideas into a secular framework helped me think outside the box, but at times it was just exhausting. Surrounded by religious thought, I found myself once again grappling with the questions that had brought me to Christianity in the first place, going so far as to declare in an essay: "I feel myself inching back toward a [non-anthropomorphic] God-concept."

God seemed such an effective way to communicate ideas of justice and reconciliation, and I began to understand why so many used that framework when inviting people to act in love and empathy.

But I ultimately stuck with my conclusion that, for me and many others, theism doesn't make sense. A professor once said to me: "When I talk about God, I mean love and justice and reconciliation, not a man in the sky. You talk about love and justice and reconciliation—why can't you just call that God?" My reply was short and firm: "Why *must* you call that God? Why not just call it what it is: love and justice and reconciliation?"

The copy in our Resource Centre was donated by Arch Thompson of Auckland, for which we extend our thanks.

Noel Cheer, Editor

FORGOTTEN ROOMS

“... we have, by definition, no access to ... subliminal events, [and] we consistently underestimate their importance. Yet occasionally they manifest themselves quite dramatically. Japanese novelist Haruki Murakami put it well in a striking interview:

“We have rooms in ourselves. Most of them we have not visited yet. Forgotten rooms. From time to time we can find the passage. We find strange things ... old phonographs, pictures, books ... they belong to us, but it is the first time we have found them.”

Christof Koch, *Scientific American Mind*
Volume 25, Issue 3, , May 1, 2014

“Consciousness Might Emerge from a Data Broadcast”

DISTINGUISHING TRUTH FROM ERROR

To improved readability, John Giffin shortened this article by Abdu'l-Baha who was the eldest son of Bahá'u'lláh, the founder of the Bahá'í Faith.*

Spirituality in our Western Civilization is being overcome by materialism to such a degree that the search for reality has become submerged in an ocean of imitation and falsehoods so that equity and justice are vanishing in our national and international relationships. Religious faith and belief is often the mere adherence to blind imitations which have descended through ancestral traditions. So too do we as a society place more importance on images of ourselves than on the realities of the current state of our affairs

This raises the question what is the ‘truth’ and how can we distinguish truth from error? There are four criteria by which the truth might be determined: first, **sense perception**; second, **reason**; third, **traditions**; fourth, **inspiration**. (Abd'ul-Baha,)

The materialistic philosophers of Europe believed that the criterion and standard of human knowledge is sense perception, a fixed, invariable law, exact in its operation through the senses. What you see is the reality, equated in many minds with Science.

But when one considers mirages, or a whirling torch that makes a circle of fire before the eye, illusions by magicians that are so popular today or numerous other examples, it becomes clear that our senses can be fooled. Sense perceptions often differ in people and are subject to personal knowledge and life experiences.

Among the Greeks and Romans the criterion of knowledge was reason, but this too is unreliable and not

to be depended upon. This human world is an ocean of varying opinions. If reason is the perfect standard and criterion of knowledge, why are opinions at variance and why do philosophers disagree so completely with each other.

Most discoveries of both science and social science are relative and continually changing because human reason is continually progressing along new roads of investigation. New conclusions are continually being reached as research and under-standings advance. Much that is considered true today will be disproved in the future.

The third criterion concerns traditions upheld by theologians as the avenue and standard of knowledge, we find this source equally unreliable because religious traditions are the report and record of understanding and interpretation of Scripture. By what means has this understanding, this interpretation been reached? By the analysis of human reason. When we read Scripture, the faculty of comprehension by which we form conclusions is reason. Reason is mind. If we are not endowed with perfect reason, how can we accurately comprehend the meanings of the Word of God?

The fourth criterion is inspiration through which some claim the reality of knowledge is attainable. What is inspiration? It is the influx of the human heart. But we are all afflicted from time to time with imaginings that have no reality. It calls to mind the documentary I saw on a religious leader in the United States that through “inspiration” considered himself the return of Christ. How can we know whether we are being Divinely guided or merely following the promptings of our own desires?

I close this article with a statement from the Baha'i Writings that summarizes the above article.

