

# Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

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

Newsletter 135

April 2018

## Religion and Education

The Education Act of 1877 established a national educational system for New Zealand. It required that education be “free, compulsory and secular.” This was not the triumph of secularists who wanted to purge religion of any sort from society, it was a reaction of the majority to power struggles between different Christian denominations (Catholic, Anglican and Presbyterian) for control of education. It did not apply to secondary schools.

Between 1877 and 1935 there were forty-two bills concerned to modify this secular system and to require some sort of Christian teaching or observation in schools, all of them unsuccessful. By contrast, in Britain the 1944 Education Act made religious instruction a compulsory part of the whole education system, both primary and secondary.

In this situation, the Nelson system eventually came about. It was an awkward and inadequate workaround that is past its use-by date. While today some want to remove religious instruction from state schools, others believe it important that the educational system gives the younger generation some insight into what religions are on about. This newsletter explores the issue.

## Secular Education Network Campaigns for Law Change

The Secular Education Network is arguing that the Education Act 1964 is inconsistent

with the Bill of Rights Act, in particular the clause that permits volunteers to carry out religious instruction in primary schools for an hour a week. They want to take the case to the Human Rights Review Tribunal and have been waiting since October 2016. Now they have given up on this tribunal and decided instead to ask the High Court to rule on the case.

David Hines is one of the parties bringing the case. He is halfway through his second survey of Bible in Schools. He writes:

The number of primary, intermediate and composite schools using Bible in Schools appears to have dropped from 40% of schools, in his 2012 survey, to 33%. 265 schools are still conducting these sessions in normal classroom time, but another 23 now hold them before or after the school day, and 39 hold them during the lunch break. 123 schools use an opt-in system which treats these sessions like an extra-curricular activity, which is what they should have been all along! Only 135 are now using an opt-out system.

17 schools are still using the highly evangelistic Connect programme. This has been disowned by the Churches Education Commission, but they and others are still using it.

Nineteen high schools have religious songs in their assemblies and 22 have prayers. 41 have religious addresses in their assemblies, mostly by the Gideons. 18 have Christian youth-workers, mostly with a brief to invite students to attend local churches, and 20 have chaplains.

*David Hines, Secular Education Network.*

<http://religioninschools.co.nz/>

## 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. 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, Sea of Faith provides a forum via annual Conference and Newsletter, 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](http://www.sof.org.nz), assists in setting up Local Groups, and organises an annual Conference.

We have the following **Life Members**: Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK), Noel Cheer, and Ian Harris. Also Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley (appointed at the 2017 AGM).

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**Publication deadline** for submitted Newsletter copy for the next issue: 14/06/18.

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## Progressive Spirituality Conference

Creation: Ecology, Theology, Revolution  
Friday 7 – Sunday 9 September 2018  
St Andrew’s on The Terrace, Wellington

Guest Speakers:

Prof Martin Manning

Dr Emily Colgan

Hon Grant Robertson MP

<https://progressivechristianityaotearoa.com/progressive-spirituality-conference-2018/>

# Sea of Faith News

## Religion for a Sustainable Future

This is the theme of Conference 2018, to be held 2-4 November at the Silverstream Retreat (same location as last year).

In deciding on this theme, the Steering Committee considered quite a range of potential topics but felt drawn back to a continuation of a broad line of thinking we have undertaken during five conferences over the past 20 years or so, focussed on the relevance and usefulness of traditional religion in meeting the challenges of a changing, and increasingly unsustainable world.

- 1999 - "Mother Earth vs Father God?"
- 2008 - "The Ecological Imperative: Is Tomorrow's God Gaia?"
- 2011 - "Pulling us back from the Brink: Economics? Science? Religion?"
- 2012 - "The Revaluing of all Values: What Values do we need to survive?"
- 2015 - "Micawber or Cassandra? Responding to an increasingly uncertain future"

The unsustainable social and environmental challenges we now face need new religious and cultural metaphors beyond those that Western Christendom has been motivated by over the last five hundred years; perhaps especially this one, that the Earth is here for Man to have dominion over.

The collection of speakers being assembled for this year's conference will undoubtedly help us advance our thinking about the complex and somewhat frightening predicament we find ourselves in, and challenge our current spiritual formulations about the right way to live.

