

SOFiA

Exploring Values, Meaning and Spirituality

A Curious Faith

Referring to life after Covid-19 let us pose the question “How are we to live, and for what? What makes lives, any lives and all lives go round well? What is good, right and fitting as we emerge into a world that has changed? Will we hear the song of the earth? Am I a child of the earth?”

Voltaire, a philosopher of the French enlightenment, once said, “Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers”. His point was that the quality of any period in human history is defined by the quality of the questions asked. He emphasized that the quality of the question determines the quality of the answer we get. Good answers require good questions.

So to the question: “What is Life, what is the meaning of it all? Does Life have a meaning?” Leo Tolstoy said “Life is everything, Life is God”. But whereas in the past we constructed a God-centered, Being-centered and knowledge centered vision of everything; today it is the Life-Centered point of view that serves us best.” It leaves nothing out.

Life is chaotic: we can’t constrain or limit it. But we have innate wisdom and can make choices by the way we commit ourselves ethically to life and to our neighbour. We can make sense of it and find a new meaning. Our attitude to life and how we deal with the now is what matters.

Are we still asking questions?

Logan Wolfram in his book *Curious Faith* says we are born with an innate curiosity to explore, marvel, and believe there is more to life. But, laundry piles up. Bills pile up.

Ultimately, life piles up. We can doubt God’s goodness and the everyday becomes marked by restraint, limits, and settling for the routine. Unexpected hardship events can extinguish our hope and we exchange curiosity for control.

To quote Michael Foucault, asking questions is one of life’s most essential skills. It improves our logic and reasoning, decision-making and problem-solving skills. It teaches us how to separate truth from lies, and fact from fiction. It stops us from being naïve and gullible so we may hopefully see through the fake news and false information. Most importantly, asking questions does not consist of saying that things aren’t good the way they are. Instead, it consists of seeing on just what assumptions, familiar notions, or established and unexamined ways of thinking the accepted practices are based. To ask questions is to make harder those acts and assumptions which are now too easy.

Logan Wolfram again says a Curious Faith is about rescuing the now. It’s about exploring possibility with a “God” who is unlimited, unpredictable, and ever-loving. In the gospels Jesus simply calls for an unreserved ethical response to the Call of Life, here and now.

We can overcome feelings and outside circumstances that inhibit growth and rob us of hope. Pursue curiosity to enjoy the wonder of an open-handed life.

To quote some good advice from Max Ehrman in 1927:

Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.
 You are a child of the universe, no less than the trees and the stars;
 you have a right to be here.
 And whether or not it is clear to you, no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.
 Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive God to be,
 and whatever your labours and aspirations, in the noisy confusion of life,
 keep peace with your soul.
 With all its shams, drudgery, and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.
 Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.

*Brian Ellis, with acknowledgements to Bill Peddie,
 Abhishek Solomon*

Interesting Texts

A Racy Story...in the Bible!

Tamar was in an unenviable situation. Her first husband, Er, had died, making her a childless widow. According to the custom of the time, Er's brother should step in and take Er's place to ensure an heir. Onan stepped in but didn't want there to be an heir, because any offspring would not be part of his family line. So instead of having normal sex, he withdrew at the last minute, to prevent pregnancy. The bible describes this as "spilling his seed on the ground." (This was long misinterpreted as masturbation and taken as biblical condemnation of the practice.) God disapproved of Onan circumventing his responsibility to provide an heir and so Onan died too.

There was another brother, Shelah, but he hadn't yet come of age. So Judah, Tamar's father-in-law and family head, instructed Tamar to remain a widow until Shelah was old enough to become her substitute husband. This meant that in the meantime any sex was adultery and forbidden on pain of death. Shelah grew up but was not given to Tamar; Judah was worried that there was some sort of curse on Tamar and that he would die too, leaving no one to carry on the family name.

Tamar was a courageous woman and was faced with the likelihood of being childless, a major disgrace in those days. So she discarded her widow's clothing and dressed as a prostitute, stationing herself just outside a village that she knew Judah would pass through. She covered her face with a veil so that she couldn't be recognised. In Hebrew there are two words for prostitute; one for the ordinary, commercial sort, and the other for a respected sacred prostitute, generally associated with a temple. This story uses the latter word, though Tamar's actions seem more like the former.