*It has become evident that the four criteria standards of judgment by which the human mind reaches its conclusions (senses, intellect, traditions (or scripture) and inspiration) are faulty and inaccurate. All of them are liable to mistake and error in conclusions. But a statement presented to the mind, accompanied by proofs which the senses can perceive to be correct, which the faculty of reason can accept, which is in accord with traditional authority and sanctioned by the promptings of the heart, can be adjudged and relied upon as perfectly correct, for it has been proved and tested by all the standards of judgment and found to be complete. When we apply but one test, there are possibilities of mistake. (‘Abdu'l-Bahá, **Promulgation of Universal Peace**, p. 255)*

John Giffin and his wife Val are members of Gisborne Sea of Faith and are of the Baha'i faith.

SEA OF FAITH NETWORK NEW ZEALAND

NOTICE OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2014

Annual General Meeting of the Sea of Faith Network NZ (Inc) will be held at Tolcarne Boarding Residence, 12 Tolcarne Avenue, Dunedin on Friday 3 October at 7:30 pm.

ELECTION OF STEERING COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Maureen Roxburgh's term expires this year, so it is desirable for at least one person to be elected to the Steering Committee. Please submit nominations to the secretary (jockcrawford@actrix.co.nz).

NOTICE OF MOTION

The Steering Committee has submitted the following notice of motion:

That Rule 7c be amended to read: ***"Steering Committee members may serve for no more than four years consecutively, except that the person appointed by Steering Committee as Treasurer may serve for up to eight years consecutively as Treasurer, or longer in the event of no other nominations being received"***.

The original Rule 7c: *Steering Committee members may serve for no more than four years consecutively.*

Rule 7c (as amended in 2010): *Steering Committee members may serve for no more than four years consecutively, except that the person appointed by Steering Committee as Treasurer serve for eight years consecutively as Treasurer"*.

The Steering Committee's immediate purpose in bringing this notice of motion is to enable our current Treasurer to continue his work. Limiting the term of service on the Steering Committee is generally a good idea, but it might not be easy to find a replacement for the Treasurer in particular.

Any other notices of motion must be submitted to the secretary (jockcrawford@actrix.co.nz) 21 days before the AGM.

DEBATE THESE

Your editor does not necessarily agree with these propositions, but they make for vigorous debate.

Asking "What came before the Big Bang?" is like asking "What's north of the North Pole?" Time began with the Big Bang, as did space, as we know it.

How to think about death - a short Humanist video can be found at <https://richarddawkins.net/2014/07/what-should-we-think-about-death/> How much of this could you go along with? Does it deny whatever religious principles you hold?

Should we revamp the New Testament in the light of recent discoveries. Prof Hal Taussag of Westar Institute thinks so. Do you? See a short interview here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5sDXHOzDHVI>

(Rabbi) Jonathan Sacks (*The Persistence of Faith* p.65, Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1991) wrote:

Should we, could we, **give all religious paths of faith equal weight?** ".... consider the problem of religious education. For liberals, the answer would seem to lie in teaching all children all faiths. The problem is that giving many religions equal weight is not supportive of each but instead tends to relativise them all. It produces a strange hybrid in which the primary value is personal choice, and we feel free to choose bits of one tradition and place them alongside pieces of another, disregarding the different ways of life that gave them meaning in the first place. A multicultural mind can use Zen for inwardness, Hassidic tales for humour, liberation theology for politics, and nature mysticism for environmental concern. But that is a little like gluing together slices of da Vinci, Rembrandt, Van Gogh and Picasso and declaring the result a composite of the best of western art.

Religious freedom occupies a special place in contemporary political discussions. It should not. This is not because religious freedom is not important but because it is **no more and no less important** than other forms of freedom of conscience, belief and practice." *Author unknown.*

At last. The Church of England's General Synod has voted to allow women bishops. The CofE remains the largest religious constituency in Britain, with a third of the population still calling themselves Anglican. But whether we look at church attendance, adherence, or baptism and funerals, decline is sharp. For those aged over-60 Anglican is the majority identity; for each younger generation it's increasingly a minority identity. Only about five percent of young people now call themselves Anglican. Whatever their personal views, church leaders have stalled on the ordination of women because of their deference to two small but vocal minority parties within the CofE: Anglo-Catholics at one end of the ecclesiological spectrum, and the conservative evangelicals at the other. Together they represent less than 15% of Anglicans. (By Linda Woodhead July 21, 2014 at <http://religiondispatches.org/>)

BOOK BLURBS

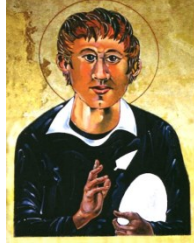
Not so much reviews as snippets in their own words.