**Mark 2-4 November in your diary NOW and don't forget to book flights early, to get the best price.**

## Christchurch Group Now In Recess

As usual, members were invited to the first meeting of the year, at which we were to decide on the programme for subsequent meetings. The trouble was, only one person

turned up. Another turned up 5 minutes late because of traffic, and by then the first person had left and the room was already locked again. As a result, two key members decided that they didn't want to attend any more. An email sent to the membership, asking whether they wanted to continue, garnered only three replies, none of which indicated a desire to continue attending regularly.

It was clear that attendance had been declining gradually over the years and had become quite small. But the end was still a shock and I am left feeling somewhat orphaned and wondering what went wrong. Has time run out for local Sea of Faith groups? Was it of interest only as long as people came from a liberal Protestant background and needed to discuss ideas that were being questioned by Lloyd and others? Are we too intellectual? Do we concentrate on ideas to the detriment of feelings and human community? Were we too much a collection of disparate individuals, each with their own rather eccentric take on things? Was it a mistake to go for a 'non-hierarchical' organisation, have no committee and leave it up to the meetings themselves to organise and plan? Have members simply lost interest in discussing the issues that Sea of Faith concentrates on? Has secularisation progressed so far that people can't be bothered with religious and ethical questions any more? Was the meeting time (5 pm on a Friday) unsuitable? It clearly made it difficult for those still in work to participate. Are we blessed with overchoice in media outlets that more than satisfy any interest in debating issues, so that a local SoF group ends up being near the bottom of a long priority list?

What will happen now? Interestingly, members came up with information about two similar local Christchurch groups, neither of which I had heard of: The Sunday Gathering, and a more activist Table Talk. And of course, there is also the Sunday Assembly.

*Laurie Chisholm*

## Lloyd Geering and the Sea of Faith

*With Lloyd Geering reaching his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday, it seemed appropriate to reflect on the outstanding role he has played in the Sea of Faith. Ian Harris writes:*

If it weren't for Lloyd Geering a Sea of Faith Network in New Zealand would not have emerged in the way it did, and maybe not at all.

Lloyd had been impressed, as so many of us were, by Don Cupitt's 1984 television series *The Sea of Faith*. Out of that was founded the Sea of Faith movement in England, and in 1992 he was invited to speak at a Sea of Faith conference in Leicester.

In his own words: "After finding the Sea of Faith Network in the UK such an inspiring community to be associated with, I spread information about it at various seminars I conducted: such was the response that a New Zealand equivalent quickly emerged and planned its first conference in 1993. It is now [2006] a thriving network with some thirty branches throughout the country." (*Wrestling with God*)

I well remember how, during a Continuing Education seminar in Auckland, Lloyd told of the UK movement and asked for the names and addresses of anyone who could be interested in a similar organisation here. Lists from around the country encouraged him to invite four members of the Ephesus Group in Wellington to work with him in launching the New Zealand network. (Ephesus had begun in Wellington in 1990 with a focus on exploring new ways of understanding Christian faith in the secular world of New Zealand in the 1990s.)

The inaugural conference took place at Waikato University, Hamilton, in September 1993, with 211 people attending. Lloyd had tweaked the UK statement of identity, and the 1994 conference adopted it with slight modifications.

In the network's early years, Lloyd was fully involved in the Wellington-based steering committee. The major focus was preparing for the annual conference in various centres, in association with a local arrangements committee. Lloyd's contacts

proved invaluable in approaching speakers to take part. He himself made a huge contribution as a regular keynote speaker. He also produced the early issues of a newsletter which kept Sea of Faith groups around the country in touch with the steering committee and with one other.

The committee later spread itself to include members beyond Wellington, and Lloyd stepped back from a direct organising role. He continued, however, to stimulate our thinking with addresses at most of our annual conferences.

His topics have been many and varied: *Tomorrow's Spirituality* (1994), *Perspectives on the Future* (1995), *Economics, Ecology, Ethics* (1996), *Faith and Doubt on the Margins* (1997), *An Ecological Faith for the Global Era* (1999), *Reshaping the Christian Culture Which Shaped Us* (2001), *The Evolving Path of Faith* (2004), *From Supernatural to Natural Religion* (2006), *God, Gaia and Us: Moving Towards A New Form of Mysticism* (2008), *Do We Need Jesus?* (2009), *Nietzsche's Contribution [to the revaluing of values]* (2012), *Theology Before and After Bishop Robinson's 'Honest to God'* (2013), *Exploring Inner Space* (2014), *The World to Come* (2015), *The Evolution of Human Community* (2016), and *500 Years from the Reformation of the Church to the Reformulation of Christian Faith* (2017).