Sure enough, Judah comes past and finds the temptation too much to resist; a sexy, available, anonymous woman by herself on the side of the road. For us this would be incest but was acceptable at the time as part of levirate marriage. A price is negotiated (a goat), but Tamar cleverly insists on a pledge in advance, so Judah provides his seal and his walking stick.

Tamar becomes pregnant (success, yippe!) but when Judah finds out, he demands that the letter of the law be followed, meaning the death penalty. (Now you see why Tamar's actions were so courageous, as they were carried out with the risk of death). But Tamar has kept the pledged items, so she is able to prove that it was Judah who got her pregnant. Oops, major embarrassment for the respected patriarch, requiring repentance and the retraction of the death penalty. Judah must admit that it was wrong for him to not give Shelah to Tamar. He had perpetrated a major injustice on Tamar to protect Shelah. It was only Tamar's clever and courageous actions and her exploitation of feminine power that brought about a good outcome in the end, resulting in twins, one of whom would become the ancestor of King David.

Genesis 38: 1-26

<https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/tamar-bible>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/religion/encyclopedia-s-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/levirate-marriage-bible>

The Editor

About SOFiA

SOFiA (The Sea of Faith in Aotearoa) is a network of people interested in the non-dogmatic discussion of values, meaning and spirituality. We want to explore for ourselves what we can believe and how we can find meaning in our lives.

SOFiA is not a church: it is a forum for discussing ideas, experiences and perspectives. SOFiA itself has no creed; its members come from many faiths and from those with no attachment to any religious institution.

If you are in sympathy with our aims, you are most welcome to join us; receive our Newsletter, attend a local group and/or come to our Conferences.

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

Committee

Our national Committee oversees the work of SOFiA.

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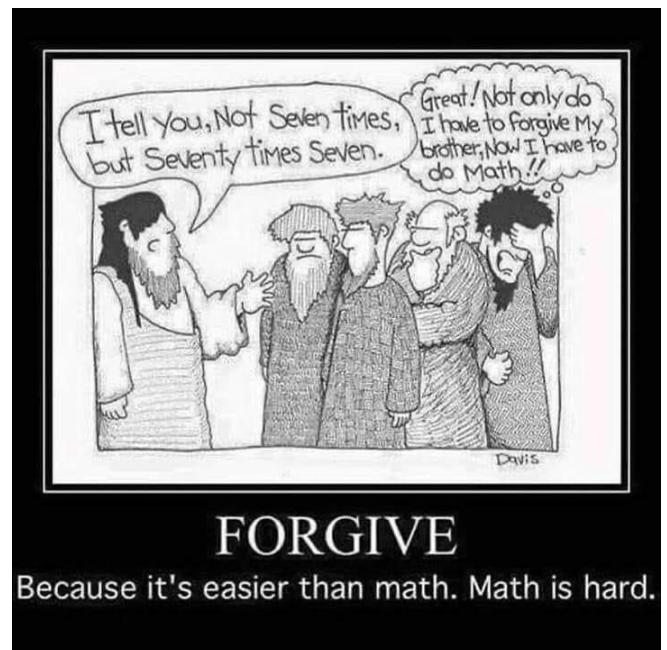
Life Members

Sir Lloyd Geering ONZ, Don Cupitt (UK), Ian Harris, Suzi Thirwell, Yvonne Curtis and Peter Cowley. Also (deceased): Fred Marshall, Noel Cheer and Norm Ely

Publication deadline for the next Newsletter is 7 April 2022.

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SOFiA News

Conference Deferred – Again!

The March 2022 conference is now deferred until we are at Covid Framework Orange. (Decision confirmed at the February Committee meeting). If possible we will try and hold it later in the year, otherwise we will abandon it and move on to the 2023 regional conference in Christchurch (Covid willing, of course).

Your Committee at Work!

No, it's not a road sign warning motorists to take care, but a sign that your Committee members – Peter Cowley, Mary Ellen Warren, Philip Grimmett and John Thornley – are hard at work developing programme ideas for 2022/23. Whether it's the literal or metaphorical highway, a great deal of faith is called for!

A decision to defer the annual conference to later 2022 has been made. The virus 'experts' predict that Omicron will burn itself (and ourselves?) out by mid 2022. We wait and see!

So what about the future? Whatever happens ahead, it is clear we will be working with a mix of online virtual and live actual events.