SIDELINED?

Kernel & Husk: The Waning of Jesus in Godzone

Bill Cooke

Pub. Steele Roberts 2014



What is the kernel of Jesus, and what is the husk that the millennia have wrapped around him? The relative indifference of New Zealanders to questions about Jesus is a response to the inability of Christian scholars to agree who Jesus was, what he did, and what his message was.

Bill Cooke sees this confusion as a chance for the real Jesus – Rabbi Yeshua – to step out of the shadows of two thousand years of theological embellishment and be heard in his own words. Perhaps he can then take his place alongside all the other great thinkers and guides of history and help us in our search for balance and perspective in our lives.

Bill is a declared atheist who writes intelligently about Christianity. He is a member of SoF in Auckland and edits *Free Enquiry*, the magazine of the Council for Secular Humanism.

You can order the book from Steele Roberts' website at <http://www.steeleroberts.co.nz/books/isbn/978-1-927242-61-2>

Source: the book blurb – we hope for a review soon.

UNLOCKING THE CREATIVITY AND IMAGINATION

Spirituality: A Very Short Introduction

Philip Sheldrake,

Oxford University Press, 2012

“... this book is a very brief summary of a vast and complex field of human behaviour. However, I want to end by summarizing what I see as the three critical features of the concept of 'spirituality' and how and why it makes a difference to us both as individuals and as groups.

First, spirituality expresses the reflective human quest for identity and meaning beyond a purely pragmatic approach to life.

Second, it suggests that a full human life needs to move beyond self-absorption to a sense of the greater good and service of others.

Finally and vitally, spirituality relates to a process of unlocking the creativity and imagination that enables us to touch the edge of mystery.

In the end, the spiritual way of life reaches out towards a wholeness and completeness that we never definitively grasp. There is always 'a more'. As a result, the spiritual quest is paradoxical. It suggests that in order to seek the totality of everything we must let go of a desire simply to accumulate more things. In that sense, 'spirituality' acts as a counter to the culture of consumerism ...”

pages xv and 122.

The ever-growing library of “a Very Short Introduction ...” is very impressive – ed!

DEIFYING THE JEWISH MESSENGER

Christian Beginnings: from Nazareth to Nicea AD 30-325

Geza Vermes,

Penguin Books 2013 page 242.

“[This book is] ... an attempt to sketch the historical continuity between Jesus portrayed in his Galilean charismatic setting and the first ecumenical council held at Nicaea in AD 325, which solemnly proclaimed his divinity as a dogma of Christianity.

In this attempt at tracing the evolutionary curve, particular emphasis will be laid on the impact of charismatic Judaism on Jesus and on budding Palestinian Christianity. Equally important to note is the influence of Hellenistic thought and mysticism on the early church, which within decades from the crucifixion became very largely Greek in speech and thought. The trend started with Paul and the Fourth Gospel and was responsible from the second century onwards for the impact of Platonic philosophy on the formulation of Christian theological ideas. The final crucial thrust stemmed from the pressure exerted by the emperor Constantine on the bishops of the Nicene Council, compelling them to bear in mind the reverberations of their ongoing religious disputes on the civic peace of the Roman state.

At the end of this journey, those readers who wonder where they now stand should remember that in the sixteenth century the rediscovery by Renaissance

scholars of the ancient sources of classical civilization forced Christians to return to the Bible for a revitalization and purification of their faith. This revolution first created Protestantism, but subsequently spread over the whole spectrum of the churches. It would seem that by now it has reached, or will soon reach, a stage when a fresh revival will be called for, a new 'reformation', zealous to reach back to the pure religious vision and enthusiasm of Jesus, the Jewish charismatic messenger of God, and not to the deifying message Paul, John and the church attributed to him."

CAN WE STILL BELIEVE IN DIVINITY, RESURRECTION, & THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRISTIANITY?

Jesus Then and Jesus Now: Looking for Jesus, Finding Ourselves.