By any measure, this is a formidable list! And by any measure, Lloyd's contribution to the Sea of Faith agenda in New Zealand, has been immense. To Lloyd, sincere thanks.

*Ian Harris (chair of the inaugural Steering Committee)*

## Newsletter Subscriptions

Worried about your newsletter subscription? Don't; there's nothing you need to do until the next financial year. We'll let you know.

# Religion in German Schools

The school principal was angry, even apoplectic. I didn't know how to respond, because the key word he used (*berieselt*) I had never heard before and didn't know what it meant. I later discovered that *berieseln* originally meant to sprinkle and by extension is used colloquially to mean 'to let something wash over you without paying attention.' He was complaining at his pupils being subject to a continuous stream of music without educational reflection. I had been playing brief excerpts from Jesus Christ Superstar to my Religion class, then translating and discussing them. As a last lesson and reward for all their hard work, I played a long section of the rock opera. Unbeknown to me, the school was being visited by inspectors that day. Hearing fairly loud pop music emanating from a classroom did not convey the right impression to the inspectors! When I related this to a colleague, he just laughed. "The principal is powerless; he doesn't have any control over the content of religion lessons." This little anecdote can serve as an introduction to the subject of religious education in German schools. The way religion is taught varies a lot between countries and has evolved quite differently in Germany from New Zealand and probably most other countries. My experience is from 1976 and things have no doubt changed quite a lot since then.

Religion is taught for two periods a week right through the school system, from year 1 to year 13, including at trade schools, where students learn to be hairdressers, bank clerks or mechanics. When I began, Catholic and Protestant often shared the same lessons, but there must have been a message from the Catholic hierarchy, so they were later taught separately, which meant the disruption of joining two halves from two different classes. Parish clergy generally taught six periods a week (about one third of a full time appointment, and the church was paid for this by the state.

When I began, I was fairly relaxed about testing pupils, and one colleague thought

that it was against Luther's doctrine of justification by faith to pass some and fail others. Then I learnt that religion, as a subject, was '*versetzungserheblich*.' If pupils do not reach an appropriate level, they are required to repeat the year (no social promotion here!). This untranslatable German word means that if a pupil is on the borderline for failing, the school is required to look at the Religion mark (after German and Mathematics) and take it into account when deciding to pass or fail the pupil. Because of this, I felt that I needed to set meaningful tests and go through the pain of marking them all.

There is a separation of Church and State in Germany (something that many people don't quite believe). Religious instruction comes in different flavours (Protestant and Catholic mainly). I was told that there was also Jewish religious instruction, but I saw no evidence of it. Today, for the land of Baden-Württemberg, the following syllabuses have been approved and published by the Ministry of Culture:

- Alevi (a Sunni Muslim variant)
- Old Catholic
- Protestant
- Sunni Muslim
- Catholic
- Orthodox
- Jewish
- Syrian Orthodox

There is also Ethics, a non-religious alternative to Religion.

Textbooks and syllabus are jointly developed by church and 'state'. (Responsibility for education is devolved to the different states, so each state has its own arrangement.)

Religious institutions are able to be recognised as "*Körperschaften des öffentlichen Rechts*" (public corporations). The state is neutral with respect to religion, but does recognise that qualifying religious institutions have a right to public support. This recognition also extends to other institutions, such as some radio and TV

stations, which therefore have a meaningful public service ethos and no advertising, except for a half-hour period before the 6 pm news. In New Zealand we give religions a similar recognition by giving churches tax-deductible status. 'Public support' means that the state pays for class textbooks and for the teachers. Religion is treated just like any other subject, except that you could exempt yourself for reasons of conscience (e.g. because you are free church or anti-religious).

Religion classes are taught by parish ministers and by religion teachers. Both are theologically trained, though the religion teachers don't require such a high level of study (for example, parish ministers need to be competent in Hebrew, Greek and Latin). For the city of Pforzheim, where I was based, there was a dedicated library for religion teaching, with enormous quantities of lesson plans, textbooks, slide shows, movies and a part-time librarian. In addition, everyone teaching religion received free copies of a quarterly magazine that contained lots of lesson plans and background material.

