

Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

www.sof.org.nz

Newsletter 136

July 2018

Religion for a Sustainable Future

Climate change is on everyone's lips these days. Even though everyone is talking about it, will enough be done to counter the very real threat that it poses?

Of course, climate change is not an isolated phenomenon. It is the effect of other causes. In 1972, the Club of Rome published a report entitled "Limits to Growth" and their analysis is if anything, even more true today. Effectively, there are three linked factors that impose limits to human growth:

- Population
- Resources
- Pollution

Extending the limitations imposed by any one of them will not solve the problem; all three issues need to be addressed.

Religion might seem like an unlikely ally in combating climate change. Humanity's first choice is likely to be technological innovation. Faced with a limited quantity of oil and the need to avoid producing carbon dioxide, surely there are other sources of energy that will mean we can keep driving our cars and having overseas holidays as before? Some of our most high-profile scientists exhibit a touching faith in the ability of science and technology to solve this problem. Stephen Hawking said, "We are running out of space, and the only places to go to are other worlds." He believes we need to colonise Mars within the next 100 years. And Brian Cox says,

"One of the worst ideas we've ever had as a civilisation is that we have access to limited resources.

Because that leads to the idea that we should compete for the resources and fight among ourselves for resources and exploit the planet, when, in fact, we have access to unlimited resources the moment we start to think beyond the face of the earth¹.

Look out to the solar system for mining opportunities on passing asteroids- and even Mars."

Our second choice would be political activism. "Keep the coal in the hole" is a parole that we frequently hear. A key point of Naomi Klein's book *This Changes Everything* was that first nations would engage in political activism to prevent the construction of the Keystone XL oil pipeline that would make the polluting output from tar sands in Canada more cheaply available in the US.

None of these options is likely to have much success without a fundamental change in attitude, essentially the expression of what could be called a "religious conviction," and that is what this year's Conference aims to explore.

This conviction will have a love of this earth, it will critique consumerism, it will overcome the body/soul dualism of the Christian tradition, it will not be missionary but will listen carefully to other traditions and learn from them. It will avoid the temptation to moralise and be judgemental. We might be entering a global era, but there will not be a single global religion, but many and varied religious responses. *The Editor*

¹ Brian Cox. Science the last hope for humanity. The Press Monday May 28 2018, p 24.

Internet Corner

Rev Billy and the Church of Stop Shopping

Max'd out your credit card over Christmas? Can't find a present for someone who already has everything? Spend more time tidying stuff than all your gadgets save? If you answered "Yes" to any of these, you are ready for the Rev Billy.

Rev Billy (real name William Talen) is a cross between Elvis and Billy Graham who combines street theatre, activist protest and evangelical-style preaching. There is an element of anti-religious satire here, but the anti-consumer message is serious.

Rev Billy began by acting a role in a street theatre production but needed to develop some convictions to make his role believable and these have deepened and widened to become real convictions. You could say that he has now really become the role he was previously just playing. He highlights the evils of consumerism and advertising and (more recently) argues for earth justice.



In the early days he would turn up with a few followers at Starbucks or Walmart stores and begin talking on fake cellphones. The conversations dwelt on the evils of these companies and got louder and louder until it became apparent that this was a prank.

Later he would preach directly to the consumers in the stores. He has been arrested more than 50 times.

A number of followers have banded together to form the stop shopping choir. They sing anti-consumerist songs. Biographies of each member are on the Rev Billy website.

There are rituals such as the following:

In our strange worship at the Church of Stop Shopping we recently took a shiny Sunbeam toaster and put it in the center of the altar.

A young man named Jonah walked up the aisle of the church for his exorcism. As he walked toward the Sunbeam his obvious admiration for it, competing with his faith in the potential of his own buylessness, was very clear. The congregation prayed that he would somehow not grab that sleek chrome bread heater (it resembled a Mercedes coupe and had computerized controls, including a woman's voice that purred "Your toast is done"). I placed my hand on the forehead of this shaking soul as he pleaded with us, "Oh, I don't need your help, I'm just browsing!" How could we possibly blame him for the bald lie? We had positioned the Sunbeam beautifully on a red velvet cloth.

As Jonah reached for the product we prayed hard. The choir hummed and the deacons moved forward to lay hands on the craven consumer as the devil pulled the young man's begging fingers toward the toaster. Jonah was pretty far gone. "Oh...toast and butter...toast and butter...it's more than a smell...Oh, my God! Black currant jam on the butter, oh, oh!" The cry was hideous.