Gregory C. Jenks

Mosaic Press, Australia 2014

Gregory Jenks is an Anglican priest and biblical scholar. He is Academic Dean at St Francis Theological College, Brisbane, and Senior Lecturer in the School of Theology, Charles Sturt University. A long-time Fellow of the Jesus Seminar, and a former Associate Director of the Westar Institute. Dr Jenks is also director of the Jesus Database project and a co-director of the Bethsaida Archaeology Project in Israel.

This book is written from an intentionally progressive Christian perspective. It draws together multiple strands from the author's personal and professional life: critical biblical scholarship, field archaeology, parish ministry, seminary teaching, and personal religious practice.

In this book you will find a profile of what Jesus may have been like within the context of Second Temple Judaism. This is set alongside selected aspects of the Jesus tradition as preserved in the earliest Christian writings. Neither is ascribed primacy over the other, but each casts light on the other and both inform the final part of the book that traces some of the ways in which Jesus communities now might shape their collective and individual lives.

The book begins with recent research into the diverse expressions of Jewish identity and practice in the early Roman period. These chapters focus on three key issues: the villages of Galilee as the primary setting for the activity of Jesus, the politics of the Herodian succession,

and the significance of continued Jewish religious aspirations for divine intervention.

This is followed by a careful consideration of the Jesus tradition in the Gospels. Four issues are considered in turn: Jesus and the kingdom of God; Jesus and the afterlife; friends and opponents of Jesus; and his death by public execution on a cross. The interplay of these four themes, together with the contextual dynamics of the previous section, generates a composite image that blends the various glimpses of Jesus into a more realistic impression.

Finally, the book explores some of the more controversial aspects of Christianity in the contemporary world. Alongside the traditional focus on the divinity of Jesus, this book celebrates the humanity of Jesus. What is the significance of resurrection in a culture where individual survival beyond physical death is becoming increasingly meaningless? What challenges and opportunities do the multi-faith realities of our human community offer for the future of the spiritual tradition that Jesus began?

The book finishes with some reflections on the individual and public implications of Christian discipleship today. This is not a template for a 'new Reformation', but a modest statement of how at least one progressive Christian seeks to fashion a life that is 'holy' and 'true'.

Source: mostly the cover blurb

ARE NEO-DARWINIAN THEORIES MISGUIDED?

Headhunters: The Search for a Science of the Mind

By Ben Shephard

(The Bodley Head 323pp £25)

How did the human brain evolve? Why did it evolve as it did? What is man's place in evolution? In the final decades of the nineteenth century, these questions began to occupy scientists. With Darwin's theory of evolution now accepted, modern neuroscience began.

Shephard writes: 'On the face of it we now live in a completely new world. All the old gods are dead - neither nationalism, Marxism, psychoanalysis nor Christianity any longer provides philosophical ballast. Instead, the modern intellectual landscape is dominated by two phenomena, Neo-Darwinian genetics and modern neuroscience - just as it was in the 1890s.'

Now, at the start of the 21st century, Christianity may still be retreating in most Western countries (though the

opposite is the case in China, Russia and much of the developing world), while Marxism and psychoanalysis may have faded from view, but the idea that we are on the brink of a scientific revelation regarding the nature of the human mind that will transform the way we think of ourselves is as strong as it has ever been.

Yet any suggestion that the human sciences can be progressive disciplines like physics remains as problematic as it was a century ago, and the neo-Darwinian theories that proliferate at the present time will surely prove to be as misguided as those that flourished in late Victorian times.

Absorbingly readable as a study of four intertwined intellectual biographies, *Headhunters* is also compellingly plausible as a critique of the Whiggish history of science, which Shephard well describes as 'a narrative of heroic progress towards the present'. The above is from

http://www.literaryreview.co.uk/gray_06_14.php

STUCK FOR SOMETHING TO READ?

Epworth Books have put a listing of their 'theology' books on their website at

<http://www.epworthbooks.org.nz/stock/theology.htm>

... OR TO WATCH?

As a support for this year's Conference there is a set of links to YouTube videos on the first page of our own website at <http://www.sof.org.nz>

It offers mostly lectures on aspects of **brain** (as 'thinking meat'), **mind** (as the co-ordinated activity of the brain), **consciousness**, as the product of the brain analogous to digestion/stomach and the production of bile. Unlike Descartes' system, neither mind nor consciousness are *substances*, but are, instead, *processes*.

The list of links offers access to talks that relate the subjects of 'mind' and 'religion'.

... OR TO BORROW?