An initial step has been taken by Christchurch, who have opened discussions on an annual conference on Saturday March 25, 2023, on the topic of 'God's Love – How Do We Enact it?' suggested as the draft theme. Doug Sellman is in contact with the national committee in planning this event.

The gist of this article is to report on a forward planning exercise begun by the committee. Over the Xmas/New Year period we were asked to list our chosen topics for 2022/23. We now seek feedback from members. These are welcomed for tabling at future committee meetings. Dates for the next meetings: 9 March and 13 April.

Events can take place at local, regional and national levels. The Newsletter will promote and cover events. Reports on local meetings/events can be sent to Mary Ellen

Warren, mewarren1@gmail.com, who is the committee's liaison person in contact with local groups and individuals.

Now back to the work we are doing!

A total of 32 suggested topics came up, and were then grouped under 8 themes: Science and Religion, The internet/Digital World, Being a Human, Spirituality-Defining It, Democracy, A Utopian or Dystopian Future?, Economics, and the Arts.

At the 12 January Zoom, while recognising the overlap in the listed topics, we agreed that the first three gave a helpful starting point. Expanding the three themes:

Science and Religion

Is science the new religion?

Science-contributor to a new spirituality of creation.

Creation 'all over again' – DIY today?

The Internet/Digital World

AI, Robotics.

Surveillance, Privacy and Spirituality.

The Media –tyrant or tool?

Social media.

Being a Human

Birth, Marriage and Death – Learning from others.

Queerness.

The values we should be living.

Education/training/lifelong learning.

Bicultural/Multicultural/Cross-Cultural.

Beyond dualisms to unity – not either/or but both/and.

Church – adapt or die?

Capitalism and humanity – where is spirituality?

Is religion relevant in NZ today?

In our discussions, some of the points raised were:

1. If the SOFiA movement is to speak to the issues of the younger generation, then the second theme - the Internet/Digital world – should have wide appeal among youth.
2. Any of these themes will have national networks that we should invite to share in the planning. For example, ACE (Adult and Community Education) and QPEC (Quality in Public Education) for an

educational focus, especially lifelong learning. Mainstream churches have social or public issue departments/ workgroups, exploring the topics under the third theme, Being a Human. Also, the Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican and Methodist churches have made changes in governance and management to reflect Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles and priorities – a progressive step largely ignored by the secular media.

3. There are two things you need to make a good learning event: choice of a well-known keynote speaker or panel speakers, and a relevant, lively topic.
4. We don't have to overburden ourselves about the choice of topic! SOFiA folk enjoy talking with others. Face to Face discussions can be held in local settings alongside or following a keynote speaker or panel mediated via the online technology.
5. In choosing Being a Human as a favoured theme, it was felt that the topics listed would not be dismissed as too academic or remote from ordinary lay people's experience; though, SOFiAns have always been open to new and 'difficult' topics addressed by a good communicator.
6. In offering programmes, we should welcome the many arts and diverse media for exploration of a search for meaning: for example, film, music, poetry, drama, dance, painting and photography. These all give a community/collective expression of the enhanced life and invite both participants/practitioners and audiences.

That's our work in process. Now we invite your response. You can use our draft topics as a focus for your own group. Or email an individual response. Please email or write to us with your ideas. Send responses to John Thornley, Secretary: email: johngill@inspire.net.nz. Postal: 62A Albert St, Palmerston North 4414.

Remember the dates of our next two committee meetings: 9 March and 13 April.

*Pete, Mary Ellen, Phil and John/
SOFiA national committee*

The SOFiA Auckland Group

This group had the following meetings in 2021, which we list, thinking they might inspire you to try something similar:

February	Peter Lineham	<i>The religious support for Donald Trump and its consequences</i>
March	Bruce Heasley	<i>The Afterlife</i>
April	Laurie Chisholm	<i>Eugen Drewermann's interpretation of Grimms Fairy Tale Snow White</i>
May	Michael Dowd	<i>Living the Questions DVD</i>
June	Quaker group	<i>Quakerism and Call to Action Covid 19</i>
July	Stephen Warnes	<i>What moral compass?</i>
August	Tayyaba Khan	<i>Peace Circles from a young Muslim</i>
September	John Trainor	<i>Review of Ian Harris's book Hand in Hand</i>
October	Graham Shearer	<i>A no faith experience</i>
November	Steve Collard	<i>Recent research into the origins of Arab and Islamic expansion.</i>

Tips for Groups

Begin with an Informal Round

You can begin a meeting with a round in which people take turns to talk about what is currently uppermost on their mind. This gives a chance for participants to express themselves and helps them feel connected to the group. The aim is to speak of matters that are of personal concern and that may have significance for others.