The effect of all this religion teaching is that parish ministers not only need to keep up with what they learnt at university, they are regarded with respect as knowledgeable and philosophically competent people and are often brought into meaningful contact with the generation of school pupils in their parish, most of whom do not go to church. Young people are given good knowledge of religious matters and are therefore less likely to fall for fundamentalist or extremist religions.

New Zealanders will find it alien that religion is taught on a confessional basis and will ask "What about all the other religions?" In fact, other religions are covered. In the case of Protestant Christianity, one of the topic areas is "Religions and World Views" and the syllabuses explicitly include treatment of Buddha and Mohammed. In year 7/8, Islam is one of the topics. It focusses on Mohammed as the prophet, the five pillars of Islam, mosque and Koran, and the contrasting views of Jesus in the two religions. These are handled with openness

and sympathy, but also from the perspective of a Christian culture, though you would barely notice it. I would also argue that there really is no such thing as a neutral standpoint from which one could objectively view all religions. We are all products of the culture and religious tradition that we grew up in. German religious instruction recognises that we are inescapably part of an evolving stream of tradition and is quite happy to explicitly recognise this. However, there is no place for attempts to convert or manipulate pupils into faith. Syllabuses require that pupils are to be assessed on their ability to make good judgements, to enter into dialog with those of other views and to form opinions of their own.

Syllabuses have four core areas: Nature (e.g. the Genesis creation stories), Society (e.g. War and Peace), Person (e.g. Conscience, Partnership and Sexuality), and Religion (e.g. Who was Jesus? The Religiosity of Pop Songs).

One of the lesson topics that stands out in my memory is "War and Peace" I think for year four. We were given letters written by a young girl (later a religion teacher) to her father, who was away at war. The letters were unable to be delivered, but vividly describe the reality of war as it appears to a child.

In one letter, she describes a visit to their grandparents. When they come round the corner into the street where the grandparents live, they are shocked to discover that their house is nowhere to be seen. However, the grandparents emerge from the cellar of their bombed house and offer them cake made from used coffee grounds and carrots. Her brother discovers a jagged piece of shrapnel in the garden, which he thinks is really cool.

In another, she throws a half-eaten apple at an American staff car because she is angry with the occupiers. The occupant chases her down across a field and explains how dangerous that act was. Later, they are invited to a Christmas celebration and discovers that he was a high-ranking officer in the military. She is amazed to discover that they know Christmas carols, too.

Laurie Chisholm

## Goodbye Billy Graham



Billy Graham died on February 21, aged 99. He was probably the world's most well-known evangelist and preached to more people than anyone else: 215 million in more than 185 countries. Most of us in Sea of Faith will remember his 'crusades.' He is also a respected and respectable authority and thankfully free of the controversy that has surrounded many more recent TV preachers.



theonion.com

It is frequently claimed that Billy Graham threatens with hellfire and damnation, so I watched three of his addresses on Youtube to check on the truth of this claim.

He is able to make his evangelical appeal without mentioning hell, but probably not without mentioning going to heaven. However, on the third address I struck gold. "The bible says there is a hell." Well, there you have it; a pre-critical view of the bible (the bible as a single whole, not a library of books formed over a period of some

thousand years), the assumption that the bible is inerrant, and the belief that there is a hell. He must be aware that hell is a matter of some doubt in the minds of his hearers, hence the appeal to the bible. You might be inclined to doubt, but if you want to keep believing that the bible is God's authoritative revelation in a fundamentalist sense, you are forced to accept that there is a hell. "You must make the choice," he says.

Billy Graham goes on to invite us to imagine the worst moment of our lives. Hell is ten million times worse, just as heaven is 10 million times better than our happiest moment. We must repent our sins and surrender to Jesus Christ as our Lord and Saviour. Sodom and Gomorrah tell us what God's judgement is like; it is a destroying judgement of fire. We, like them, follow pleasure, look for false security, overindulge, are sexually obsessed and greedy.