Then there's our Resource Centre – a growing library of books that Softies are known to enjoy. You will find the catalogue on our website and all it takes to borrow a book is a short note to the Curator, Suzi Thirlwall.

SIR LLOYD GEERING RECOGNISED WITH TOP LITERARY PRIZE (FOR THE SECOND TIME)

Sir Lloyd Geering was placed first in the published book category of the Ashton Wylie Charitable Trust book awards, presented at Auckland's Hopetoun Alpha venue on Friday 15 August.

Convenor of judges, Bob Ross, described *From the Big Bang to God* as well researched and presented. "This is a giant of a book in terms of depth of understanding and execution from one of New Zealand's greatest theological thinkers. It presents a clear analysis of the evolution of the universe, life and humanity."

This is the second time 96-year-old Sir Lloyd has taken top honours at the awards — the first was in 2010 with *Such is Life! A Close Encounter with Ecclesiastes*.

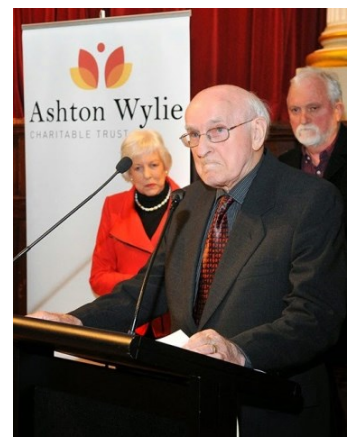
The late Auckland businessman Ashton Wylie was a philanthropist with a wide range of interests particularly in the area of personal development and positive relationships. He believed that if you wanted to change the world, you had to first change yourself.

The Ashton Wylie Charitable Trust was set up following Ashton's death in 1999, with the focus of inspiring loving human relationships.

For further information visit: www.awct.org.nz

From Beattie's Book Blog, the unofficial homepage of the New Zealand book community

Photo: Shirley Geering, Lloyd Geering,
Roger Steele (publisher)



“... THE INCREASING ABSENCE OF GOD”

Lloyd Geering's sequel to *Wrestling with God* and *From The Big Bang To God*

Reimagining God: The Faith Journey of a Modern Heretic

Lloyd Geering

Pub. Polebridge Press 2014

FROM THE PUBLISHER:

Described by the BBC as “the last living heretic,” Lloyd Geering has spent much of his life wrestling with God. Of late, however, he finds himself struggling with the absence of God. The rise of nonreligious, secular culture around the world testifies that he is not alone, that the concept of God has become problematical. Should God be abandoned altogether? Can God be reformed, so to speak?

Drawing from theology, science and his own faith journey—from his call to ministry, through his much-publicized heresy trial, to decades of public speaking, teaching and writing, Geering retraces key developments in the Western understanding of God. He imagines a new spirituality, one that blends a relationship to the natural world with a celebration of the rich inheritance of human culture.

FROM THE FOREWORD

For some years Tom Hall has edited Lloyd's works for publication. He also wrote the Foreword for this book. Here are some excerpts:

“...in 1967 [Lloyd Geering] dared to follow the lead of the best theological scholars of the day in proposing what was widely accepted by theologians but carefully kept from the people in the pews: that Jesus' resurrection was the stuff of ecstatic experiences rather than an historical event.

“[Lloyd has] an imposing intellect equally adept at both analytic and synthetic modes of thought, [he possesses] a genuine concern for others ... an endless curiosity, [and] a passion to understand the ever-changing and constantly evolving world we live in.

“I would suggest that his compilation [this book] presents a portrait of a contemporary prophet who, in the manner of the prophets of old, not only tells us how we have created our present spiritual ambiguities and ecological muddles, but also indicates what steps we must take to avoid planetary disaster. In short, Geering urges us to see things as they are, and challenges us to make our increasingly global and secular world a sustainable one as well – something we can do, he believes, by undertaking a journey of faith that will attune our lives to the unseen Presence and Process that has long been referred to as God.”