But wait! Jonah's hand hesitated, and then pulling out of that force field, it flew back and wavered there in the air. Jonah stared, in shock, at his released fingers. Then he ran around the church as if proving to a Pentecostal TV audience that now he could walk. Held aloft by the preacher, his hand was shaking with new freedom, unburdened. The Stop Shopping Gospel Choir was swaying with the power of a receiptless God-Goddess that surpasseth all valuation. The object looked cheated, cuckolded. Finally the Sunbeam deluxe toaster was just junk.

Website: revbilly.com

Wikipedia: [article on Rev Billy](#)

Documentary: [What would Jesus Buy?](#)

Profile: www.businessinsider.com/profile-of-william-talen-better-known-as-reverend-billy-20...

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, 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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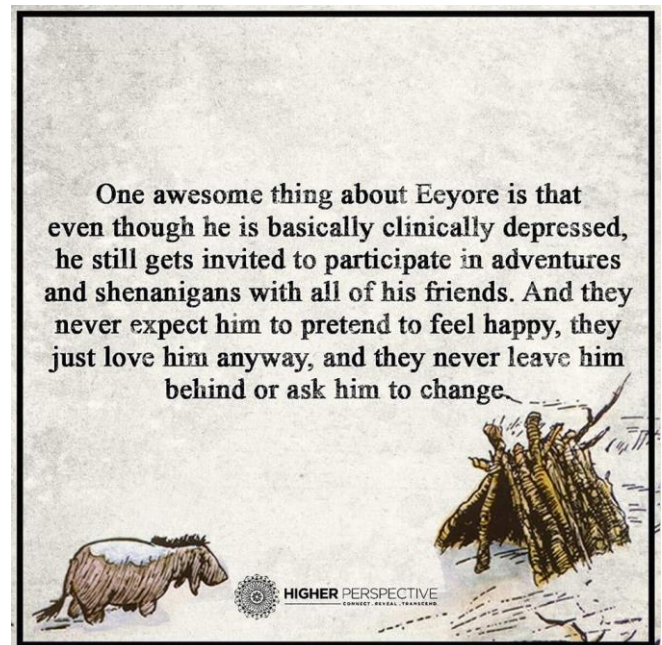
There is a team of **Copy Editors** (Shirley Dixon, Maria Cash, Barbara Purchas, and Jocelyn Kirkwood).

Newsletter Distribution is by Yvonne Curtis (paper copies) and Peter Cowley (emailed copies). Assistance is also provided by John Thornley (john.gill@inspire.net.nz).

Publication deadline for submitted Newsletter copy for the next issue: 14/08/18.

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Sea of Faith News

Steering Committee

The Steering Committee held its regular meeting on 10 May.

Conference

This will be held 2-4 November at Silverstream Retreat, Lower Hutt, on the theme "Religion for a Sustainable Future."

Issues with Skype

Meetings in the recent past have used Skype's conference calling feature. This doesn't cost anything, but is subject to bandwidth issues, resulting in intermittently poor voice quality. In addition, some members have had difficulty joining the call. For the May meeting, we reverted to the previous technology: Eureka Conferencing.

Conference Planning

All four keynote speakers are confirmed, as well as three elective workshops.

Noel Cheer Progress

Noel continues to be sadly missed. Plans are in the early stages for an update of the Sea of Faith website (sof.org.nz). If you notice any factual inaccuracies, please let us know.