Hell is not dwelt upon, but it is still there in the background as a fearful threat. Billy Graham's world view makes best sense as a throwback to the time of the nineteenth century evangelical revivals. Every address ends with an appeal to dedicate or re-dedicate your life to Christ and asks people to come forward to the tear-jerking strains of "Just as I am".

This is powerful emotional manipulation. You are bad, sinful people, destined for hell. The only way out is to sacrifice your intellect and surrender to the message offered to you. Amazing happiness in heaven or terrifying suffering in hell; the choice is yours!

We can only be thankful that if one of his earlier crusades were to be repeated, probably only a fraction of those who earlier came forward would come forward today.

*Laurie Chisholm*

Billy Graham Message about the Judgement of God: [goo.gl/cd47SW](http://goo.gl/cd47SW).

<https://spiritedcrone.co.nz/shame-on-you-dr-billy-graham/>

## Time for State Schools to Teach Religious Studies?

At a recent service, my congregation was shown a nostalgic Victorian picture of a little girl kneeling at her bedside, saying her prayers. Although that was not the point of the picture it prompted in me the question, how do we get to know about religion? How does anyone, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh or whatever, acquire a sense of what it is to have a faith or become aware of what we call a spiritual dimension to life?

Since we are born into the world without any gene any scientist has yet discovered that carries DNA faith instructions, we must learn from the culture into which we are born. How does that work? How individually do we acquire our first awareness of religion?

For Christians probably by unconscious imitation: being taken to church from babyhood and becoming accustomed to the rituals and words and actions of Sunday worship. More education probably came from attending Sunday School, where religious instruction was paramount, where songs were sung and biblical stories told, and later where some of the core values of our particular faith-community were spelled out for us. (And sadly often where it all ended.)

At school we might have encountered Bible in Schools programmes, those curious periods when regular schooling was technically suspended (because state education was secular and its secularity had to be guarded), and well-meaning volunteers, who sometimes included members of the teaching staff, told us more stories and discussed at a more mature level faith values.

After that, there were radio broadcasts and television programmes, carrying religious services and, more recently, hymn sessions—for those too aged or infirm to attend a 'real' church. And then there were the books, hundreds of them on specific religious topics, if you could find the time to read and the money to buy them. Even

secular news sessions carried information about some great Church festival, or visiting dignitary, or if you were lucky a royal wedding in a great English abbey.

Beyond that again, if you were alert enough you learned about religion by observing (or hearing about) the behaviour of other religious people; the kindness of a neighbour, the amazing charitable life of a Teresa of Calcutta or the principled actions of a Martin Luther King.

As for learning about faiths other than our 'own' Christianity, that came in bits and bobs of news, mostly through the secular media of our times or travel books about foreign places, where they professed such strange things about Allah or Buddha or Shiva or Confucius.

But the world has changed mightily. Modern families disintegrate, new secular communities for our young people emerge on Facebook or Twitter, church attendances drop rapidly, Sunday schools are closing down, national radio and TV are abandoning religious topics (no more Hymns on Sunday Morning), Bible in Schools (now too often a mere tool for covert evangelism) is vanishing in the face of parental and teaching opposition, religious books are to be found in secondhand bookshops in their hundreds. And we are more likely to hear news about the latest scientific theory of the universe or the most recent scandal of abuse in religious institutions than we are about the Pope's visit to South America or the dedicated work of our own church missions. Everywhere organised religion, the old-style denominations, is in competition with individualist spiritual advisers, religious gurus, and practitioners of this or that 'spiritual' therapy. And as the latest census has shown, the 'Christian nation' of New Zealand has become a society of many faiths and thousands of the indifferent, among which Christians willing to declare their allegiance are rapidly becoming a minority group.

All this spells a massive decline into sheer ignorance of what religion is, let alone the beliefs and practices of faith communities, including our own. More dangerous still, uninformed labelling and sheer propaganda



is creating a deep suspicion of **all** forms of religion. All priests are child abusers, all Muslims are terrorists, all Buddhists burn villages and drive out ethnic minorities, all Hindus starve their people to feed their sacred cows, Southern fundamentalists are, every one of them, gun-carrying murderers, and what spoilsports we all are when it comes to sex or gambling or drilling for oil or making heaps of money. To which I might add, making heaps of money out of war—‘Trade wars are good and easy to win’, declared President Trump, just recently, and he can’t wait to make America great again by wiping out North Korea with a good ‘ole US hydrogen bomb.

