

# Sea of Faith

Exploring Values, Spirituality and Meaning

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

## Religion for a Sustainable Future

Annual Conference 2-4 November 2018

Silverstream Retreat Lower Hutt

As Noel Cheer has reminded us many times, the Sea of Faith is an adult “talk-fest” on religion; a talk-fest that involves exploration of a wide range of topics related to values, spirituality and meaning that are relevant to our current existence and the challenges we face in living a good life.

This year’s conference is focussing on arguably the most important exploration of all – how are we going to survive in a human world that is increasingly showing itself to be worryingly unsustainable and heading for disaster? And, importantly, where does religion fit into this challenge? Can religion help?

We are confronted by the possibilities of runaway climate change that will disrupt millions, if not billions of the world’s current population, nuclear war is still a major threat, polluted rivers, oceans, and land environments reduce the capacity for feeding the world’s population apart from detracting from aesthetic beauty and quality of life, the rich-poor divide continues to widen in most countries of the world including New Zealand where child poverty has become a regular topic of angst on national media. The world’s financial system appears on the brink of major collapse, and the rate of species extinction brought about largely through habitat destruction by *Homo sapiens* has now occurred to such an extent that the epoch we members of the Sea of Faith were born into, the Holocene, has now

been superseded by a new epoch, the Anthropocene, in recognition of the way life on Earth has been radically altered by the presence of human beings.

Can religion help us change our ways before it is too late? We seem in great need of a shift in human understanding far more profound than the one initiated by Luther.

Religion won’t go away. God might be dead but she won’t lie down! Institutional religion, a human power construct, has brought great benefits, but also curses - pogroms, crusades, jihads and inquisitions. Obsolete forms will likely persist. But new religious forms as part of an emerging global culture may save us.

What can religion possibly offer when the capitalist/consumerist economy in which we are immersed appears to offer us all we think we need - sport and infotainment, every recreational product (from China) we can imagine - holding us all in its sway? The modern economy’s techniques of manufacturing consent, its scientifically designed advertising and generation of wants and “must haves,” embraces us all. How can something ostensibly dull and obsolete, as a lot of ‘religion’ seems, offer anything of use?

Capitalist-driven culture is in its terminal phase, drawing down too heavily on the earth’s resources, with its militarism,

excessive human population, massive pollution of air, ocean and land, and so much power vested in rapacious corporates with their governmental sycophants. Politicians, advertisers, social scientists, television evangelists, the news media and the sports and entertainment industries have learned what makes us respond. It works. None of us are immune. But when we act in their interests, we are rarely acting in our own. A rising chorus of scientists and informed commentators point out that the capitalist culture, which has brought so many blessings, is now putting the human economy at risk, and callously taking down the environment as it goes. However, most people don't seem to be aware how serious things have become.

We need resources far beyond a technological fix to address this crisis and to resource us to make a change as deep as is required. That means drawing on the wellsprings of our spiritual capacity and ancient wisdom.

Religion is not a popular word today. Many will reject it as unimportant, or revile it as dangerous. How can we as the Sea of Faith be so bold to suggest that it can be the key to a sustainable future? The etymology of religion points to what "links us back" (re-lig-ere); but to what? To a Creator or First Principle? This is language that speaks to a minority of people today.

Yet there is a 'linkage' that matters, that is vitally important; one that we cannot avoid in reality, even if we try to avoid it mentally. That vital linkage is in recognising that "we're all in this together": we are part of the fabric of this world and we are profoundly part of one another.

This is the basic ecological understanding that humanity needs to recover, lest we poison the biosphere and extinguish other species, if not our own. The realisation that environmentalism has an ethical claim on each of us came to many of us in the light of the Al Gore film, *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006). This was followed by a lesser-known, crowd-funded film by director Franny Armstrong and (New Zealand) producer Lizzie Gillet called *The Age of Stupid* (2009).

But what has this to do with religion? For Sir Lloyd Geering, it has to do with the Greening of Christianity (Lecture Series, 2005). Let's start with the bad news: Judeo-Christian monotheism resolved the multiple gods into one God, thereby eliminating the Earth Mother in favour of an all-powerful Sky Father. In so doing it not only promoted exclusive male imagery and patriarchy but also desacralized the earth. And it promoted an unhealthy dualism of earthly/heavenly, material/spiritual, and temporal/eternal. When we no longer reverence nature, we can despoil it, and then expect some *Deus ex machina* to intervene to save us!

Good news is found in the mythologies of various indigenous cultures that intimately connected human destiny with the rest of nature. If we rightly understand the role of story and myth (profound truth in fictional form) then we can value and reinterpret these stories for our time. Eastern religion has likewise continued to reverence nature. In the case of Buddhism, we are reminded that religion that is compassionate to all creatures does not need to subscribe to supernatural theology.

While monotheism is flawed (as Geering would say), the Hebrew Scriptures remind us that we are formed from the dust of the earth: we are earthlings. We may not be dependent on the "breath of God", but we are vitally dependent on atmospheric gases.

What we used to call 'God', we may now term the ground of being (Paul Tillich), the sum of our highest values, the evolutionary process itself (Teilhard de Chardin), or the interconnectedness of all things. That interconnectedness is a necessary 'belief' if we are to be convinced to act more urgently for a sustainable future.

What are we to do? is not a new question. The ancient Hebrews, finding themselves in a radically different situation, wondered, "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a foreign land?" This is the topic for our upcoming conference. What shape can our spirituality take in order to guide us to thrive and be happy in this modern foreign land we find ourselves in? What is religion for a sustainable future?

Doug Sellman/Adrian Skelton/Ian Crumpton

# Conference 2018 Programme

## Friday November 2

From 9.30	Constant tea/coffee/muffins available for all arrivals	Pillars
From 12.30	Lunch for early arrivals	Dining room
12.30 – 2.00	Steering Committee meets over Lunch	Pillars
1.00 – 2.45	Registration Desk in operation	Pillars
3.00 – 3.30	Conference opening, Jan Calvert	Pillars
3.30 – 4.30	<b>Keynote by Lloyd Geering</b>	Pillars
4.30 – 5.30	Core Groups meet	As per handout
5.45 – 6.15	Happy (half) hour in Pillars.	Pillars
6.30 – 7.30	Dinner	Dining Room
7.45 – finish	AGM Sea of Faith	Pillars

## Saturday November 3

7.00 – 8.00	Breakfast	Dining Room
8.30 – 9.30	<b>Keynote by Byron Rangiwai</b>	Pillars
9.30 – 10.30	Core Groups meet	As per handout
10.30 – 11.00	Morning Tea	Pillars
11.00 – 12.00	<b>Keynote by Barbara Peddie</b>	Pillars
12.00 – 1.00	Core Groups meet	As per handout
1.00 – 2.00	Lunch	Dining Room
2.00 – 3.30	Elective. Megan Scott and Emily Calvert	Pillars
3.30 – 4.00	Afternoon Tea	Pillars
4.00 – 5.00}	{Elective. Tom Hall	Pillars
4.00 – 5.00}	{Elective. Doug Sellman	TBA
6.00 – 7.00	Happy hour	Pillars
7.00 – 8.00	Conference Dinner	Dining Room
8.15 – 9.30	Entertainment	Pillars

## Sunday November 4

7.00 – 8.00	Breakfast	Dining Room
8.30 – 9.30	<b>Keynote by Charles Waldegrave</b>	Pillars
9.30 – 10.30	Core Groups meet	As per handout
10.30 – 11.00	Morning Tea	Pillars
11.00 – 12.30	<b>Panel Discussion chaired by Adrian Skelton</b>	Pillars
12.30 – 12.45	Close of 2018 Conference	Pillars
12.45	Collect Packed Lunch for all attendees ( <u>especially first departures</u> )	Dining Room
<b>1.00</b>	<b><u>First shuttle departs</u></b>	

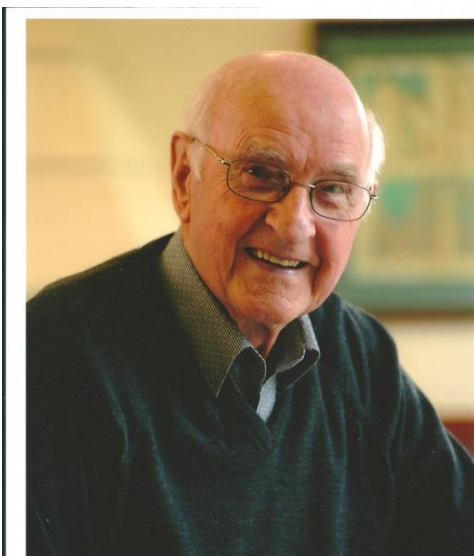
# Keynote addresses and their speakers

## Keynote address by Sir Lloyd Geering:

### God Comes down to Earth (Secular Version)

Traditional Christianity has proclaimed as its central tenet its doctrine of the Incarnation. This asserted that God had come down from heaven to earth and become 'enfleshed' in the man Jesus of Nazareth. This assumed a dualistic or two-tiered view of the universe, commonly thought of as 'heaven and earth'. But what happens to this doctrine as, in modern times, we moved into the secular world-view of one, almost infinitely large, space-time universe? Some would argue that it renders Christianity obsolete. But this lecture expounds an alternative view, which may be called "Secular Christianity".

The modern non-religious world, far from being an enemy to Christianity that must be held at bay, is in fact the culmination of its doctrine of the incarnation. In the secular world the concept of God turns out to be a mythical symbol for our highest human values, such as truth, justice and compassion, as even the New Testament acknowledges in its assertion that "God is love". We humans are now challenged to put these values into practice in our daily life.



Professor Sir Lloyd Geering was born in Canterbury in 1918 and educated in Otago. He holds Honours degrees in Mathematics and Old Testament Language and Literature. Ordained as a Presbyterian minister, he

served in Kurow, Dunedin and Wellington. He held chairs of Old Testament Studies at theological colleges in Brisbane and Dunedin before being appointed as the foundation professor of Religious Studies at Victoria University of Wellington. From this he retired in 1984. The University of Otago awarded him an honorary D.D in 1976 and he received a C.B.E in the 1987 New Year Honours, PCNZM in 2001 and ONZ in 2007. He celebrated his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday on February 26 2018.

## Keynote address by Byron Rangiwai

### Te Atuatanga o te taiao: A Māori theology of the environment

The word Atua refers to an ancestor with continuing influence; or a god, demon, supernatural being, deity, ghost, strange being, or an object of superstitious regard. The missionaries took the word Atua and used it to describe the Christian God. A Māori context for speaking about Atua (God – in a post-Christian context, or gods) is located within the environment; within a cultural context where nature and the elements are inhabited by myriad Atua. Major Atua have dominion over the sea or forest, while minor Atua are specific to whānau (families) or hapū (sub-tribes). Some Atua are anthropomorphised while others may appear in the form of lizards, or whales, or insects. Some Atua are our direct ancestors who have been deified over time and others are our whanaunga (relatives). For Māori, positive relationships with Atua ensure peace within the environment. This keynote address will explore the relationships between Māori, Atua and the environment.

Dr Byron Rangiwai

BA (*Waik*), MIS(1<sup>st</sup> Hons) (*TWWoA*), PhD (*AuckUT*), PhD Candidate (*Otago*)

Ngāti Manawa, Ngāti Whare, Ngāti Porou, Ngāi Tūhoe



Byron holds a PhD in Māori and Indigenous Development from Auckland University of Technology. His thesis interpreted a prophecy uttered by the nineteenth century prophet Te Kooti Arikirangi Te Turuki and reformulated it into a community development model. Byron is completing a second PhD at the University of Otago around the syncretism evident in Māori theology and the impacts of this upon the development of Christian faith among Māori.

#### **Keynote address by Rev Dr Barbara Peddie**

#### **Topic (on bioethics) TBD**

Details of Barbara's contribution will be available after her return from overseas in August.

Barbara retired from the position of Scientific Officer (Microbiology) in the Nephrology Dept, Christchurch Hospital in 2002 and is now an ordained presbyter of the Methodist Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, currently appointed to the Central South Island Synod. She holds a PhD in Microbiology, BTheol and a PGDipTheol. Her work in microbiology was in the fields of infectious diseases and new antimicrobial agents, and in theology, she majored in systematic theology and ethics.

#### **Keynote address by Charles Waldegrave:**

#### **Locating the Life of God in Society**

Faith has so many dimensions in people's lives, ranging from the mystical to radical social activism. Rather than viewing these as a continuum, I like to see mystery and social justice brought together. This address will consider ethical and spiritual priorities around notions of service to communities and society as expressions of generosity and love.

In the Christian tradition, we now have good evidence of the alternative lifestyles of both the mother Church in Jerusalem and the Pauline Churches in the Diaspora during the first century CE. They were aspirational in both their participation in society and their challenge to the prevailing ethos. At the same time a strong sense of the mystical permeated their lives.

These provide a challenge to many modern Christians caught in the headlights of relentless secular materialist assumptions, who often find themselves in protective survivalist mode, biblical assertion or retired personal faith mode. The loss of activist faith and contemporary mysticism is countered by the new monasticism (urban monasticism) and social justice activity, for example on climate change and the Living Wage.

From my perspective, locating the life of God in society is a mystical pursuit of where the pain is and how we overcome it. I am deeply interested in the action of God in and through society by secular and religious groups. I am also interested in distinguishing compassionate practical responses that meet immediate needs from structural socio-political economic responses that prevent the pain on a long-term basis.

#### **Charles Waldegrave**

Charles Waldegrave is Coordinator of the Family Centre Pākehā (European) Section and leader of the Family Centre Social Policy Research Unit, in Lower Hutt.

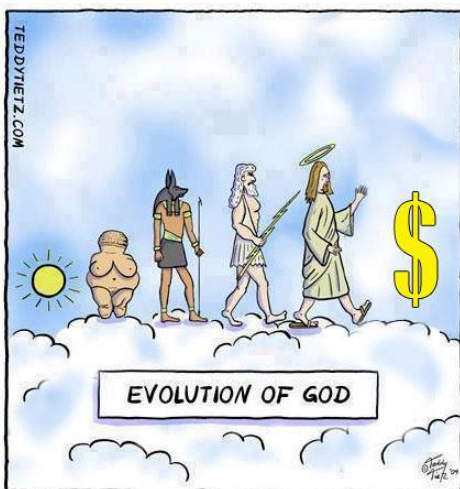
He co-leads the 'New Zealand Poverty Measurement Project' (NZPMP) which has provided the evidence base for considerable public policy debate and social and economic changes in New Zealand. He also



co-leads the New Zealand Longitudinal Study of Ageing (NZLSA) research programme. He is one of the founders of 'Just Therapy', an internationally recognised approach to addressing cultural, gender and socioeconomic contexts in therapy. He is regularly contracted to lead workshops in a range of areas of applied social policy internationally on every continent. He publishes regularly in all of the above areas.



Charles is an ordained Anglican minister whose formative education included two MA Honours degrees; the first in Educational Psychology from Waikato University in 1971, and the second in Theology and Religious Studies from Cambridge University, UK in 1977. He is known as the person who first identified poverty in New Zealand and has worked for social justice for over 40 years. He was made a Companion of the Queen's Service Order in the 2009 New Zealand New Year Honours for his long record of service to social policy in New Zealand.



## Workshops

### Footsteps & Footprints

Insights into our ecological footprint from the minds of millennials

A workshop facilitated by Megan Scott & Emily Calvert

The world population is growing at an unsustainable rate and there is much debate about how many planet earths we would need to continue living as we do. In this interactive workshop we will delve into:

- How our values of sustainability have been formed by the footsteps of people we follow
- How we can reduce the environmental footprint that we leave behind
- How we can influence future generations to live more mindfully of our resources

We endeavour to provide some practical advice on applying sustainable principles from our areas of interest in the fields of Architecture and Energy Management.



Megan Scott is a Registered Architect and Tertiary Teacher who graduated from Auckland University with a BArch (Hons) in 2005. She is keenly interested in Sustainable Architecture, having studied under the tutelage of pioneering researchers and experts in the field, Brenda and Robert Vale. Since graduating she has shifted back to the Waikato's green pastures and calls Hamilton home. She is a Homestar Practitioner (New Zealand Green Building

Council) who is hopeful that her generation will make a change towards a more sustainable future.



Emily Calvert graduated from the University of Otago in 2008 with a BSc (Physics) and BA (Spanish). After an OE, Emily was excited to return to New Zealand to be a part of EECA's Warm Homes scheme. She has since spent seven years working in the energy sector and is passionate about inspiring the next generation to make sustainable energy choices, particularly through her work with the Young Energy Professionals Network. Emily is currently living in Wellington and works at the national electricity grid owner and operator Transpower as an Energy Analyst.

### A Call for Commitment

We have for too long treated religions as belief systems. Jesus' message has been trivialized by Paul and Luther, who championed salvation by faith alone – a concept alien to the prophet they claimed to represent. Only recently has it been made clear that the Greek *pistis* is better rendered "trust" or "faithfulness" or "confidence." But even these name states of mind rather than an ethical response, and any hope for a sustainable religious or ecological future demands an active commitment to *tikkum olam* – repairing the world.



Tom Hall is a former English teacher and

lay pastor from the small rural town of Foster, Rhode Island. Active since 1996 in the Westar Institute, home of the Jesus Seminar, he was recently made a life member. He has edited more than 67 books for Polebridge Press, including 10 for his most admired author, Lloyd Geering.

### Fundamentalists' Recovery Sharing Group

Following a successful inaugural sharing group last year, we will be holding another meeting of the group during the workshop time at this year's Conference 2018.

The meeting is for anyone who has previously been a Fundamentalist (in whatever way you would like to define that term), who would like to come along and share and compare notes with others about your spiritual journey to date.

NB1: You don't need to have come last year to come this year – new participants are very welcome.

NB2: This is not a meeting to come and observe. It is a personal sharing group. So why don't I kick it off as follows...

For the first 20 years of my life I was immersed in a staunchly fundamentalist, yet loving, Christian family in which I absorbed and then committed myself to a set of conservative religious ideas on offer that became deeply embedded in my teenage psyche and which subsequently became very difficult to change my mind on. When I finally did take the plunge I found myself bereft of the wonderfully secure and motivating world view I had previously relied on for meaning and purpose. The subsequent struggle to make sense of my formative years and ensuing turmoil, and then the gradual calming over more recent years have been significant features of my adult life. Reading Lloyd Geering's books and then finally meeting the man (virtually considered the Antichrist by my family of origin, most of whom, incidentally, remain fundamentalist Christians), were both of great assistance in my recovery from fundamentalism.

I've become aware my experience is not dissimilar to that of other comrades' in the Sea of Faith.

Doug Sellman June 2018

# Directions to Silverstream Retreat

## 3 Reynolds Bach Drive



### By air

Let us know on the Registration Form when you plan to fly into and out of Wellington airport. We can then arrange for a shuttle to be there and bring you to the Conference venue. We plan three trips (probably 10.30 am, 12.00 noon and 1.30 pm) from the airport on Monday at a cost of \$20/person. Look for a Sea of Faith member with a sign. Timing for the return shuttle will be given at Conference.

### By car from Wellington

Get on the motorway (SH2) going North. Keep an eye out for Hutt Valley signs and eventually the Silverstream sign. Go to “Over the River.”

### By car from the North

There are two options

#### ***Over the Rimutakas from the Wairarapa (on SH2)***

Follow the motorway until you see a sign to turn left to Silverstream. Go to “Over the River.”

#### ***From the Manawatu***

Take the Hutt turnoff (left) at the bottom of the Ngauranga Gorge (SH2) and follow it to the Silverstream turn-off. Go to “Over the River.”