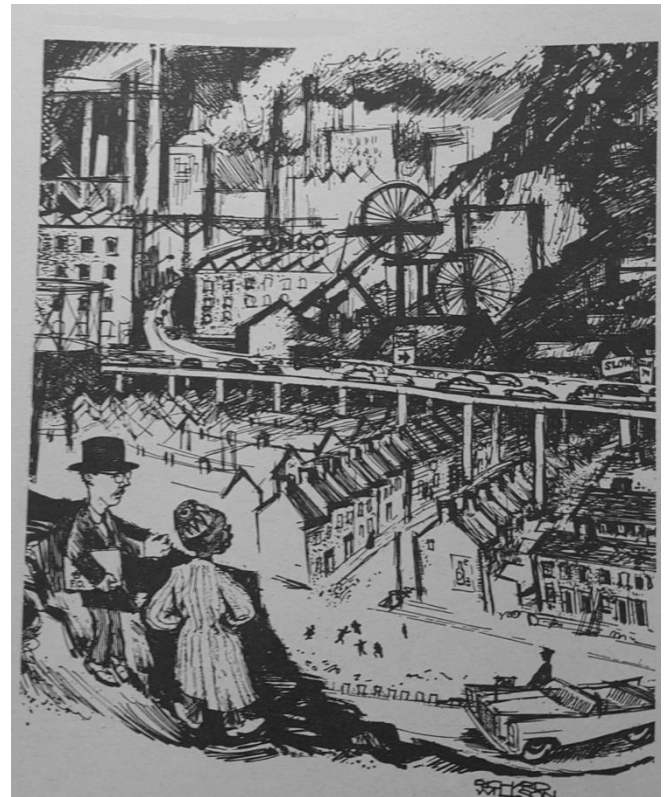
Noel's condition deteriorated in the fortnight up to 12 May, so he was admitted to the Mary Potter hospice for assessment. It was decided that he needs 24-hour hospital-level care, so the plan was to transfer him to the hospital wing of Harbourview Rest Home. Unfortunately, this plan fell through, but a place has been found for him at Churton Park, north of Johnsonville. Noel's address is:

Room 1,
Churton Leigh,
24 Mallard Grove,
Churton Park,
Wellington.

Calling all Local Groups

Had any interesting meetings lately? We would like to hear from you and publish what is happening in local groups in our newsletter. This is, after all, a newsletter, and not a treatise in systematic theology. So it can be casual, even gossipy, it doesn't have to be super deep and meaningful! Even a single paragraph would help. Send any copy to laurie.chisholm1@gmail.com. Thanks.

A well-meaning colonial attitude held out the prospect that undeveloped countries could share in the affluent lifestyle of the west. The result: local pollution difficulties turned into an unsustainable global pollution problem:



"You too can have progress, like us"

Non-Duality:

A Religion for a Sustainable Future

I can recommend this 5000 year old approach to life as the best solution to the problems which have resulted from our moving into the present worldwide western materialistic religious paradigm which has brought so much conflict, war and terrorism to the world. These threats to our peaceful enjoyment of life are increasing and could lead to our extinction in the not too distant future.

Non-duality, or in Sanskrit advaita, originated in the Indus valley and has migrated to the West. It says that we are all 'one' but the ancient Sages in their wisdom and humility preferred to not define the sacred but to deny its opposite. An increasing number of westerners are awakening to this religion as the best option to rescue the world from its oncoming demise.

There are many leaders and teachers of non-duality and thousands if not millions of people who are becoming aware of the reality of our common identity. I am attracted to the way Rupert Spira shows that there are no beliefs or assumptions required. He begins with the question "What am I?" and answers - I am obviously that which is aware of my experience. I am aware of my thoughts, I am aware of my feelings, I am aware of the sound of my voice, the sight of the room, I am aware of the taste of tea. I am aware - I am aware - I am aware, it pervades all experience and is ever-present in all experience. I am that which is aware of my experience. I am that with which all objective experience is known but this knowing cannot itself be known as an object. It seems to be located in and shares the limits of the body. The second question after realising I am awareness is to ask what is the nature of the knowing with which I know my experience? There seems to be evidence for it to be temporary and finite, that it shares the destiny and limits of the body. But when I look for the non-objective experience of being aware, I don't find any objective qualities there. It is an undoubted experience, we all 'know' that we are aware. It is a unique experience in that it has no objective qualities. It is not a thought, feeling, sensation or perception - all of which have objective qualities. Being aware is non-objective and quite unique in that it has no limits either in time or space. My very

knowing has no limits, which gives me a freedom in time - I, awareness, was never born, and I, awareness will never die. This puts an end to the fear of death. And freedom from limits in space means that is I am not finite, I am infinite. The experiential consequence of this discovery is that I don't need anything, I am complete, full in myself. This puts an end to the sense of lack. The separate self is defined by these two feelings - the fear of death and the sense of lack. All our activities in this world are aimed at trying to overcome these two feelings - to fulfil the sense of lack and overcome the fear of death.

This discovery of who we are provides a new basis on which to think, feel, relate and perceive. This is a discovery, it doesn't develop. However, there is a third step in this new process and this is to discover how to think, feel, act and relate to other people in the light of this new understanding. This third stage goes on forever. We are continually learning how to colonise the entire realm of our experience. We are learning the art of life, and how to live this new understanding.