Is there any hope for change? If state education properly regards present Christian fundamentalist religious instruction programmes with suspicion, it must be time to urge the introduction into the New Zealand educational system of a Religious Studies unit, which introduces the next generation to all the major faiths now present in our society and the religious values which they embody. There already are excellent models in English and Scottish education, developed to recognise the presence of large populations from Muslim, Indian and other cultures. Such programmes work for the general social good rather than claim paramount importance for a single faith. They mesh well with other studies which make knowledge their foundation. They inculcate respect and tolerance for the real diversity of spiritual experience and religious practices in the whole population (including complete secularity or humanist positions). And they present spirituality as a fundamental element in the make-up of every whole human being.

The sea of faith (and unfaith) is wider and deeper than we have ever realised, as we sailed on, each in our windowless little boats. Time to acknowledge the changed world, and co-operate in an interfaith way in the construction of a New Zealand-oriented Religious Studies programme?

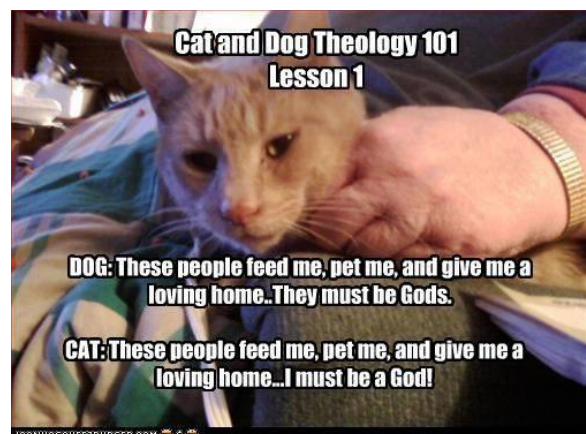
*Colin Gibson, Retired Professor of English*

## Letter to the Editor

Norm Ely asks fundamental questions about the future of the Sea of Faith (Last Word, February 2018); one of which is whether Sea of Faith remains a good marketable name at a time when the average age of members is rising (currently at a median age of 79) and numbers are slowly dwindling.

I have questioned the name Sea of Faith for just about as long as I’ve been a member since 2004, because of its lack of appeal to outsiders. The closest we’ve come to changing the name was following an AGM remit, in 2010 I think, to change the name to “*National Religious Discussion Network: Values, Meaning and Spirituality*”. The remit failed. However, a compromise was forged to maintain Sea of Faith as the name, but introduce two alternating by-lines for the newsletter – “National Religious Discussion Network”, and “Values, Meaning and Spirituality”, in order to describe more accurately and hopefully communicate more effectively what we are about. Sea of Faith unfortunately sounds like a traditional faith (belief) organisation, and is more likely to put young modern secular people off than attract them to join; without us quickly reassuring listeners (if they’re still listening – unlikely!) that we are not what we sound like.

I must admit I am now largely resigned to the possibility we are living in the last days of the Sea of Faith. However, I no longer feel downhearted at this thought. The Sea of Faith has been a spiritual life-saver for many of us and an inspiring “talk-fest” for all of us. It would be appropriate to celebrate by resolutely retaining the name Sea of Faith to the end.  
*Doug Sellman, March 2018*



## Book Review

### Geering Interviews

Here is a book all members of the Sea of Faith will enjoy reading. It is 'Geering Interviews' by Michael Grimshaw (2017) and is published by Polebridge Press, which is the publishing arm of the Westar Institute. I found it hard to put down, and when I did, I had that warm feeling of knowing I had more of the book to read later. At times it was like being at a Sea of Faith conference on the last day listening to The Panel. The author, Michael Grimshaw, asks questions not dissimilar to how Noel Cheer has; questions that open the door for Lloyd to further elaborate or clarify a point with the unique intelligence and wisdom we have all come to love in Lloyd's korero.

Michael Grimshaw was born in the year of the heresy trial in 1967, which makes him almost exactly half Lloyd's age. In the Introduction we see Michael walking a similar path to Lloyd, religiously and academically, spending time himself at Knox College and the Religious Studies Department at Victoria University, which along with his family inter-relationships makes him an ideal person to be the author of this important biographical work.