Have an opening meditation

Meditate on a poem or a picture or lead the group in a meditation exercise.

With thanks to the Christchurch Rethinking Religion group.

Who or What is God?

Richard Dawkins wants to give God a traditional definition: “a supernatural creator it is appropriate to worship”. Lloyd Geering wants to reinterpret God as “a symbolic term for our highest values (honesty, truthfulness, love for others and ourselves.)” Paul Tillich defines God as “Being-itself” but Lloyd Geering finds this “cryptic”. Nevertheless, that is what I would like to explore in this article.

But wait a minute. Do we really want to engage in this task?” I’m thinking of Arthur Wells’ advice to “not bother too much about God. Instead, commit fully to this finite, human life” (Newsletter 153, p 7). At the same time, Arthur himself says that he can’t leave religion alone. It continues to fascinate him. Jeff Brown says “I am tired of hearing what God is from head-tripping men” and that seems to me to hit the nail on the head. Trying to define God quickly degenerates into an abstract, philosophical discussion, far removed from any personal experience. By contrast, if you begin with an experience of awe, of holiness, of thankfulness or gratitude, does it really matter what it is connected to, whether God, Allah, the Universe, Life or Brahman? The key thing is the human experience; how we define ‘the eternal Thou’ is secondary.

As a concept, God may be pretty dead for most of us, but that means we need ways of paraphrasing God-talk. We need an understanding of the God concept, if only to provide us with some continuity with the Abrahamic religious tradition and to help understand what worship is about.

Don Cupitt thinks that Life has effectively replaced God as the current totalising word, and the most that Lloyd Geering can say is that some of us will want to continue using the word ‘God.’ Yet it is striking that so many of his books feature God in the title: (*Christianity without God, Reimagining God, Geering and God, Wrestling with God, From the Big Bang to God, God and the New Physics, God in the 20th Century, God in the*

New World and Tomorrow’s God). Is this just a marketing ploy (likely decided by the publisher) or is God-talk crucial for unlocking the meaning of religious traditions in the modern world?

So let us proceed with the question of what God is but continue to bear in mind these reservations.

God as Being-itself

For Paul Tillich, God is being-itself. I first came across this through Bishop J. A. T. Robinson’s book *Honest to God* in 1963 and immediately became a Tillich fan. In the Student Christian Movement of the day, this was not uncommon, and we frequently heard references to “the ground of being,” another term Tillich used to describe God.

Reading *Honest to God* as a young student was a great liberation for me. I had long since abandoned the idea that God was literally “up there” in some sort of heaven, but I still thought of Him as “out there,” somehow beyond or transcending our ordinary human reality. Tillich’s idea of “ground of being” appealed as an image that represented God more as underlying or supporting or finding a basis for our existence. I later saw the image as more related to meditation, one that sought to plumb the depths, rather than prayer, which addresses one who is “out there” in some sense.

Debunking ‘Being-Itself’

At our Conference In 2007, emeritus professor of philosophy Raymond Bradley launched an attack on Tillich, Bishop Spong and all those who try to provide a contemporary definition of God. They engage in playing with words, in philosophical mumbo-jumbo. They try to make the word “God” mean whatever they want it to mean, ignoring the shared meaning it has had over the years. In describing God as being itself, they move from a simple verb (God is) to an abstract noun (being), they trip over their own language and end up with convoluted language and don’t even really know themselves what they mean. The verb to be can have different meanings: predication (for example: John is strong) or identity (John is the burglar the police are seeking). This fact

makes it impossible to give the abstract noun Being a clear meaning. Bradley follows the Anglophone tradition, which regards Heidegger as the epitome of abstruse speculation and self-generated problems. In his desire for clear and unambiguous statements, Bradley seems completely unaware that Heidegger's purpose in talking of being is quite different. Through the poetic use of language that often involved creating new words or word combinations (and making the job of translation insanely difficult), Heidegger sought to shake us out of our default assumptions about what it means to live in the world and to see everything with fresh eyes.