We have now realised that we are not a body or a mind, we are 'awareness'. Awareness is inherently whole, complete, fulfilled in itself. Thus, its nature is happiness itself - not a happiness that depends on the condition of the mind, body or world, but a causeless joy that that is prior to and independent of all states, circumstances and conditions.

In the third step we understand that the words awareness, consciousness and knowing are synonymous. All experience is permeated with the knowing with which it is known. It is saturated with the experience of being aware or awareness itself. There is no part of a thought, feeling, sensation or perception that is not infused with the knowing of it. This realisation collapses, at least to a degree, the distinction between awareness and its objects. In the third step we understand that it is not even legitimate to claim that knowing, being aware or awareness itself pervades all experience as if experience were one thing and awareness another.

- All there is to a thought is thinking, and all there is to thinking is knowing.

- All there is to an emotion is feeling and all there is to feeling is knowing.
- All there is to sensation is sensing and all there is to sensing is knowing.
- All there is to a perception is perceiving and all there is to perceiving is knowing.

Thus, all there is to experiencing is knowing, and it is knowing that knows knowing. Being all alone, with nothing in itself other than itself with which it could be limited or divided, knowing or pure awareness is whole, perfect, complete, indivisible without limits. It is now evident that there is a non-duality (knowing) in the body, mind and world. This absence of duality, separation or otherness is the experience of love or beauty in which any distinction between a self or an object other or world has been dissolved.

Thus, love and beauty are the nature of awareness. In the familiar experience of love and beauty, awareness tastes its own eternal, infinite reality. It is in this context that the painter Paul Cezanne said that art gives us the taste of nature's eternity.

The three states of waking, dreaming and sleeping are all limited, but consciousness, the underlying reality of all three states, does not share their limits. At some point science will realise that the universe is not a universe as such, it will recognise that unlimited consciousness is all there is. Until scientists investigate the nature of 'I' they will never discover the nature of the universe. It is not the nature of the world that is a problem it is our own separate identities that make it so difficult to see the obvious facts of experience. The apparently separate self around whom most of our lives revolve – is referred to as ignorance – in which the reality of experience is ignored – and this is the cause of all psychological suffering.

The finite mind is an illusion abstracted by thought. However, all illusions have a reality to them. The reality of the finite mind is infinite consciousness just as the reality of an image is the screen. There is only one 'I', the infinite, indivisible 'I' of pure consciousness or God's infinite being, which refracts itself through the activity of its own creativity and appears to itself, as itself, in the form of an apparent multiplicity and diversity of objects, selves and others. The world is what God's infinite being looks like when viewed from the perspective of an apparently separate subject.

In the dream state consciousness has more access to a broader segment of its infinite possibilities than it does in the denser and more clearly defined waking state. Awareness does not

fall asleep at night. Awareness never passes through any state. Thought considers sleep to be the absence of awareness but in fact, it is the awareness of absence. In sleep awareness ceases to colour itself as the activity of mind and reveals itself to itself, and as a result we taste the peace of our true nature. Awareness recognises itself. That's why we look forward to sleep.

For centuries our culture has been dominated by the materialist view of reality. It is not necessary to point out the devastating effects of this view, the extent of suffering and conflicts in society speaks for itself. If the human race still exists in 500 years' time, hopefully people will look back on this period of materialism just as we now look back on the flat earth and geocentric universe that dominated our world culture for centuries. If humanity does not exist in 500 years' time it will most likely be because materiality prevailed.

Humanity cannot survive a materialistic paradigm, it has to be replaced by the consciousness model. A culture based on any other model is bound in the end to destroy itself. The ancient masters in their humility and wisdom did not speak of humanity being one but 'not two', non-duality, or in Sanskrit *advaita*, or *advaita vedanta* meaning not-two the end of knowledge, the doing away of subject-object relationships - all is intimately combined. Individual, social, community, national and international conflicts are not possible when there is only one.

Graham Shearer, April 2018.

Personal Profile – Sande Ramage

Not Christian Theology

“Not Christian Theology” is the title of the article that follows, and comes from the judgement of Sande Ramage’s ecclesiastical superiors. She has fallen foul of the church hierarchy, much as Luther did. He was fortunate in that he had fairly powerful supporters among the nobility, who found him useful politically to curb the ambitions of the pope. Otherwise he would have ended up a martyr like many before him. Sande is fortunate in that the church has way less power today. Why is it that the most interesting and creative thinkers end up marginalised by church authority?