The book contains a wealth of diligently researched and carefully annotated historical data about Lloyd, particularly focused on the lead up to the trial in 1967, his academic life thereafter as the first Professor of Religious Studies in a New Zealand university, and his subsequent career as a writer and speaker of international acclaim. The book begins with an extended Introduction in which Michael provides an overview and sets the scene. This is followed by extracts from an invited address Lloyd gave to the Presbyterian Summer Conference in Gore 1962-1963, considered the initiating event for the troubles to come with conservative fundamentalists.

The central feature of the book, Q & A between MG and LG, came from a series of

interviews that Michael conducted with Lloyd over six years beginning in October 2010 amidst the chaos and disruption of the Christchurch earthquakes. Michael then meticulously organised the interview data (that he transcribed himself) into four chapters titled as follows:

1. Early Life, University, and Entry into the Church
2. Parish Life, Queensland, Then Return to the Theological College
3. The Trial and Then Escape to Religious Studies
4. From Religious Studies to Public Theologian.

These interviews record many additional details and clarifications not included in Lloyd's autobiography "*Wrestling with God*".

Escape from Knox isn't exactly what I picked up though. Lloyd wasn't expecting to get the Chair at Victoria University in the aftermath of the heresy trial; however he saw the move to Wellington as a great opportunity to explore "Comparative Religion" as it was known then, a field he had begun to enjoy exploring previously when in Queensland. However he is clear he would have been quite happy staying on at Knox if this opportunity hadn't come along.

There are several sad references to the fact that apart from St Andrews on the Terrace and a very select few others, Lloyd has not been invited to preach in any other churches – his mission has been almost completely outside of the church; but nevertheless, a church he continues to remain loyally attached to.

Lloyd speaks of his two conversions. The first when he was a student; not in an evangelical "born again" sense, but rather a deep commitment to Christian community as evidenced in the university Student Christian Movement and attending First Church, Dunedin. Theologically he describes himself as having initially been a liberal Christian, and although he never really prayed at a personal level, nevertheless

believed in a theistic God and gained inspiration from communal prayer. Following the trial his theology morphed into a post-modern radical non-theistic Christianity. He reminds us that the modern world represents “a form of secular Christianity”, where we experience spirituality in the valuing of human relationships and a respect for all forms of life and their interconnections.

Lloyd says it was somewhere between 1963 and 1966 he stopped believing in the physical resurrection (aged 45-48), influenced by Gregor Smith’s *Secular Christianity*, in which the words “the bones of Jesus lying somewhere in Palestine...” got him thinking. Lloyd emphasizes several times he doesn’t like labels but agrees with Michael as interviewer about being a secular Christian Buddhist at one point and Christian Humanist at another. I wonder what he entered for religion on the recent census form.

The book will likely appeal particularly to those who lived through those times closely involved in the trial and beyond and knew of the major protagonists involved. Appendix 2 provides detailed biographical sketches of all these people and other key figures with whom Lloyd has interacted. However, the book provides the necessary supporting detail and explanation for many other people not as directly involved in these events to appreciate it as well. It is a story of human drama in which the serendipitous flow of life led a humble down-to-earth man who simply wanted to know the truth to attaining great stature as an internationally renowned intellectual while living in a young country that has been rather anti-intellectual at heart.

Lloyd’s quest for truth shines through. He even proclaims at one point: “all of life is a search for clear, logical truth”. His extraordinary thirst for knowledge and hard work is well recorded. Appendix 1 (over a third of the book) is a list of all the titles that Lloyd consumed from 1965 – 1990; Lloyd had kept them all in a notebook. His five named mentors - Schleiermacher, Feuerbach, Teilhard de Chardin, John Robinson, Jung (especially Feuerbach)

naturally feature a lot, but writers from different perspectives also regularly appear, for instance Billy Graham.

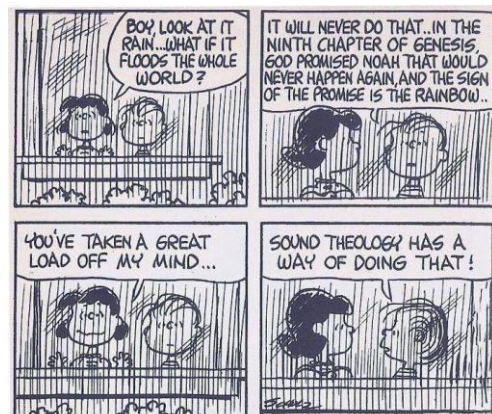
Most of us feel good if we read 10 books in a year. Lloyd averaged 74 books each year for those 25 years – 1853 books in total! No wonder Lloyd speaks with such authority on so many topics – he is an authority. I can imagine a keen PhD student making a study of that library of books in time to come.