Digging deeper

And so, some 50 or 60 years after my initial encounter, I return to Tillich's formulations, to dig deeper and to try to understand "Being-itself" better. Tillich says that being-itself is the only non-symbolic statement that can be made about God. However, we can broaden this with symbolic statements that expand on that sparse definition: God is 'the ground of being' or 'the power of being', the ground of being and meaning,' the 'creative ground of essence and existence,' the mystery of the divine ground'. Falling for evil is to be separated from the ground of being.

"Being-itself" not "a being"

Tillich makes a clear distinction between "being itself" and "a being" in order to counter the popular attitude that the most basic religious question is whether God exists.

"Ordinary theism has made God a heavenly, completely perfect person who resides above the world and mankind. The protest of atheism against such a highest person is correct. There is no evidence for his existence, nor is he a matter of ultimate concern." (*Systematic Theology I p 271*) "God does not exist. He is being-itself beyond essence and existence. Therefore, to argue that God exists is to deny him" (*Ibid p 227*).

Karen Armstrong is helpful

Karen Armstrong also often uses the term Being and thinks of this as follows:

"People...discovered a transcendent dimension of life that was...identical with the deepest level of their

being. This reality, which they have called God, Dao, Brahman or Nirvana has been a fact of human life." (*The Case for God p 5*).

From the documents of later Neolithic and pastoral societies, we know that Being rather than *a* being was revered as the ultimate sacred power...Certain objects became eloquent symbols of the power of Being, which sustained and shone through them with especial clarity. A stone or a rock...expressed the stability and durability of Being; the moon, its power of endless renewal; the sky, its towering transcendence, ubiquity and universality." (*ibid p 20*).

Why Being-Itself?

Heidegger and Sartre, fashionable philosophers during Tillich's lifetime, spoke of Being (often translated with a capital B) but Tillich always spoke of Being-itself, a subtle difference that annoyed me because for a long time, I could find no reason given in Tillich's writings.

Being-itself is the way that classical philosophers expressed themselves. In Latin it is *esse ipsum* or *ens a se* (being from itself). In Greek, it is ὄν ἢ ὄν (being insofar as it is being). In German it is *Sein-selbst*. The aim is to put the focus on what it means to be in general rather than the particular way that any particular entity is. Being itself is about the fundamental reality that beings are, rather than about any particular being.

People like Thomas Aquinas even found biblical justification for this doctrine of Being. In Exodus 3.14, Moses asks God for his name, and God answers, "I am who I am. The one who is called I AM has sent me to you." They read this Hebrew text as a definition of the being of God, expressed in Greek terms. Modern scholars with a better understanding of Hebrew, regard it as a denial that you can define God, meaning "I will be who I will be." God is not unchanging; and you will find out who God is in the course of history as it unfolds.

Being is a philosophical concept

The concept of Being has a long and respectable history, even going right back to the pre-Socratic philosophers. They looked for a fundamental material that was the origin of everything (fire, water, or air). Parmenides held that existing things are

merely an appearance of Being, which is a single, eternal reality underlying all particular beings. For Thomas Aquinas, different beings have Being in different ways; only God has Being in its full sense. All created things have a distinction between essence and existence; only in God are these the same.

For European existentialist philosophy, Being again became a central concept. Heidegger's magnum opus is *Being and Time* and Sartre's is *Being and Nothingness*. More recently, Jean-Luc Marion has written *God without Being*, in which he tries to free God-talk from any association with this philosophical tradition.

For Heidegger, Being was the central concept and we are heirs of a history in which Being has been forgotten. His aim has been to awaken an awareness of Being. Perhaps this boils down to fancy philosophical talk for a narrowing down of the fullness of human existence through focussing for example on

the use of technology to achieve practical goals and limiting human values to what can be measured in terms of dollars and cents.

You could regard the history of philosophy as a story of different ways of understanding Being. For Plato, it was the eternal ideas, for Aristotle, it was the substance underlying forms, for Descartes, it was the thinking subject, for Husserl, it was the immediate awareness of consciousness and for Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, it was the Will to Power. Translating Being by "the fundamental, underlying reality" probably won't go far wrong.

Tillich's talk of God as Being-itself puts him squarely in these philosophical traditions.