So,’ said my Jungian analyst, voice quiet but interested. ‘You didn’t put your ordination dates in this autobiography.’ I scrambled to find the page and chuckled when I realised that I hadn’t even noticed the omission. An inadvertent absence was pointing to something more.

Two years have passed since I stepped out into the uncertain territory of being ordained but not authorised to act as an Anglican priest. It wasn’t my choice. Instead, made by the Anglican church hierarchy who considered that my writing, mostly exploring what we mean by God, indicated a move away from the central tenets of Christian faith.

When I wrote in 2008 that ‘living in the 21st century gives us the freedom to take control of our spirited search, listening to the wisdom of all religious traditions and sometimes figuring out our own hybrid version’ it was crystal clear that many of us were doing this whether we said so or not. Thomas Moore’s, [A Religion of One’s Own](#) echoed these sentiments because they’re an unstoppable stream of contemporary thought and action, not peculiar or disloyal but vital for reclamation of spirituality beyond religious control.

Not good enough say my church masters. This is not Christian theology. From their

perspective, it seems they require priests, through their ordination vows, to literally agree that the Holy Scriptures contain everything necessary for salvation. However, literalism has no place in the academic study or application of ancient texts. Learning to be a critical thinker in the company of those texts was one of the gifts of my theological education, courtesy of the same Anglican church that was now telling me I didn’t belong.

Many other pieces of writing were in dispute too but [Crumbling Christianity Good News for Kiwis](#) seemed to hit the spot with the hierarchy. There I said,

“Tom Harpur, Anglican priest, theologian, broadcaster and author of [The Pagan Christ](#), believes that the real Christ is a universal archetype; a classic, pre-existent myth, known essentially by all humanity. That rings a bell in my world. That particular Christmas, New Zealand church leaders went with a more literal interpretation, telling us that God stepped into human history to live among us. However, we’re past being told what to think.”

Was it the suggestion that Christ is an archetype, part of a mythology, that riled them? Or was it the idea that we need to think for ourselves beyond a feudal system that is effectively ruled by the whims of a tribal leader, in this case, a bishop? Or was it a refusal to face the reality that “Christianity is crumbling and our spiritual evolution is now happening outside of tight cultural or religious lines” that effectively ended my clerical career?

To be fair, this was not the first time my theology had been in dispute. All told, it’s been up for debate for 20 years but writing tends to bring one’s ideas into the public arena. How ironic then that many of the articles in question were paid for by the Vaughan Park Retreat Centre, itself part of the Anglican church, and earlier articles published in Taonga, the national Anglican

magazine. There's a confusing organisational dissonance here, often apparent in feudal systems as varying lords impose different rules without objective standards.

My final engagement with the hierarchy was an interview with the bishop who explained that he saw me as a prophet, but not one for the court because my theology was outside the hazy area at the edge of the church. No permeable boundaries there then.

As I write this now it all sounds calm and reasoned, but it wasn't. The whole sorry mess took years and threatened my job, income, sanity and any fragile belief I had in myself, my innate spirituality, my critical thinking and ability to string words together for good. In circumstances like that people can collude in their own destruction and I'm no stranger to self-immolation.

My killer stroke was to destroy my website, home to thousands of words, formed and shaped in what I've come to understand as some kind of alchemy, a process that goes way beyond my own ability. It is forged in the psychic fire that burns within.

Recovery is slow. Helping it along is the process of Jungian analysis. Whilst exploration of the unconscious through analysis of dreams is not for the faint-hearted, it nurtures my soul, that indefinable part of me where my essence is realised and responds.