FROM THE PREFACE

“So when Polebridge Press invited me to follow up the publication of *From the Big Bang to God* with a collection

of my recent public lectures, it seemed to be an appropriate time to look back once more, though this time over quite a short span. Along what path has my faith journey been taking me over the last twenty years? To this end I have selected fourteen lectures and present them not chronologically, but in an order that shows the general direction in which I have been moving and why. It may be regarded as an appendix to *Wrestling with God*, but this time I have been wrestling with the increasing absence of God.” (page xiv)

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Foreword by Tom Hall

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2. Faith to Doubt

Part Two: Learning from My Mentors

3. Friedrich Schleiermacher: God Is Experienced
4. Ludwig Feuerbach: God Is Humanity Projected
5. Carl Jung: God Is in the Unconscious
6. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: God Is Evolving
7. John Robinson: Honest to God

Preface by Lloyd Geering

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8. How Humans Made God
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12. Christianity without Christ

Part Four: Contemplating the Future

13. Tomorrow's Spirituality
14. Spirituality for an Ecological Age

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SAMPLE PAGES

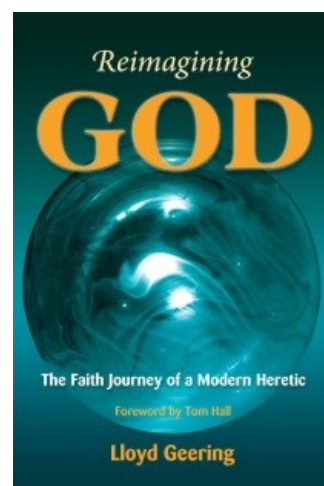
<http://www.westarinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Reimagining-God-Sample.pdf>

AVAILABILITY

There are plans to have copies for sale at the Sea of Faith Conference in Dunedin from October 3 to 5.

St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society (SATRS) in Wellington is planning a launch event. Their website is <http://satrs.org.nz>

Reviews are invited and, provided they meet appropriate standards, will be published in later editions of this Newsletter.



OPTIONS FOR SATURDAY AFTERNOON IN DUNEDIN

- Visit the Orokonui *Ecosanctuary* with optional extra Guided Tour. (For Booking see the Registration Form.)
- Visit Toitu Otago Settlers Museum & Chinese Garden. (Booking details are in the Registration Form?)
- Attend one or both of the Workshop Sessions detailed below. Booking should be made at the Conference.
- Have a snooze (or whatever!)

WORKSHOP BY TOM HALL: “A THOROUGHLY MODERN MARY”

Laurie Chisolm must be prescient. As long ago as April he submitted to the SOFNZ Newsletter an essay entitled “The Soul Did Not Fall From Heaven,” a central assertion of which is that “spiritual/intellectual functions of the human being ... are the result of evolutionary developments. They do not need the metaphysical principle of God or soul for their explanation.”

Clearly so but, lacking the incalculable benefits of modern knowledge, the ancients – who like us preferred almost any explanation to none at all – proposed some pretty arcane theories. The Gospel of Mary of Magdala (GMar) is based on one of these, a neo-platonic dualism of spirit and matter in which the soul is portrayed as a divine spark from on high that takes on the burdens of humanity when it joins with an earthly body, and then seeks to regain its home in the realm of perfection when that material shell returns to dust.

This workshop will consist of a brief overview of GMar’s textual history, followed by its narrative portrayal of Jesus and Mary, and Mary’s role as ‘Disciple in Chief’ It is hoped that most of the discussion will focus on the doctrine that Mary alone received from Jesus in a vision: that the soul must have knowledge (Greek *gnosis*, hence ‘gnostic’) of the challenges it will face in seeking to return to the realm of pure spirit – of the ‘gatekeepers’ who will try to bar its upward way and the correct answers it must give.

To be sure, the drama is a highly fanciful one, but it is one I have come to see as a considerably more fruitful metaphor than those found in the traditional salvation scenarios. However weird and metaphysical GMar may be on the surface, a moderate lens adjustment may be enough to give an assessment of the human condition not far from that offered by an objective secularist. Perhaps

‘Soul’ and ‘Heaven’ can continue to serve as useful metaphors if we remember that’s what they are. So also in the case of ‘God’ – though that may be a little more difficult

WORKSHOP BY LEO HOBBS: “CONSCIOUSNESS AND REALITY”

Outline: Our understanding of mind and consciousness is closely entwined with our perception of reality. In this workshop we will examine some aspects of human experience, including near-death and death-bed experiences, which seem problematic for a purely materialist or physicalist view of mind.

Do our mental states correspond to states of matter alone or do we need something more? Participants are encouraged to share any personal relevant experiences.

A short reading list is given below. Intending participants are welcome to contact Leo at leohobbs@maxnet.co.nz for more.

- *The Art of Dying* by Peter Fenwick and Elizabeth Fenwick, 2008. (Includes the subject of consciousness generally as well as the authors' special knowledge of the near-death and death-bed experiences.)
- *Twin Telepathy* by Guy Lyon Playfair, 2002.
- *Consciousness beyond Life* by Pim von Lommel, 2010.
- *From Consciousness to God: a Physicist's Journey into the Mystery of Consciousness* by Peter Russell 2020.
- *A Feeling for the Organism: The Life and Work of Barbara McClintock* by Evelyn Fox Keller, 1983. (Describes the remarkable insights of this plant-geneticist and Nobel Laureate.)



THE LAST WORD

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson

One of the advantages of being older is that you have more of a sense of how things change over time.

My teenage sons obtain their music from iTunes in MP3 format, while my memory goes back to “His Master’s Voice” 78 rpm records, brought home by my father to the great excitement of the family. As a teenager I recorded my favourite songs from AM radio onto a little reel-to-reel tape recorder. Things went from reel-to-reel to cassette, to CDs and then to digital, for listening on iPods, computers and smartphones. It’s astonishing how much change has occurred and how technological revolutions succeed one another with ever-increasing rapidity. As a schoolboy, my father assisted with milk delivery: unpasteurized milk in billies and a horse-drawn cart. The horse knew which houses to stop at and, if it rained, water would sometimes run from my father’s hat into the billy, diluting the milk. Since then we have had pasteurisation, milk bottles and delivery by milk truck, all of which have been supplanted by cardboard cartons in supermarkets.

As I reflect on these changes and the revolutions they have brought about, I just find it more and more amazing and I keep wanting to trace changes in other areas. Lloyd Geering, in a lecture to his theology students, said that a book in the Middle Ages was worth about as much as a farm – that is, well over \$1 million in today’s currency. The painstaking labour involved in manually copying every word made books expensive and available only to the privileged few. The invention of printing revolutionised this, enabling mass production. This played a big role in the emergence of Protestantism. Ordinary people could read the Bible in their own language and could emancipate themselves from dependency on the ecclesiastical hierarchy and priestly mediation of divine grace. Today we are in the midst of another revolution that could be just as fundamental: ebooks. No need to have enormous printing machines producing paper copies that have to be stored in warehouses, shipped to faraway countries and lined up on bookstore shelves. One click and a book arrives over the Internet onto your ebook reader, costing perhaps only \$US9.99.

It doesn’t seem so long ago that door-to-door salesmen were selling expensive, beautifully bound sets of the Encyclopaedia Britannica, produced by an army of

writers and experts commissioned to do articles. For a brief period, we had multi-media encyclopaedias on CD and DVD, before Wikipedia revolutionised things again: content provided by volunteers, delivery free over the Internet, with an occasional appeal for donations.

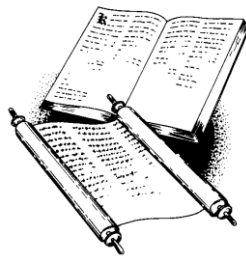
Religious institutions have been changing too. The Bible Class movement was important in the socialization of my generation but is now a shadow of its former self. Easter camps and Saturday night dances were run by Bible Classes but ballroom dancing has all but vanished and schools have moved to provide camps themselves. The Bible in Schools programme (more correctly, the Christian Religious Education programme) initiated by the churches as a way to get around the Education Act that pronounced education to be secular, looks increasingly dated today; voluntary teachers in an age of increasing professionalisation, a syllabus that is

Christianity-centred in an increasingly multi-cultural and multi-faith community, at risk of capture by conservative groups that will misuse it for indoctrination and conversion. Fundamentalism may deny that it is a product of change, claiming that it alone is holding on to the changeless faith delivered once and for all to the saints, but it is clear

that it too is a phenomenon of modernity, a reaction against the historical-critical study of the bible. Far from having the same attitude to the bible that St. Augustine or Luther had, it maintains with inflexible rigidity the infallible truth of every bit, whether scientific or religious.