We can see this in his use of terms like essence and existence, of relative and absolute non-being and of substance. This is a tradition foreign to most English-speaking people.

Tillich is close to this tradition, though critical of it. Religion and philosophy are linked. Religion deals existentially with the meaning of being, while philosophy deals theoretically with the structure of being. Being is concerned with what it means to have being. The properties of being are common to everything that has being. They include categories such as time, space, causality and substance. Tillich would counter Bradley's reductionist approach by saying that even this reductionist approach has a specific view of Being; namely that only that approach can provide knowledge of what is.

The Ground of Being

Tillich describes the ground of being as a

mixture of cause and substance. To understand it exclusively as cause would be to tend towards deism (God as the initial cause of everything). To understand it exclusively as substance would be to tend towards pantheism (God as everything). The concept 'ground of being' is not to be identified with one or the other, which implies that its meaning is symbolic.

He may well be trying to get away from the problems in this tradition, but it still makes of God a philosophical concept that is closely linked to rational thinking about the nature of the world, something that is fundamentally problematic given our modern understanding of the cosmos.

Paul Tillich was an expatriate German and I've

Ground of being (Seinsgrund).

This is a term used in existential analysis [a therapeutic approach going back to Victor Frankl] for the ultimate security, that is sensed through experiences in concrete situations. Ground of being is the ontological basic experience that there is always something there that gives security and that is greater than oneself – a world, an order, a cosmos, a God. The ground of being mediates the feeling "when the source of anxiety persists, I can accept it, even if I die from it, because I feel myself to be ultimately in safe keeping. The experience of the ground of being leads to an attitude of serenity and is the precondition for the development of a fundamental trust that, beyond the framework of psychotherapy, also relates to the sphere of personal faith.

Längle A. (2000) Seinsgrund. In: Stumm G., Pritz A. (eds) Wörterbuch der Psychotherapie. Springer, Vienna. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-211-99131-2_1678

found it helpful to translate his key concepts back into the German language, where they often make more sense. It was a liberating discovery to find a definition of ground of being (*Seinsgrund*) in a dictionary of psychotherapy (see the text box). Here the approach is not through philosophical concepts but through lived experience of anxiety and (its opposite) security (*Geborgenheit*).

Conclusion:

1. Defining God as being-itself gets us away from regarding the existence (or not) of God as the central question.
2. We need to get away from the God of the philosophers and theologians. Tillich himself did not do this as he was too deeply immersed in the history of European philosophy and theology. This probably won't help us. He did however emphasise that talk of God is symbolic and made a valiant attempt to explain the nature of symbols.
3. We need to approach God-talk from the bottom up (i.e. from the domain of human experience), not from the top down (from some metaphysical doctrine). Much of the rest of Tillich's theology does this admirably, for example his understanding of faith as the Courage to Be and of religion as to do with Ultimate Concern.

The Editor

Book Reviews

Grounded Spirituality

By Jeff Brown. Enrealment Press 2019

When we in Sea of Faith/SOFiA agreed on the byline "exploring values, meaning and spirituality" I'm not sure how much thought we put into that word "spirituality." It was a fashionable word, broader and more inclusive than "religion."

I don't think most of us would be prepared for the kind of material that Jeff Brown presents. I certainly wasn't. I made the mistake of skipping Part 1, so it took me

some time to find my bearings. What was difficult to understand in the later chapters made sense once I had read the account of his personal story in Part 1.

Brown was on the way to become a very successful lawyer when he abruptly changed path. Then followed a quite long process of development, exploring varied influences. These included the psychologist Abraham Maslow, Eastern Religious traditions, and Buddhist meditation. Brown concluded, "The tantric bliss-trip left me energetically charged and entirely ungrounded, the head-trip sharpened my focus but blocked my heart, and the meditation trip both calmed me and left me feeling uncomfortably self-severed." As a result, he decided to become the explorer of many paths and the master of none. He worked for a while with the founder of bioenergetics, Alexander Lowen, with Stanislov Grov and his Holotropic BreathWork, and then with Buddhist Vipassana (insight meditation). His next step was to engage with Eckhart Tolle (famous for *The Power of Now*) followed by Yoga. He also worked with Bhagavan Das, another spiritual teacher, and the result was *Karmageddon*, a documentary featuring Das and other teachers.