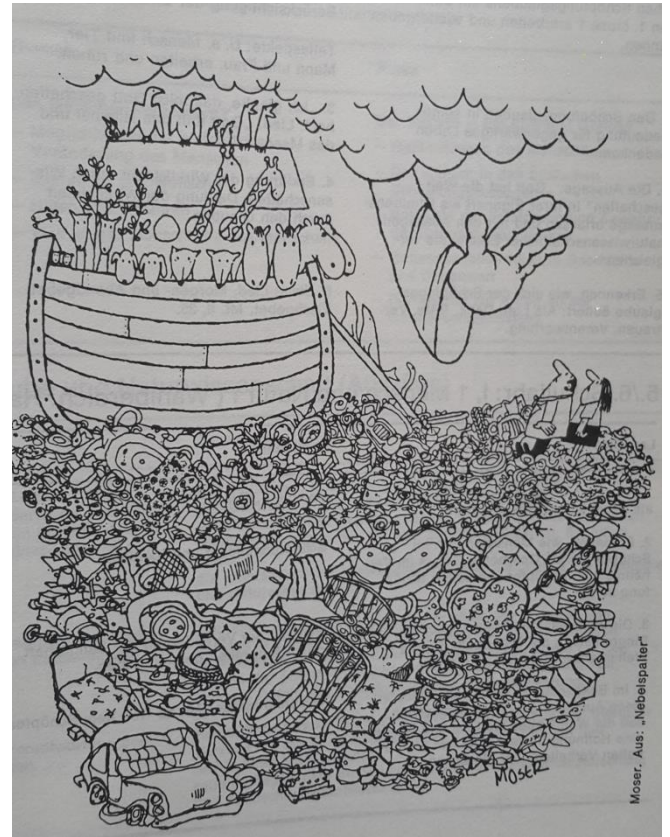
Analysis has also enabled me to prise open the boxes of old articles, read them and embark on the long process of re-posting on a new website. Every piece that goes up contributes to healing. And then there's the writing, still a mammoth struggle way beyond the normal task of wrestling words into place on a page.

'Write,' my analyst says. 'Just keep writing, especially, all the things you are not allowed to say,' for he knows that writing is my lifeline.

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<https://spiritedcrone.co.nz/not-christian-theology/>.

If we were to imagine a re-run of the Noah story on an earth polluted by humans, it would probably look like this:



Book Review

The Patterning Instinct

The Patterning Instinct explores the way humans have made meaning from the cosmos from hunter-gatherer times to the present day.

This book by Jeremy Lent, subtitled *A Cultural History of Humanity's Search for Meaning* and published by Prometheus Books in May 2017, covers the whole gamut of human prehistory and history, tracing how different cultures patterned meaning into their universe, developing their own unique understandings of it all – and how these evolving understandings have affected history. The result of ten years of research, the book offers a thesis that “culture shapes values and those values shape history.”

He begins with the hunter-gatherer worldview, which “caused them to respect the spirits of the natural world and trust nature to be a giving environment...” but gradually, as the easy pickings got picked, a different world evolved—with limitations and anxiety, requiring technological invention—the world of agriculture.

Lent traces early civilisations, and describes in detail the emergence of dualism in ancient Greece, comparing this development with ancient India, the Islamic world, and Song China: “Whereas the cognitive structure of Islamic civilisation was organised around submission to God, and gave primacy to faith, Chinese civilisation was organised around social cohesion and gave primacy to harmonising with the Tao.”

He notes how many of the conceptual foundations of our particular culture were set in Ancient Sumer, the outstanding contribution being that of writing. The Greeks then brought to bear a new toolbox of systematic and abstract thought – ground for the future emergence of science. Platonic dualism subsumed all the gods into one, inhabiting a perfect heavenly realm. But it was the Hebrew insight that because God

was good, and consistent, so the earthly realm must reflect those qualities, and be orderly, consistent and coherent. These are the essential requirements for the emergence of a scientific worldview.

Lent argues that “The cognitive frames through which different cultures perceive reality have had a profound effect on their historical direction. The worldview of a given civilization—the implicit beliefs and values that create a pattern of meaning in people’s lives—has, in my opinion, been a significant driver of the historical path each civilization has taken.”

The book conducts what Lent calls an “archaeological exploration of the mind,” using findings from cognitive science and systems theory to reveal the layers of values that form cultural norms. The Patterning Instinct shows how medieval Christian rationalism acted as an incubator for scientific thought, which in turn shaped the modern vision of the “conquest of nature.” Thus the West’s scientific revolution got under way. It has spread across the whole world, coupled with western dominance, and is now unreflectively accepted by many as the norm to which all cultures should aspire. Those that don’t conform are deemed to be failures. Evaluating the sustainability crisis, Lent argues that it is culturally driven: a product of particular patterns that could be reshaped.

The book concludes by exploring scenarios for humanity’s future, foreseeing a coming struggle between two contrasting views: one driving to a technological world of artificially enhanced humans, the other enabling a sustainable future arising from connectedness among people and to the natural world.

