

# SOFiA

## Exploring Values, Meaning and Spirituality

### Follow Jesus to the Sea.

I love this line from a poem composed by that lowest-case of poets, ee cummings:

for whatever we lose (like a you or a me)  
it's always ourselves we find in the sea

The sea is mystery. It's a desert. Save but for the dark pinpricks of distant ships or gyring birds, it is a great emptiness that clears away our pretences. It washes away our preconceptions. Its waves grind to sand our edifices of pride. It hides power and energy beneath its surface.

In the myth from the gospel of John, that most mystical of biblical gospels, Jesus stands on the beach after his death and resurrection. Dark mysteries writhe and surge below the waves. Jesus knows what moves under the water. He sees the unseen. He tells his friends where to drop the net. They follow his instructions and pull up a huge haul of fish. The sea is the realm of the unconscious. The waves are our fears. The Christ is the One within us who calms the waves and casts out the fear and enables us to find what we need to find below the surface.

It's always ourselves we find in the sea. We find that Self by unfinding: by recognizing who we aren't. When you go to the beach, you have to leave a lot behind. Half the fun of it is reducing your belongings to what fits in a wicker basket, and wearing as little clothing as possible. And when you get into the water, there's no carrying the wicker basket. Or even the flip-flops. Is this not what it means to follow Jesus? To move freely and joyfully in the waters of the soul, unburdened by all the baggage of habit and culture. To help

people shed their assumptions, drop their worn-out beliefs, and soak up the sun of love and peace and total acceptance?

In this sacred myth from the gospel of John, the disciples went from being fishers of fish to being fishers of women and men and then to being fishers of fish once again, after the death of Jesus. A person's gotta eat, after all. Jesus understood that. Let the people eat. All the people. Not just the 1%. Jesus helped his friends fish so that there would be food to spread around to the 99%. Is this not what it means to follow Jesus - not just to preach justice, as he did, but to make justice real, as Jesus did? To press faithfully for effective social and political change, so that everyone will have food on the table? When we know who we really are, when we know who we really aren't, when we shed ourselves of all that gets in love's way - then we know we are here not just for our selfish selves. We're here for each other. That means changing the economic and political system so that the needs of all are met. That means participating in politics on the side of the most vulnerable people in society. That means campaigning for issues and candidates. That means voting in every election, and motivating others to do the same. *"Come, and have breakfast,"* said Jesus by the sea. Following him, let us make sure there is enough breakfast for everyone.

It's always ourselves we find in the sea: our true selves, and our true mission.

Jim Burklo

Senior Associate Dean of Religious and Spiritual Life,  
University of Southern California

# Application for Membership in the 12 Disciples

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_ first \_\_\_\_\_ nickname bar \_\_\_\_\_ (father's name)

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_ hut, shack, tent \_\_\_\_\_ village \_\_\_\_\_ province \_\_\_\_\_ empire

**Occupation:** \_\_bass fishing \_\_catfish fishing \_\_tilapia fishing \_\_walleye fishing \_\_tax-collecting  
\_\_banditry \_\_carpentry (houses, furniture) \_\_carpentry (crosses) \_\_farming \_\_\_\_\_other

**Class:** \_\_desperately poor \_\_dirt poor \_\_poor \_\_poor but proud

**Ethnicity:** \_\_Jew \_\_Gentile

**Family Status** - check or fill all that apply:

\_\_married, one wife \_\_married, two wives \_\_married, 3 or more wives \_\_eldest brother \_\_2nd or lesser  
brother \_\_mother still living and kvetching that you don't come home often enough \_\_ # of children

**Do you keep kosher?** \_\_yes \_\_no **If yes, really?** \_\_yes \_\_no

**Hobbies:** \_\_fishing \_\_other

**Political Affiliation:** \_\_Pharisee \_\_Sadducee \_\_Zealot If Zealot, which faction? \_\_People's Front for  
the Liberation of Israel \_\_Front for the People's Liberation of Israel \_\_Revolutionary People's Front for the  
Liberation of Israel \_\_Front for the Revolutionary Liberation of Israel \_\_Peasant's Front for the Salvation  
of Israel \_\_Peasant's Party for the Violent Overthrow of the Roman Empire \_\_other faction

**Medical Status:** \_\_lame \_\_blind \_\_leper \_\_resurrected \_\_demon-possessed \_\_\_\_\_other

**Education:** \_\_Bar Mitzvah \_\_Hanging out in synagogue/temple \_\_School of hard knocks \_\_\_\_\_other

**Have you ever been someone else's disciple?** \_\_yes \_\_no

If yes, reason for defecting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Have you ever loved your enemies before?** \_\_yes \_\_no \_\_are you crazy? \_\_am willing to try

**Ever offered forgiveness to someone who harmed you?** \_\_yes \_\_no \_\_I still hate that @\*!)\*?!@  
\_\_am willing to try to forgive

**Have you ever been persecuted for righteousness' sake?** \_\_yes \_\_no If yes, describe  
persecution: \_\_\_\_\_ Are you ready for more? \_\_yes \_\_no

**Do you have transportation:** \_\_sandals \_\_walking stick \_\_camel \_\_ox \_\_ass \_\_boat

**Are you literate?** \_\_yes \_\_no \_\_kinda

If not, provide name and address of person who assisted you in filling out this form: \_\_\_\_\_

**Please deliver this completed form to:** Simon, aka "Peter", Director of Personnel and Recruitment.

# 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.

**Chairperson:** Pete Cowley

[prcowley@gmail.com](mailto:prcowley@gmail.com)

13 Leith St Gisborne 4010

**Secretary:** John Thornley

[johngill@inspire.net.nz](mailto:johngill@inspire.net.nz)

**Treasurer:** Pete Cowley

[prcowley@gmail.com](mailto:prcowley@gmail.com)

**Membership Secretary and Webmaster:** Pete Cowley

**Local Groups Coordinator:** Mary Ellen Warren

[mewarren1@gmail.com](mailto:mewarren1@gmail.com)

**Additional member:** Philip Grimmatt

## Newsletter Team

**Editor:** Laurie Chisholm

email [laurie.chisholm1@gmail.com](mailto:laurie.chisholm1@gmail.com)

mobile 0212010302

**Copy Editors:** Shirley Dixon, Maria Cash, Yvonne Curtis and Jocelyn Kirkwood.

**Distribution** is by Peter Cowley.

**Address:** 62/68 Mountain Road

Mount Wellington

Auckland 1072

## 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 June 2022.

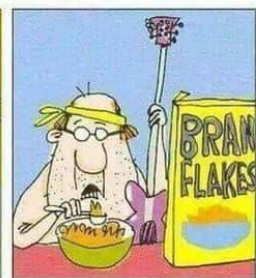
# Contents

Follow Jesus to the Sea .....	1
Application for Membership in the 12 Disciples.....	2
About SOFiA.....	3
SOFiA News.....	4
Your Committee at Work!.....	4
Future Planning Responses .....	4
Are You Missing Conference? .....	4
A World First — In NZ! .....	4
Oh No—Not Again! .....	5
Seven Radio Programmes for Easter .....	6
Inaugural Winner of Sir Lloyd Geering Scholarship in Religion .....	7
Book Review .....	7
Reimagining God. The Faith Journey of a Modern Heretic .....	7
Internet Corner .....	8
Progressive Christianity.....	8
Killing and Dying for a Cause.....	8

## ROCK'N ROLL BANDS FOR FOLKS YOUR AGE



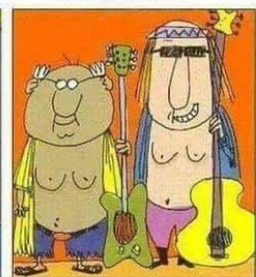
The Grateful  
we're not Dead



Earth, Wind  
and Fiber



Fleetwood Crack



The Boobie Brothers

# SOFiA News

## Your Committee at Work!

Mary Ellen Warren has sent emails to all 14 local groups that we are aware of, asking 11 questions with the aim of getting a clearer picture of what local activity is going on. Not all groups have answered so far.

## Future Planning Responses

John Thornley says there has been a good start to responses on the Committee's exercise in future ideas for topics for Conferences and local groups. To date, eleven individuals have sent in their ideas. It takes a little longer for groups to discuss and send a response, and it can be focus for a future local meeting. All the details are found on page 4 of the February issue. Please send responses to John Thornley ([johngill@inspire.net.nz](mailto:johngill@inspire.net.nz)) Dates for next two Committee meetings: 13 April and 11 May.

## Are You Missing Conference?

If so, the following poem may help evoke again the feeling of being at such a Conference. The author is a primary school teacher with an M.Ed. in Religious Studies. She was also a member of the UK Steering Committee. Thanks to Beverley Smith for the tip!

What an age since we first came together!  
Tiered seats throbbled with expectation, excitement,  
Apprehension in anticipation of action.  
Here sat strangers, seeking sanctuary  
So much flotsam and jetsam on a sea of faith  
Fearful and somewhat wary of each other before  
IT HAPPENED, we were under way.  
Cupitt's darts struck home, pursued by others'  
weaponry  
And, one by one, folk threw accustomed caution to the  
winds  
Aired questions and concerns common to the throng.

Such characters collected there!  
They leavened every group discussion,  
Livened up the bar and dining tables.

Spirited chat sprung up in sundry places  
No intervention then by skilled Facilitators  
Ensuring fair play, gagging the garrulous  
And coaxing contributions from the timid!  
Who remembers the sparkling set-to between  
An urbane photographer from down-under in broad-  
brimmed hat  
And an earnest Methodist Radical, the one who urged us  
To engage in political action on behalf of the Third World?  
Or an impassioned argument on the sun-drenched terrace  
Between a feminist from the Metropolis (into knitting)  
And a motherly Mancunian, whose wit and wisdom  
warmed  
Those of us sitting on the sidelines?

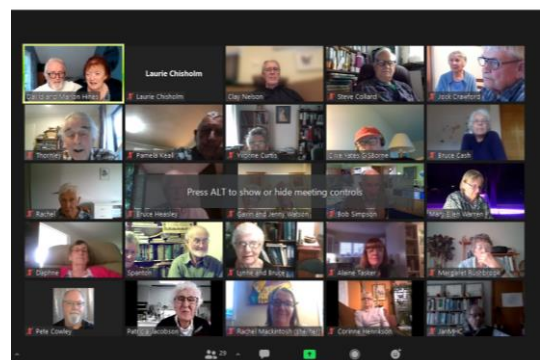
Bar closing imposed no constraint on conversations  
Carried into the small hours by Quaker universalists  
And disenchanting Catholics who next morning clustered  
Contemplatively around a clump of driftwood on a table

And, hard to credit now, for such practice has been long  
Eschewed - we Anglicans celebrated an uneasy  
Eucharist,  
Sharing symbols of our past, less certain of our future  
Before we left to go our separate ways disclosures  
came:  
"Hands up Non-Realists!" and "Who agrees to stay  
aboard the yellow submarine to continue a journey  
together in the Sea of Faith?"  
Most of us answered emphatically that we did.

Penny Mawdsley

## A World First — In NZ!

On 20 March 2022, the Auckland SOFiA group hosted the very first ever Zoom meeting to which SOFiA members from all over New Zealand were invited. A total of 45 people attended. Only 7 were from the Auckland group as a significant number are not yet Zoom-literate. Clay Nelson spoke warmly about his memories of Bishop John Spong, who was his bishop when he began ministry as an Episcopalian Vicar in the United States.





# Oh No—Not Again!

Has *Homo sapiens* learnt nothing from two world wars, Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan? The Russian invasion of Ukraine adds a new war to an already long list of tragic wars. It is resulting in millions of refugees, the death of many thousands, an astronomical cost in weapons and the wholesale destruction of villages and cities. Above all, it is causing an inconceivable mountain of human suffering, and also setting back humanity's feeble attempts to combat the climate crisis and to find an alternative to fossil fuels.

The conventional wisdom blames Vladimir Putin, the Russian leader. He is the one who has invaded another sovereign nation. People suspect him of being a megalomaniac, or mentally deranged, or of having megalomaniac dreams of establishing a greater Russia. They fear he will not stop at Ukraine, but will, like Hitler, attempt to bring Europe as a whole under his rule.

Now we need to be cautious in interpreting what either side says in a war. There is a tendency to idealise one's own side and to demonise the other side. For that reason alone, we should be cautious in the way we ascribe motives to Putin. But there is no shortage of views expressed on the Ukraine war. It seems that everyone with a public profile is rushing to publicise their opinion. A professional mediator believes we should try to think our way into Putin's shoes and to make sure that any proposals are win-win.

**Chris Hedges**, who, in spite of many years spent as a journalist in the thick of violent conflicts is not a pacifist, thinks that the military-industrial complex, which stands to profit enormously from this war, is in no hurry to see it end. The longer it goes on, the more profit. The inevitable death toll is secondary in comparison.

**Noam Chomsky** thinks that Ukraine is of enormous strategic importance to the Russians. They are faced with a step-by-step increase in the size of NATO, and the intention of Ukraine to also join NATO, bringing that military alliance right to the borders of Russia. He believes that the solution is for Ukraine to give up its plan to

join NATO and to declare itself an independent state that is not militarily aligned with either Russia or the West.

I also listened to an interview with **Fredrick Kagan**, an expert in military history, who understands Russian thinking very well but who regards NATO as a defensive alliance of free states and thinks that NATO expansion was not aimed at threatening Russia. This is very likely true, but disregards how NATO expansion looks from a Russian perspective. Don't forget that Russia has a long cold war history in which it and NATO were deadly enemies for 45 years.

My most interesting discovery was **John Mearsheimer**, an expert

in international relations, who calls his perspective neorealist. The conventional wisdom is that Ukraine has the right to determine its own destiny, so if it wants to align with the West (NATO and the EU), Russia has no good reason to object. It can

## Timeline

1999 Hungary, Czech Republic and Poland join NATO

2004: Baltic states join NATO

2008 NATO Summit at Bucharest: NATO officially announces that Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO.

2009: Albania and Croatia join NATO

Feb 2014: Pro-Russian president flees Ukraine after an uprising supported by America. Russia responds by taking Crimea.

Dec 2017: Trump sells "defensive weapons" to Ukraine.

July 2021: Major NATO naval exercise in Black Sea region. British naval destroyer enters territorial waters claimed by Russia.

November 2021 US-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership. Ukraine committed to reforms for full integration into NATO.

24 February 2022: Russia invades Ukraine.

only be a good thing if Ukraine heads towards being a liberal democracy in the West European model.

Mearsheimer points out that NATO expansion to include Ukraine and Georgia would mean that an anti-Russian alliance moves right up to the Russian border. Russians made it clear that this was not acceptable to them, so first they invaded Crimea, then they supported civil war in Eastern Ukraine and finally they invaded Ukraine itself. They also used military action to prevent Georgia from aligning to the West. Don't forget that during the Cuban missile crisis, America found a similar situation (military equipment from a hostile power on its borders) completely intolerable.

Mearsheimer thinks that America bears primary responsibility for the current situation. Think of Russia as feeling backed into a corner and reluctantly forced into a desperate act in defence of its strategic interests. Like Noam Chomsky and Yanis Varoufakis, he sees the only practical solution to be a clear declaration by NATO and by Ukraine that the latter will never become a NATO member. Unfortunately, he also sees his position as a minority one and therefore that this outcome is unlikely. A division into separate East and West Ukraine countries is also currently unlikely but could become attractive as frustration grows.

### Links

Russia, Ukraine and the West  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ys2zTL-b3eE&t=20s>

<https://www.economist.com/by-invitation/2022/03/11/john-mearsheimer-on-why-the-west-is-principally-responsible-for-the-ukrainian-crisis>

Ukraine Conflict Explained by John Mearsheimer:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAB3QsuShXU>

*The Editor*

# Seven Radio Programmes for Easter

## Tuning in to Aotearoan hymnody

John and Gillian Thornley, hosts for the Wesley Broadway weekly programmes on Manawatu People's Radio (MPR), offer seven songs for the Easter season. John comments: 'In the annual church calendar Easter lasts for 13 Sundays, starting Lent on March 1 and ending On 20 May'.

For online listening the website On Demand files holds programmes for 3 months, so SOFiA followers can still listen to the March programmes when the April issue of the Newsletter is published. Website access: [www.mpr.nz/radio/wesley](http://www.mpr.nz/radio/wesley). People in the Manawatu region can hear the live programmes on each Tuesday and Saturday mornings, 11 A.M. on AM Frequency RNZ 999.

Gillian says, 'We favour sharing Easter songs from our New Zealand hymnwriters. From 2005 to 2014 we were the Managers for the NZ Hymnbook Trust. It was a privilege to work with composers and poets in the creation of new hymns.'

Colin Gibson shared with us a letter from Emeritus Dick Watson of Durham University, England, senior editor for the comprehensive International Canterbury Dictionary of Hymnology. He had just read Gibson's Companion to NZ hymnody, *Knowing the Song*. Here are some words from Watson's letter:

'Your Companion is a wonderful celebration of a great body of work that I, for one, knew little about. You can be justifiably proud of your part in achieving a monument to enterprise and innovation in a relatively young country. I loved the entries on hymns that I didn't know existed, such as 'The jersey cow came mooing' by Joy Cowley, and many of your own ('Let there be peace for the earth', 'Peace is not fighting', 'Take a grape'). Shirley Murray's hymns are world class (sorry if that sounds such a corny phrase, but your Companion shows that she was one of the great

writers of hymns of the world). I was also deeply moved by 'Tama ngakau marie', and the thought of the burial of the brave soldiers in North Africa and Italy, so far from home'.

## The list of radio programmes.

Each programme lasts for half an hour, and is repeated the following week.

March 1: Six Easter hymns from contemporary sources

March 15: Four jazz instrumentals

March 29: Seven traditional Easter hymns

April 12: Four New Zealand hymnwriters and Easter – Colin Gibson, Shirley Erena Murray, Bill Wallace and Marnie Barrell

April 26: Songs for peace - follows Anzac Day

The programmes for May - one of them will choose Easter songs from the African-American women's choral group, Sweet Honey in the Rock.

John and Gillian welcome responses to our radio programme.

Email: [john.gill@inspire.net.nz](mailto:john.gill@inspire.net.nz)

John Thornley

## Inaugural Winner of Sir Lloyd Geering Scholarship in Religion

Arama Tairea is the first recipient of the \$10,000 annual scholarship, which will support his Masters research. He says, "Like Geering, I am fascinated by contemporary religious change. I am a child of the Pacific (Cook Islands Maori), and this scholarship gives me the opportunity to hopefully provide a detailed contemporary understanding of religion and religiosity among Cook Islands Maori in New Zealand, a people who have experienced much religious change since they first started arriving in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Victoria University of Wellington's Religious Studies Programme continues to seek support for the scholarship, in order to secure its long-term future.

## Book Review

### Reimagining God. The Faith Journey of a Modern Heretic

Lloyd Geering. Polebridge Press 2014

Many of Lloyd's books have God in the title. *From the Big Bang to God* covers the evolutionary story from the beginning of the universe to the emergence of human culture and language, with its concept of gods and one God, followed by the coming down of God to earth. *Christianity without God* looks to a Christianity without a theistic assumption. *Wrestling with God* is more autobiographical. There are also *God in the New World* and *Tomorrow's God*.

I am puzzled by the frequency with which "God" appears in Lloyd's book titles. Why dwell on "God" when theism is dead and God can only have a symbolic meaning that needs describing with other words? I am aware that book titles are often chosen by publishers rather than authors, as they are important for marketing. It could also be that stirring controversy over "God" is a way to attract publicity. Another possibility is that he is beginning with "God" as a traditional concept in order to trace a path to a believable modern view. To be sure, there are major problems with the traditional idea of God, but I think the situation is rather like that of a millipede, who is able to walk quite naturally, but when asked how he does it, becomes all confused. We used to just naturally refer to God but now have begun thinking about "God" and become confused, because this is no simple matter.

The present book weaves together various speeches given to various audiences, including our very own Sea of Faith. So there isn't a tight focus on "reimagining God" but rather talks with a different theme that illuminate the idea of reimagining God from different angles.

After some autobiographical reflections and an excellent meditation on the difference between faith and belief and on the importance of doubt as a counter to

superstition, Lloyd has a series of chapters on key thinkers who have influenced him.

**Friedrich Schleiermacher** initiated modern theology by focusing on the Christian community's experience rather than on doctrines, biblical texts or divine revelation. His major work *Glaubenslehre* (teaching about faith) focusses on the human experience of faith or trust. He describes this as a feeling of absolute dependence (we are dependent parts of something far greater than us) and what he called God-consciousness.

**Ludwig Feuerbach** unmasked ideas about God as really ideas about humanity that have been absolutized and externalised onto a divine being. The focus needs to change from heaven to earth.

**Carl Jung** brought an understanding of psychology to the subject. "God" is a psychological reality, perhaps better described as a God-image, that emerges from the unconscious. The archetypes of God and of the Self are essentially one and the same.

**Teilhard de Chardin**, in his magnum opus *The Phenomenon of Man*, painted an evolutionary picture that has brought forth the vast cosmos, the planet Earth, life, *Homo sapiens* and is headed towards an Omega point. For him, God is the evolving process itself, a story of ever-increasing complexity.

**John Robinson**, in his famous book *Honest to God*, made popular the revolutionary changes that had been happening in theology but were not known by the general public.

The next part, "Adjusting to the Challenges", argues for God as a human creation, made possible by the development of language. It also argues for our modern scientific world view as a natural development from Christianity rather than something opposed to it.

The final part looks at the shape that a future spirituality might take and what an ecological spirituality might look like.

Lloyd has a unique ability to distil down complex ideas to the basics and to explain them with admirable clarity. I think he aims to articulate an incontrovertible bedrock that

can guide our culture as it moves into the future. This makes it difficult to argue with and so it is a disappointment to me that so little active debate about Lloyd's ideas has taken place.

*The Editor*

## Internet Corner

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

### Progressive Christianity

If you want to find out more about Progressive Christianity, two websites can help. The first is global and the second is NZ-based.

<https://progressivechristianity.org/>

<https://progressivechristianityaotearoa.com/>

## Killing and Dying for a Cause

No historian would deny that the part played by crimes committed for personal motives is very small compared to the vast populations slaughtered in unselfish loyalty to a jealous God, king, country, or political system. ...the number of people killed by robbers, highwaymen, gangsters and other asocial elements is negligible compared to the masses cheerfully slain in the name of the true religion, the sacred cause. Heretics were tortured and burnt alive not in anger but in sorrow, for the good of their immortal souls. The Russian and Chinese purges were represented as operations of social hygiene, to prepare mankind for the golden age of the classless society.

Man has always been prepared not only to kill, but also to die for good, bad, or completely hair-brained causes. What can be a more valid proof for the reality of the urge for self-transcendence?

*Arthur Koestler*