Some time later, the result is this book, in which Brown sets forth his model of spirituality. The book is structured as dialogues in an on-going relationship between Jeff Brown and "Michael", a construct derived from many of the people he has worked with. Each chapter revolves around a theme and it is mainly about confronting and undoing the thinking that Michael has picked up from other spiritual advisors.

A major theme is that we are not to ascend to the spiritual but to become more fully in the body and in our concrete real-world situation (grounded). We should be wary of spiritual teachers who lead us on a narrow path and exclude the fullness we are capable of. We can't separate maturing on a spiritual path from working through emotional problems arising from our upbringing and our relationships. His spirituality is a weaving together of psychotherapy, active methods for releasing buried trauma and being led on a spiritual

journey. A good part of the effort is devoted to undoing Michael's false thinking.

The **non-duality** tradition is more about dissociation (floating up and away from one's humanness) than about spirituality. The **quest for enlightenment** is detached and rarefied; instead, Brown speaks of "enrealment", a philosophy that includes all aspects of the human experience. Meditators speak of "the monkey mind," the ever-restless thinking activity. Brown says, "The primary cause of our unhappiness is not our thoughts. The monkey mind is not the source of our anxiety. It's a symptom of it. Forget the monkey mind. The mind is not the enemy—unhealed pain is." Brown describes the New Age as the New Cage, vividly illustrated when a friend took her own life after floating away from reality in a pseudo-enlightened stupor.

The book is well worth it for Brown's story alone. I'm not so enthusiastic about the dialogues and the exercises might be helpful but probably make best sense in the context of a therapeutic relationship rather than when practiced alone. We also need to be cautious when Brown criticizes other approaches. New spiritual voices are engaged in a "survival of the fittest" struggle for recognition, for example looking to Oprah Winfrey for an invitation to her programme that will provide some validation and some free advertising. They are desperate to profile themselves in contrast to other voices. Of one thing I am sure: religion/spirituality in a broad sense is not going away, just changing radically, becoming more commercial and re-emerging in new forms. *The Editor*

The Bonobo and the Atheist

In search of Humanism Among the Primates by Frans de Waal. New York 2013

The field of ethics and morality has generally been the domain of philosophers, who argue about such things as virtue ethics and utilitarianism. The notion of right and wrong is seen as something uniquely possessed by us humans and as the consequence of rational thinking from first principles.

Frans de Waal is a biologist who researches the behaviour of primates and his book certainly puts the cat among the pigeons, undermining much of the effort of philosophers and seeing much of our morality as the product of evolution. It is written for lay people, so is not difficult, and it is a mixture of his personal story, wide-ranging anecdotes about humans and primates he has experienced, together with carefully structured scientific research into bonobo and chimpanzee behaviour. Reflections on an intriguing painting by Hieronymus Bosch "The Garden of Earthly Delights" are woven through the book.

I am tired of hearing what God is from head-tripping men.
I am tired of hearing what God is from isolationists on a spiritual quest.
I am tired of hearing what God is from lovers of detachment.
I want to hear about a juicy God, a creative God, a relational God, a God that arises when we jump into life and stop playing it safe, watching it from afar like a passing train. It's time for the dancers to tell us what God is.
It's time for the artists to tell us what God is. It's time for the lovers to tell us what God is. We are not here to watch God from afar. We are here to live God from the inside out. *Grounded Spirituality page 176*

You will be surprised at how much de Waal has to say about religion and morality and how down-to-earth and believable his comments are. I personally appreciated particularly his reflections on the new atheists and his

critique of behavioural psychology.

"Just like us, monkeys and apes strive for power, enjoy sex, want security and affection, kill over territory, and value trust and cooperation...our psychological makeup remains that of a social primate. P16"

"The neo-atheists call themselves "brights," thus implying that believers are not as bright. They have replaced St Paul's view that nonbelievers live in darkness by its opposite: non-believers are the only ones to have seen the light...what good could possibly come from insulting the many people who find value in religion? P 18-9."

Far from regarding animals as stimulus-response machines, modern neuroscience is exploring their emotional state.

The Editor

Internet Corner

The Internet revolution is as far-reaching and radical as the print revolution in the 16th Century, that brought about Martin Luther and Protestantism. So here are some pointers to valuable content among the enormous flood.

On Being

On being (onbeing.org) is a radio show that provides podcasts online. It began in 2003 under the name “Speaking of Faith” a title which has an uncanny resemblance to our Sea of Faith. Its laudable aim was to treat the religious and spiritual aspects of life as seriously as we treat politics and economics.

Its aim now is to “take up the great questions of meaning...at the intersection of spiritual inquiry, science, social healing, and the arts. What does it mean to be human, how do we want to live and who will we be to each other.”

I remember being impressed by podcasts on Einstein years ago. The sheer amount of stuff on the Internet is overwhelming, but On Being is worth checking out.

“(Christa Tippett) has created, over decades, something rare in American life: spaces where people of different faiths, disciplines, and ideologies discuss divisive questions without becoming more divided, without losing sight of each other’s humanity.” Ezra Klein

Einstein’s God:

onbeing.org/programs/freeman-dyson-and-paul-davies-einsteins-god

The Editor

Eugen Drewermann

Some of you will be aware that the Editor is a great fan of Eugen Drewermann, a German theologian (Roman Catholic at least until he retired and gave up his Church membership). Very little of his vast repertoire of writings has been translated into English but recently, Dietmar Krieger has created a Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/106272410345>) and begun providing brief excerpts from Drewermann’s writings, together with an English translation. I think it’s a machine

translation, so often it comes out rather weird. To access these Drewermann excerpts, click the link above, or click the Menu, go to Groups and then search for Eugen Drewermann. Here’s a taste of his radical anti-war stance (very brief and to the point, in contrast to much of his writing. If you would prefer something longer, try the three volumes of his Capital and Christianity). The excerpt comes from this group, but was unusually not translated:

Capitalism itself is a permanent war against the rest of the world. It is not a democracy, it is an oligarchy of around 200 billionaires, who believe that the world belongs to them. And it appears that their interests are worth any sacrifice. We should stop believing our mainstream media. NATO has bought them and for decades they have been talking us step by step into a readiness to accept war as an emergency solution. Actually only to push through economic interests, but that is not said. They are lying through their teeth.

The Editor

Two Hymns for Justice Now!

Shirley Erena Murray died in January 2020. Her biography is currently being written. In the final years of life she kept writing new texts, and we reprint two of them in this issue. The music for ‘Everyone born, a place at the table’ by Gibson, is found in *Faith Forever Singing*, NZ Hymnbook Trust 2000. The final verse has been added later. If you sing the full verses and chorus each time, you’ll lose everyone except the most ardent singer. Edit to sing what suits your occasion. The music for ‘Who would steal a life?’ is by Swee Hong Lim, an Asian hymn composer, who met Shirley Murray when they attended Asian Christian workshops.

The music is found in *Life into Life – New and Collected Hymns* Hope Publishers 2019 (Philip Garside Publishers Ltd for orders: bookspgpl)

For everyone born, a place at the table,

For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead,

and God will delight when we are creators
of justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators
of justice, justice and joy!

For woman and man, a place at the table,
revising the roles, deciding the share,
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,
for woman and man, a system that's fair,

For young and for old, a place at the table,
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,
the hand of a child in hands that are wrinkled,
for young and for old, the right to belong,

For just and unjust, a place at the table,
abuser, abused, with need to forgive,
in anger, in hurt, a mindset of mercy,
for just and unjust, a new way to live,

For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
for everyone born, the right to be free,

For gay and for straight, a place at the table,
A covenant shared , a welcoming space,
a rainbow of race and gender and colour,
for gay and for straight, the chalice of grace,

Words © Shirley Murray
Tune MENSA © Colin Gibson



Who would steal a life?

A hymn about human trafficking by Shirley Erena Murray 2015

Who would steal a life to satisfy a greed?
Who would buy a life, despairing and in need?
God, help us wipe away this evil trade,
make it now your people's passionate crusade!

Who would hurt a child, lead innocents astray?
Who would do this thing and bear the light of day?
God, help us wipe away this evil trade,
make it now your people's passionate crusade!

Who would taint the young who look for love and care,
feed a greed for money, harm the unaware?
God, help us wipe away this evil trade,
make it now your people's passionate crusade!

Where the poor are punished, nothing left to sell
but their very bodies in a human hell,
God, help us wipe away this evil trade!
Every faith and culture join in this crusade!

Words and music found in Life into Life – New and
Collected Hymns
Hope Publishers 2019.