The Patterning Instinct is a totally absorbing read, with lots of memorable passages, insights, and quotations. Guardian journalist, George Monbiot, has called it “the most profound and far-reaching book I have ever read.” *Ian Crumpton*

On Maintaining Nature

Among Eugen Drewermann's many books, one is specifically focussed on the future of religion: Is There Hope for Faith? On the Future of Religion at the Beginning of the 21st Century, published in 2000. One section addresses the Conference theme of Religion for a Sustainable Future. Your editor has translated, paraphrased and abbreviated the following excerpt, which argues that any future religion must reconcile humans with nature, in particular by reawakening a sense that some areas (such as tropical rainforests) are sacred and untouchable, and by relativizing the power of money.

A decisive step towards "peace on earth" would be taken if a vision could be realised in which religion brings about cultural integration, for the unity of all humans, and personal expression and freedom. But even if we really had this, the main problem of the future, the inability of earth to feed and carry ever greater numbers of humans would not be solved, indeed it would probably only become worse.

After the Second World War, bomb craters and piles of rubble were full of life. Frogs were so loud that it was hard to get to sleep at night and there were so many mosquitos and flies that people had to fit insect screens to keep them out. Then came the crazy military doctrine of mutual deterrence, which didn't lead to a real peace but a sort of fear-based not-war. It became clear that this terror-peace among humans had developed into a permanent war against nature. Farming, which used to have a balanced relationship between human and nature, turned into agribusiness, enormously dependent on energy (petrol, oil, electricity) and chemicals (herbicides, fungicides and fertilizers). The transition to factory farming, with hundreds of cows, thousands of pigs and ten thousands of chickens, legalised animal suffering and produced huge quantities of excrement, degrading rivers and coasts. Humans had hardly finished destroying one another in a competition for hugely expensive nuclear weapons and aircraft carriers when they

turned on nature, intending to exploit it as efficiently as possible.

The result after about 50 years speaks for itself. The only survivals of a relatively intact nature are, with few exceptions, those places that are life-threatening for humans: borders with East Germany, military training areas, and the no-go areas, where Americans and Russians hide their nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Today, you can travel hundreds of kilometres without seeing a frog, and even country-dwellers can leave their windows open in summer, unafraid of moths and beetles, for they exist no longer. If there is a conflict between economy and ecology, the interests of the economy win. For decades, politicians claimed that a good economy is necessary for a healthy ecology; now everyone can see that the opposite is true: the "richer" humans are, the poorer nature is. To protect nature, we must reduce our human claims. But how to achieve this?

We expect that the religion of the future will play an active role reconciling humans with the environment. This involves two main aspects: there must be sacred or holy spaces and the factor of money must be relativised. This article looks at the former; a later newsletter will deal with the latter.

The days are past in which a particular mountain or spring was believed to mediate the divine with particular intensity. There is a major difficulty if you want to save nature from humans; the loss of feeling for anything that could be regarded as sacred. Our culture has continually converted the "sacred" into the profane, or to be more exact, it has shifted the foundations of life from what is naturally given to what is technically do-able. Everything that exhibited a this-worldly self-transcendence (Arnold Gehlen) used to be regarded as holy. For example, the bear was a sacred animal for some hunters in Siberia even at the beginning of the 20th Century. The reason was simple: people lived from the bear, it provided them with skins, flesh and bones and it looked fearsome, majestic and astonishing. When people transitioned to

agriculture many millennia ago, the most important crops were honoured as the flesh and blood of a dead and resurrected divinity – concepts that play a continuing role in Christianity’s communion celebrations.

As long as humans felt dependent on the “gifts” of nature, for example in ancient Egypt on the rising and falling of the Nile, they could understand and revere them as a divine mystery about the meaning of death and life, as an appearance of the God Osiris. It’s quite different in a culture that does not receive gifts from nature and is proud of being able to take anything it wants.

In general, we can say that everything that is essential to life and deserves absolute protection counts as “holy.” For Indo-Arian farmers 3,500 years ago, it was the sacred cow, for Egyptians 4000 years ago it was even the cat, which prevented mouse plagues from decimating grain stores. For Saxons 1500 years ago, it was the horse, as an essential beast of burden. As soon as human activity gives the impression of no longer taking things from nature, but creating them themselves, things lose their aura of sacredness. Value is produced by human work; nature seems to have become redundant.

You only need to look around a bit today, and you will be shocked at the danger we face. We aren’t heading for a future with holy places of all sorts, rather we can expect a dramatic desecralisation of all life processes. The main reason is biotechnology and genetic engineering. Take genetically engineered maize, for example. For the sake of a tiny competitive advantage in the cost of animal feed, people are ready to undertake serious changes to nature, even though we haven’t the slightest idea of the ecological effects. We think we have the future in our hands, when in reality we are like drivers racing through the fog, telling themselves they are acting responsibly, because they can’t see any danger. It appears to be our duty to do everything that we are able to do, under the pressure of the “market.” There is nothing “holy.”