People differ widely in their attitude to change, but most of us would quickly become bored if there was no change and life was like the movie *Groundhog Day*. A little bit of change is stimulating, but too much is anxiety-producing. Most of us need anchor points that endure and stable areas where we can feel at home. Otherwise we can become deeply alienated from things.

Underpinning these attitudes to change are different grand narratives, different spiritualities. Nietzsche called for a revaluation of all values and looked forward in hope to the emergence of the Übermensch – a heroic future human being who would be radically different from mediocre present-day humans. Traditional Christianity saw no prospect of real change: original sin meant that our innate tendency to evil would torpedo any moves to improve our lot. The Enlightenment rebelled against such



a view and became very optimistic about the potential of human reason and so emerged a philosophy of evolution – not the biological theory, but an ideology of inevitable progress. Buddhism teaches about impermanence, in other words the universality of change, and has ways of cultivating detachment so that change and the transitoriness of human life do not upset us too much. Tibetan Buddhism has a wonderful ritual in which a beautiful, harmonious multicoloured mandala is first made out of sand and then ritually destroyed, with the sand poured back into a river. Steven Pinker's book, *The Better Angels of our Nature*, argues that humans have become progressively less violent over time and that this is the legacy of Enlightenment science and reason, together with democracy and increasing wealth. The philosopher John Gray sees here not scientific fact but a delusion: the attempt to argue for a liberal humanist faith and an ideology of progress through the selective use of evidence and evolutionary theory.

The Sea of Faith emerged at a particular time in the flux of change. People were becoming increasingly aware of a dissonance between modern thinking and the Christianity that the mainline churches represented. They wanted to hear critical voices and to come together to discuss the implications. They needed mutual support for the sometimes scary journey of questioning long-held beliefs. The Sea of Faith, too, is evolving as most people now grow up with little knowledge of bible verses and Christian hymns. They are interested in a broad-based and open approach to spirituality. They are concerned about the big issues of climate change, population growth, pollution and peak oil. They may feel a need for the kind of community that church offers, but do not want to commit to a particular set of doctrines.

Laurie Chisholm, Chairperson 2013-2014

PRE-CONFERENCE BOOKLIST

Everyone would write a different list of recommended books as background reading. Here is a listing of your editor's recommendations – and some others.

Why God Won't Go Away Newberg, d'Aquili and Rause, Ballantine Books 2001. "mystical encounters ... may be produced by sound, healthy minds coherently reacting to perceptions that in neurobiological terms are absolutely real". P98.

The Astonishing Hypothesis Francis Crick, Simon and Schuster 1994. You are the sum of your neural activity

Consciousness, Christof Koch, MIT 2012.

"You are unaware of most of the things that go on in your head and zombie agents control much of your life, even though you confidently believe that you are in charge."

The Concept of Mind, Gilbert Ryle, Peregrine Books 1949. "billiards provides one of the simplest examples for a course of events for the description of which in mechanical terms are necessary without being sufficient". P77

Minds, Brains and Science, John Searle, Penguin Books 1984. P99: "My aim in this book has been to try to characterise the relationship between the conception that we have of ourselves as rational, free, conscious mindful agents with a conception that we have of the world as consisting of mindless, meaningless, physical particles."

FROM PETER CREEVEY, CHRISTCHURCH:

Two books by Eric Kandel: *The Age of Insight* and *In Search of Memory* give a useful introduction to what has been called the Doctrine of Neurology.

Another useful perspective is given by Andrew Koob in *The Root of Thought* in which he declares that the 'grey matter' or glial cells which surround the neurons in the brain's hundred billion connections have been grievously under-researched.

Super Consciousness by Colin Wilson, and *The Illusion of Conscious Will* by Daniel Wegner are good for further discussion, and *Your Brain – the Missing Manual* by Matthew MacDonald further stimulates one's thinking on this valuable topic.

The Epigenetics Revolution by Nessa Carey is a difficult but informative read.

Permanent Present Tense by Suzanne Corkin relates a great deal of brain discovery enabled by the life of "H.M.", a famous patient whose amygdala, hippocampus and other pieces of brain matter were removed in some of the drastic neuro-surgery which occurred in recent years.

FROM LAURIE CHISHOLM, CHRISTCHURCH

Taking the Fear Out Of God. An Introduction to the Thought of Eugen Drewermann by Matthias Beier. Laurie reviewed this on page 6 of Newsletter 111 – its worth a re-read.