Like many others, I suspect, I discovered Lloyd Geering on reading “*Faith’s New Age*” (1980) so it was interesting to see that he considers this book his most important work, because he put the most research into it. It formed much of the basis for Stage 2 Religious Studies at Victoria University.

His love of the Old Testament certainly came through the interviews, comparing its down-to-earth focus with the more supernatural “Paulism” of the New Testament. He comments that since the late 1990s he has found the Jesus Seminar helpful in gaining a fresh perspective on Jesus’ teaching as essentially focussed on this world rather than the next world.

Lloyd doesn’t hold back his opinion about certain individuals such as James K Baxter, or his admiration of others such as his contemporary Colin McCahon. There are also a number of compelling Lloydisms dotted throughout the interviews, like this one: “we need to remember that community and the Holy Spirit are one and the same”. But it was the documentation of Lloyd’s dedication to the church and his strong sense of service that I found most moving: “when I came into the church I lost all sense of goals, as I was here to be used”.

Doug Sellman March 2018



## Last Word

The 1877 Education Act established education in New Zealand Schools as “free, secular and compulsory.” Under the Nelson Plan schools were officially out of session for the weekly half hour of religious instruction, known as “Bible in Schools.” As a parish minister, among my duties was the responsibility to front up to a school, accompanied by a small group of lay volunteers, invariably women, to staff whatever classes we had the numbers for – usually Stds. 2 to Form I. This ensured every student got some exposure to “R.E.” The system was generally arranged by the local Ministers’ Association. An “Agreed Syllabus” was provided by the Churches’ Education Commission, with a teacher’s manual and work books for the students. In parishes containing several schools, many ministers took several classes a week.

Some parents objected to their children being involved, and these children were excused the classes and provided with an alternative programme by the school. Over the years I was involved, there were two notable trends: one, the group being excused steadily grew, and the number of School Committees declining to have the programme at all also steadily rose as New Zealand society became more diverse and churchgoing declined. The other trend was caused by the social change of more women returning to the work force, and so not being available to teach. It became harder to recruit suitable teachers, and this gap was eagerly filled by women from the Brethren churches, who as a rule did not join the work force and saw the programme as a means of proselytism. A number of them took many classes each week. The lesson content was a simple telling of Bible stories, literal and direct. Naturally, the more graphic stories had the strongest appeal: David and Goliath, Sampson and Delilah, the journeys and adventures of Paul, the drama of Jesus’ miracles.

Of course, children of this age have a literal frame of mind, and work done by Ronald Goldman and others based on

Piaget’s theories on the cognitive development of children made it clear that teaching material that must be “unlearned” before further stages of understanding can be developed is poor theory. The complexities of an ancient document from an alien culture are challenge enough for a theologically trained professional, much less a classful of kids! Teaching the Bible to adults is difficult enough, but trying to make children understand it is far more difficult, given their intellectual immaturity, linguistic limitations, and restricted experience.

Further, an outsider coming into the classroom for half an hour implies religion is an optional extra, not an integral part of the general culture. I guess this understanding goes back to the dualism developed by Plato and the Greeks, with a perfect heavenly realm, and a corrupt earthly one. A parallel dualism, engendered by monotheism, sees humanity over and above the rest of the creation, which is all there for human exploitation. Contemporary science is beginning to challenge this assumption, showing how deeply connected we are to the environment. I think that a relevant spirituality for today, transcending all faiths and denominations, must help us develop reverential thinking, treating all with a sense of the spiritual and the holy. That, I believe, is where R.E. must go. Such a reverential approach to life and habitat is critical to our survival and flourishing as a species.

*Ian Crumpton (Steering Committee member)*

### Dialogue Australasia Network

Established in 2000, Dialogue Australasia Network (DAN) is committed to fostering and promoting critical and creative approaches to teaching Religion and Philosophy in Australasian schools.

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