It seems impossible that religion could bring about a sense of the “sacredness” of life, and yet there is evidence that points to

what we should declare to be holy, and therefore removed from our thinking in terms of exploitation and possession. Tropical rainforests for example. They are to be protected because of their oxygen production and climate stabilisation. The continual destruction of these unique oases of life will worsen catastrophic scenarios. But the religious dimension of the problem is only touched when the relative advantage of ecological prudence is widened to an absolute valuation, a kind of taboo formation.

Take the sacred cow as a comparison. For the Indo-Arians it was certainly beneficial not to slaughter their cows but to use the milk they produce. If that was all, one could agree with killing old or unproductive animals. However that is not what happened. The cow as such was taboo. You could object that this is a disaster and cows have an awful fate in cities, and this is true, but we learn from such examples the way in which religion defines particular areas as “divine” and puts them under unconditional protection.

The tropical rainforests with their diverse life are certainly such an area, for which we can only be thankful; we haven’t “made” them and we will never be in a position to make them. Nature needed 60 million years and it makes no sense to demonstrate that we can forever destroy these cathedrals of nature. The animal conservationist Bernhard Grzimek caused controversy years ago when he presented this thought experiment. Imagine that Rome decided to put a motorway through the middle of St Peter’s basilica. There would be a world-wide outcry over this crime against a cultural treasure. By contrast, imagine that someone discovered gold in the middle of the Amazon rainforest and that a large area had to be cleared to enable mining operations. Most people would be behind such a project. And yet the stones of St Peter’s feel nothing, while the plants, animals and humans in the Amazon feel and perceive. Which area deserves protection more?

The religion of the future is obliged to teach future humans an attitude in which they show absolute respect to a number of zones, and protect them from all human intervention. As well as tropical rainforests, these include the Serengeti, the polar ice caps and oceans, the high mountains of earth and the huge forests on the Pacific coast of Canada. The list can be extended indefinitely; effectively we need to protect everything in nature that is not yet destroyed.

Nature doesn't need us. We owe our existence to the conditions of earth; they deserve absolute respect as a religious feeling. These areas are worth protecting and maintaining!

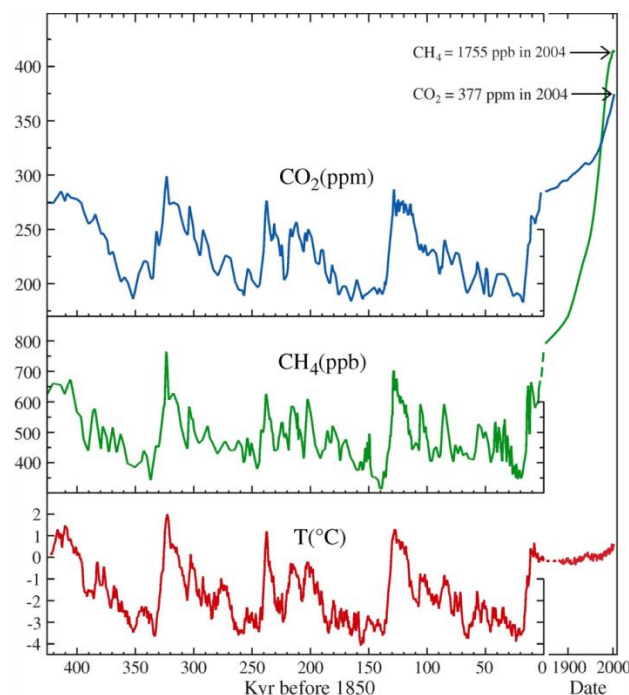
From Eugen Drewermann *Hat der Glaube Hoffnung? Von der Zukunft der Religion am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts*, p 232-243.



The following graphic from James Hansen, climate scientist, clearly shows that the levels of CO₂ and CH₄ are way above any cyclical peaks in the geological past, demonstrating that they are human-induced. Temperature is almost at previous peaks, and will continue to rise.

CO₂, CH₄ and
estimated global
temperature
(Antarctic $\Delta T/2$
in ice core era)
0 = 1880-1899
mean.

Source: Hansen, *Clim.
Change*, 68, 269, 2005.



Looking at population growth over an extended period makes it clear that the rise has been dramatic and exponential:

