



Sea of Faith NETWORK N.Z.

# NEWSletter

## Now We Are Ten!

**The Newsletter of the Sea of Faith Network (NZ) is celebrating its tenth birthday. This is how it began.**

I first made personal contact with Don Cupitt in 1981. I was in London on study leave when his book 'Taking Leave of God' was published. I rang him up and he invited me to spend the day with him in Cambridge. As result of our continuing contact I arranged for the St. Andrew's Trust to invite him to deliver a series of lunch-hour lectures at St. Andrews-on-the-Terrace in Wellington. He told me of a group of Anglican clergy which had started meeting in Leicester to discuss his BBC series on 'The Sea of Faith'. This group eventually decided to call itself the Sea of Faith Network.

Don Cupitt came to New Zealand in 1991 and his lectures were published as 'Rethinking Religion'. As a result of his visit, I found myself invited to give lectures at the UK SoF Conference in 1992. On my return I told the story of Don Cupitt and the SoF Network to some of the University Extension seminars I was conducting. I also showed a 30 minutes documentary on the SoF, which the BBC had done. I invited people, if interested, to give me their names and addresses. I soon had a list of about 100. They are the ones who received the first Newsletter. Only after that were they invited to continue their interest by sending ten dollars to cover the cost of further Newsletters. So then I had to establish a trust account.

I invited three or four people to form a committee to plan further activities. Ian Harris soon agreed to

become the Chair of this Steering Committee (as it was later called). I expected it would take years before we were ready for a conference. To my surprise we were able to hold our first conference in 1993, largely due to the enthusiastic and generous help of John Denny, Warden of Bryant Hall at Waikato University and his wife Gillian.

To our surprise over 200 people turned up at our first conference. The SoFN (NZ) was already able to hold a conference as large as that of UK! Since that time the NZ movement has not looked back, holding regular conferences, forming local groups, and adopting a constitution.

Once Noel Cheer took over the Newsletter, members have been kept informed by an excellent publication, whose Tenth anniversary we now celebrate.

*Lloyd Geering*

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## INTRODUCING EUGEN DREWERMANN

*This information was submitted by Laurie Chisholm of Christchurch. It has been edited for reasons of space and the full version is included in the website version of this Newsletter.*

Eugen Drewermann is Germany's best-known contemporary theologian and he is also well-known in other parts of Europe. Astonishingly, he is almost totally unknown in the English-speaking world. While we do not look up to German theologians the way we did in the 60s (when Bishop Robinson's book *Honest to God* quoted liberally from Barth, Bultmann, Bonhoeffer, Buber, and Tillich), many of us have heard of Jurgen Moltmann and Hans Küng.

In addition to practicing psychotherapy, Drewermann lectured in systematic theology at the University of Paderborn and served as a diocesan priest.

Psychotherapy is, for Drewermann, the key to unlock the meaning of our religious symbols. The title of lectures he gave at Union Theological Seminary in 1999 was "Biblical Myth and Inner Experience: Why Theology Needs Depth Psychology". It's not that he finds religion dead and therapy alive, but that psychotherapy has the conceptual tools to help us understand the meaning of our own religious traditions. Theology and church have not taken seriously the challenge that Freud and Jung represent and while some clergy use Jung's approach to the interpretation of the bible or are trained in this or that therapy, there is little systematic working-through of the implications for religion. Add to this depth psychological approach Kierkegaard's existentialism and critique of the Church establishment as well as Jung's idea that religious symbols are archetypes that are built into the human psyche, and you have the basic ingredients of Drewermann's approach.

Drewermann's work is a fundamental rethinking of theology, even a kind of anti-theology. How often have you heard that the immortality of the soul derives from Plato and Platonism? Drewermann looks rather to ancient Egyptian religion, and he traces ascension, immortality, and resurrection back there, arguing that the New Testament's use of these concepts only makes sense against that background. We take it for granted that there is a need to get back to the historical Jesus, to find out what actually happened and what kind of person he is. Drewermann says that in the story of Jesus, at all the religiously significant parts, the bible speaks mythically and that we need to learn to understand the language of myth. The Sea of Faith has learnt a lot from Cupitt, Geering, and Spong, but I think it would be stimulated and challenged by this different approach.

His writing style is different too. Most theology deals in bloodless abstractions while Drewermann makes sure that he explores and presents the emotional, personal meaning of what he is talking about. To introduce you to the theme, he might sketch a recent film, analyse a novel, meditate on a work of art (reproduced beautifully in the book) or present a folk tale from the brothers Grimm. In the middle of his argument, he might change tack and present the argument using a totally different vocabulary: if you stumble over one, the other will speak to you.

Drewermann's academic works are a bibliophile's delight: beautifully bound, often around 800 pages long

with about 150 pages of footnotes and bibliography and up to 7 levels of heading. *Structures of Evil*, his first major work, arose from his doctoral thesis. It dealt with the Yahwist's primeval history contained in Genesis 1-11. In separate volumes, he approached it from an exegetical, history of religions, and philosophical perspective. In effect, he dealt with the traditional teaching of original sin by revisiting one of its major biblical sources.

In *Depth Psychology and Exegesis*, Drewermann analysed the different genres of biblical literature (for example folk tale, saga, legend, prophecy, and parable) and used the insights of psychotherapy to help interpret their contents for a post-Enlightenment world. While he acknowledges that there can be no going back to a pre-critical view of the bible, modern study of the bible has missed the essence of the texts and that exegesis needs depth psychology to unlock their experiential background. This led to a wave of controversy about his method of interpretation, but this was largely restricted to the academic world.

In 1990, Drewermann produced *The Clergy: Psychogramme of an Ideal*. In this book, he moved from bible and theology to look at the reality of the Catholic Church today, particularly its full-time workers and their ideals of poverty, chastity, and obedience. This proved to be a best-seller, going through 10 printings in its first year, and unleashing a storm of controversy. The magazine *Der Spiegel* judged:

*Your book is the sharpest, most comprehensive, and most knowledgeable critique of the Catholic Church that there has been in recent decades.*

Drewermann held up a mirror to Catholicism, much as a therapist would confront a client with the reality of his or her life and his aim was similarly therapeutic.

Although there were already moves against him in the Catholic hierarchy, this book, along with an interview in *Der Spiegel* where Drewermann answered questions very plainly and bluntly, no doubt gave urgency to the task. In October 1991 his Archbishop removed his right to lecture at the theological faculty and in January 1992 his permission to preach was withdrawn.

Drewermann did not go quietly: a published volume of documentation on the controversy shows a lengthy correspondence in which theologian and archbishop wrestled intellectually with each other. In Drewermann's view, the accusation of false doctrine was merely a front for an agenda, directed from the top Catholic hierarchy, to remove an uncomfortable critic who challenges its authority.

Drewermann's response when it became clear that he was losing the battle was to say that if the windows of the Church cannot be opened from within, they must be broken from without. The media now took a heightened interest in [him and] public lectures filled to overflowing.

I wondered what would become of Drewermann after his exclusion from the Church. While he is often described now as a psychotherapist and writer, that tends to give a wrong impression. He has more or less continued on the same path as before: His more recent writing continues to deal in great detail with basic theological issues, now more particularly with the implications of evolution and cosmology for religion.

I read that he continues to offer psychotherapy or pastoral care (he has never charged for this, saying that those who come to him provide him with the material for his writing) and that he held weekly services of worship (in a secular space, as the Catholic Church won't permit him the use of its buildings) until December 2000.

Drewermann's work on the interpretation of texts has not been limited to the bible. He has produced a series of depth-psychological interpretations of Grimm's folk tales and similar interpretations of other works of literature. Indeed, if you want to learn more about him, the best book to start with is *Discovering the Royal Child Within: A Spiritual Psychology of the Little Prince*. With a bit of luck, by the time you have read it, something more of his will be available in English or there will be a book or two written about him.

There is also a good introduction at [www.depts.drew.edu/gsadmis/conferences/drewermann/beier.html](http://www.depts.drew.edu/gsadmis/conferences/drewermann/beier.html).

In addition, there is an authorised Drewermann website ([www.drewermann.de](http://www.drewermann.de)) that plans to have English and other language versions.

### DREWERMANN ON GOD

I believe in God in two ways. First, I believe that science is about to develop a new picture of theological thinking. It reveals the necessity of respect for a self-organising system. We can no longer speak of spirit and matter in the way we are accustomed in the Christian west. We acknowledge that spirit is a structural property of all complex systems. Consciousness creates itself on the path of evolution. God in this sense is something that unfolds itself in the world and with the world. That is a concept that reminds one of pantheism, but it is a concept of high poetry and creativity, of wisdom too, in which our communal life together with the creatures at our side is understood anew. Following 8000 years of development since the Neolithic age, which detached humans from nature and separated spirit from body, a religion will only be believable if it undertakes to create religious meaning for the human and the natural realms and which understands body and soul as an inseparable unity. It will be a religion that doesn't represent itself as aggressive and exclusive, but as integrative and dialogical.

The second point: The anxiety that broke out because humans became individuals cannot be banished. It belongs to us, it is part of our personality and freedom, our capacity for self-reflection. I regard faith in a personal God as an essential postulate in answer to human anxiety. I believe that that was what Jesus meant when he wanted to give us courage to walk on water and to feel that the abyss supports us, if only we are able to trust.

These two pictures of God, the personal God and the self-unfolding Spirit of system theory and evolution, are antithetical. But I regard it as possible, that the old Christian doctrine of the trinity is able to connect such polarities with one another.

*From an Interview in the magazine of the Frankfurter Allgemeinen Zeitung 3/5/91.*

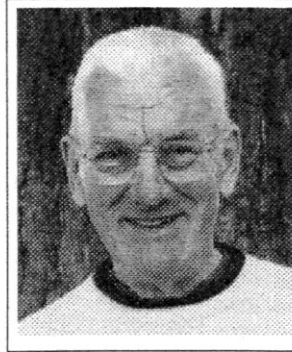


Photo: Margaret Gaze

## "LIFE" FOR DON CUPITT

**"We live in a society in which most people believe that religious thought is either totally unnecessary or quite impossible: either the truth is already known because some great authority knows it and therefore there is no place for individual religious thought, or the whole subject is completely irrational anyway, so there is absolutely nothing for religious thought to rediscover."**

**I want to reject both those views and say that religious thought is important and intensely exciting and that people can get involved with it. That is why I've always been such an ultra democrat in what I've tried to teach SOF: I want to say, "You must learn to do it for yourself!" "**

This is Don Cupitt speaking as part of the panel discussion in the last session of Conference at Timaru. He is expressing what seems to me the essence of the Sea of Faith position.

Don Cupitt has been encouraging us to launch our own craft on the sea of faith for several decades. In recognition of his essential contribution to our network, the Steering Committee decided to honour him with Life Membership at this Conference.

So just before the final panel discussion, Lloyd Geering, our first Life Member, inducted Don into that status, to the resounding applause of the whole conference.

We wish Don many more years of exciting thought himself, and of helping others plane sailing in his wake!

*Frank Gaze, Chairperson of the Steering Committee of the SoFN (NZ) 2002-2003*

**"CHANGE IS OK, BUT FOLDING MONEY IS BETTER"**

*Author unknown*



# REVIEW

## CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT GOD

by Lloyd Geering,  
Bridget Williams Books \$34.95

### A NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC

article titled "Putting together the Big Picture" epitomises for this reviewer the substance of this book. The title "Christianity Without God" will undoubtedly alarm many church people, Christianity and God are like Siamese twins, they are intimately connected and feed off each other. Divorce God from Christianity, or worse, proclaim the death of God and Christianity becomes a damp throwaway squib. Before we rush to judgment it is important to underline the author's main intention, i.e. to show how Christianity can exist without theism. In theism God is taken to be the name of a supernatural personal being believed to have created the world, who exercises control over human affairs and whose revealed will is not to be questioned. It is this theistic God that Christian orthodoxy still strongly affirms and which we can well do without. Indeed 'Christianity without God' has been around for quite some time, we are gradually loosening ourselves from the restrictive shackles of theism which enslaves its adherents in so many ways, e.g. a crude biblical literalism. As we enter the new global age it is imperative that Christianity, if it is

to play a part in shaping human affairs, takes leave of the theistic idea of God. The closing chapter of the book cogently and urgently explains why.

Lloyd Geering, in the first seven chapters of his book, gives us the "Big Picture" contending that Christianity, even in its origins was already moving towards the rejection of theism. Christianity is likened to a river, a flowing cultural stream, which has its source in ancient Israel. After many twists and turns the Christian stream, gathering new and discarding old material on its way, is now fanning out into the global secular world. The secular world is not, as some surmise, the enemy of Christianity but the logical continuation of the Judaeo-Christian stream. Old cosmic superstructures like heaven, purgatory and hell have largely disappeared from sight.

All our ideas of God — there are many — are human constructions. So are all the world's religions, all doctrines, creeds, languages, cultures and so on. There is a very enlightening chapter on the Trinity. This was a brave though tortuous attempt to bring together people's experience of grace (Jesus), love (God) and spiritual

empowerment (Holy Spirit) which evolved into a new way of understanding God. Theism was transformed into trinitarianism.

Crucial to the argument is the central doctrine of the incarnation. The focus now shifts from heaven to earth, to the importance of being human and for the freedom to think and be responsible for one's self and for others. A supernatural personal saviour is now no longer necessary. The doctrine of the incarnation was the final nail in the coffin for theism (although the author of Job had "taken on" God centuries before) and led to the evolution of the modern secular world.

The section on the Wisdom writings of the Old Testament shows how that tradition is now coming into its own as scholars tease out the voiceprints of Jesus the man of wisdom par excellence.

From his prison cell in 1945 Dietrich Bonhoeffer reflected that we must learn to live without God. This book, simply written and modest in scope, continues in that tradition. Its "Big Picture" gives us direction and hope for the future.

Alan M. Goss, Napier

## FAITH

Faith is a story  
Of another kind  
Similar to the sea  
But in the spirit  
Millions and trillions  
From very ancient times  
Have talked and thought  
Adopting their Faith  
  
People of Nations  
All creeds and colour  
Living their lives

In diverse ways  
Beliefs and notions  
Tied to the culture  
But the spirit  
Remains free  
As birds in the sky  
  
Religions are purposeful  
Can be somewhat limiting  
If practised and adhered  
With dogma and tightness  
Much time is spent  
Questioning and debating  
Even wars are fought  
In the name of  
Religion  
Faith is so special

An individual gift  
Blessed and given  
Anointed at birth  
Imprinted on us  
At the time of  
Conception  
As the life stream  
Continues  
In endless times  
And aeons  
  
Cannot be compared  
Nor compartmentalised  
Scientific Research  
So far has failed  
To put faith  
Into

Measurable objectives  
As faith is elusive  
To be caught  
And framed  
  
Yet faith is strong  
Much talked about  
Enabling people to  
Endure suffering  
Propelling others  
To move with force  
Giving service  
With Selfless Love

first-time Conference  
attendee Savi Anthony



## "HOW DO WE RETAIN, AND LIVE BY, THE LASTING CHRISTIAN VALUES OF THE PAST IN A VERY DIFFERENT WORLD?"

On May 11 2002, the Auckland Central group held a one-day conference on this theme. **Lloyd Geering** spoke first tracing changes in our understanding of religious experience since the Enlightenment. The second speaker was Reverend **Darryl Milner**, Anglican Vicar of Northcote, Auckland, who spoke from the point of view of a parish minister. These are some excerpts from Darryl's presentation. The full paper is on our website.

I am a Parish minister open to the new insights that Lloyd [Geering], Don Cupitt and the Jesus Seminar scholars are presenting to us. This does not mean I agree with everything they say, but disagreeing often helps me to clarify what it is I do think and believe. And whenever any of my parishioners are troubled about what I am saying, I can always comfort them by reminding them I am not as radical as either Lloyd or Don!

Although I struggle with the Church, living in a mixed love/hate relationship with the institution, I recognise that it has shaped me irrevocably, and I believe, if only it will honestly face up to the challenges facing it, it can still contribute significantly to the emerging new world. The unwillingness and inertia of large sections of the church to openly debate the deep theological issues confronting it, in my worst moments, tempt me to despair of it ... but I haven't given up on it yet!

I find myself in full agreement with these words of John Spong: **"I believe that God is real and that the insatiable human quest for meaning is found in that reality. This means that in the last analysis I do not accept the premise that there is nothing to religious systems except human constructs built only by human need. ... I experience this God as the depth dimension of my humanity, and I believe this dimension is not an illusion, but a reality which I trust."**

We have to think differently about prayer and worship, two of the most characteristic expressions of 'faith' in the past. I [want to] share with you some of what I have tried to do in a fairly ordinary, typical Anglican parish over the last 20 years to help people 'retain, and live by the lasting Christian values of the past in a very different world.'

The research of James Fowler and the writing of M. Scott Peck about the stages of spiritual development have made me aware that different people are at very different stages in their personal and spiritual development. [The author draws extensively on the summary contained in M Scott Peck's book *Further Along The Road Less Travelled*.]

These differences need to be understood and respected. One of the jobs of a parish minister is to help people along their developmental journey. ... The minister can also offer new perspectives and paradigms, exposing people to ideas which challenge and stretch them without threatening them so much that they simply close down and retreat into dogmatism. All this takes time, and requires, I believe, a long-term commitment of the minister to the

people in his or her congregation.

**These are some of the steps that we have taken:**

**Theological education:** One of the most important tasks of the parish minister ... is to share what he or she has learned at his or her theological college with his or her parishioners. ... I have tried to keep up-to-date by constant reading, attending seminars and lectures ... I have then tried to share what I have been learning with my parishioners. ... I have also endeavoured never to say something in a sermon which I couldn't defend to a radical critic. I have also tried not to be unnecessarily confrontational. So I have tried to be sensitive to the feelings of a diverse and, when I first arrived, a fairly conservative group of people.

... Robert Funk in his introduction to *The Once and Future Church* writes: **"The final barrier that had to come down was the canon. The authority of the New Testament gospels is the ultimate defensive line of orthodoxy. Once "Q" is admitted into the picture, and the Gospel of Thomas becomes an independent source, the mythical matrix created by the narrative gospels stands out in bold relief"** [\* See footnote]

**Liturgical Changes:** It took a little while of gentle teaching for people to begin to grapple with the idea that much of the language of Scripture and Liturgy was poetic and not literal. [Much of] it is expressive language, not literal or descriptive.

**Changing language:** Another area we are trying to tackle is changing the language, the underlying images, mythic framework, [that] we use. ... My first real attempt was to write a Sunday Eucharistic Liturgy that didn't use any of the sacrificial language normally associated with the Eucharist. I hoped it would be something with which we would all, conservative and radicals, feel more comfortable. I also tried to get as far away as possible from the sort of grovelling penitential language so characteristic of *The Book of Common Prayer*.

**Using more images of God:** We have made the journey [that] most of you will have made when feminists challenged the patriarchal nature of so much of our language. Their voices have not been strident in our congregation, but quietly persistent and almost unconsciously we have begun using more and different images for God. We still have a long way to go. Alongside [the] 'golden oldies' we include a wide repertoire of modern hymns and songs.

**Conclusion:** The end of this slow, twenty year project is that we have a loving and accepting congregation. Members respect the different places at which others find themselves. The radicals do not try to make the conservatives change, and the conservatives do not cry "heresy" when the radicals introduce something new.

We have created a congregation in which quite a number of people who would otherwise have left the church now have a spiritual home, and to which others, who had left the institutional church have found somewhere they are still welcomed.

**Darryl Milner**

• "Q" is the hypothetical oral-tradition material thought to underlie the synoptic gospels. It is short for "quelle", the German word for "source" — ed]

## QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

These questions were used at the Seminar in Auckland referred to on the previous page. The first group for the morning session, the second group at the end.

1. Is Christianity forever tied to an unchangeable essence of a supernatural or metaphysical kind, or is it free to express itself in a wholly natural form to meet the requirements of the new cultural environment?
2. Is the global, secular world to be resisted as an enemy of Christianity or welcomed as a legitimate product of Christianity, in spite of its obvious defects?
3. Why has Christian orthodoxy become so suspicious of humanism when its doctrine of incarnation has long affirmed that, through Jesus Christ, God has become enfleshed in the human condition?
4. To what extent is humanism to be seen, not only as consistent with Christianity but as having long been an important element within it, however much hidden from view by the supernatural superstructure?
5. What are some of the practical ways (ritual, social, political) in which you can envisage the humanistic expression of Christianity in today's world?

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1. What are some of the "lasting Christian values" we should seek to maintain and live by?
2. What is specifically "Christian" about these values?
3. What in the example offered as a case study is helpful to you in formulating your response to our conference theme?
4. "I believe, if only it will honestly face up to the challenges facing it, it (the church) can still contribute significantly to the emerging new world." Is this naive in the highly secularised context of NZ society?
5. "There are not many other places for people who want to engage with others in clarifying their beliefs and values as they confront the complexities of our rapidly changing world. In all of this, I believe we have something valuable to offer the community, as we explore what it is to be human." How true is this to your experience? Share example with one another of other places, like Sea of Faith meetings, perhaps, where you have found this can be done?

## MUSIC IN THE AIR

A twice-per-year publication by John Thornley of Palmerston North. The latest issue contains two articles on jazz and religion, two new hymns built on old tunes, discussion on contemporary hymn-writing, waiata, hip-hop music and a review of a new recording of Douglas Lilburn's three symphonies.

Surprising, perhaps, for a religious-music magazine is an introduction to Richard Holloway (*Doubts and Loves*, 2001) but justified by a comment from Holloway that perhaps morality is less like playing from a fixed text and is closer to jazz improvisations.

**Contact:** John Thornley, 15 Oriana Place, Palmerston North.

## I Believe In Life Before Death

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

I never cease to wonder at remarks, such as that made by the Rev. Randerson in the latest Edition of the Newsletter [nº. 48, page 1]: "Leaving open as wide a range of options as possible of future options for the future." His reason for doing this is, "The uncertainty of the information available."

Physicians and Scientists for Responsible Genetics, and many others, spent a great deal of time and expense trying to communicate the very certainty of information concerning this formidable science to the Royal Commission of Inquiry, on which the Rev. Randerson sat.

Having spoken to many groups, including the Sea of Faith, it is very apparent that public are now becoming most suspicious over the findings of the Royal Commission. It was given more than ample evidence of the numerous dangers of proceeding with this technology, yet chose to ignore most of it. The Commission advised we proceed with playing God in a lab coat and keeping our options open — whatever those options might be.

The Commission was not held under oath, nor did it subpoena vital evidence. It never referred to experts who raised concerns and gave the impression it knew of none who had. As legal advocate, Steven Drucker, said: "The members of the Commission owe the nation an explanation and also an apology for having consumed so much public money and the time of so many people in such an errant and irresponsible manner."<sup>[1]</sup>

Had Bishop Tom Brown or others like him been selected for this Commission, I feel a very different result would have ensued.

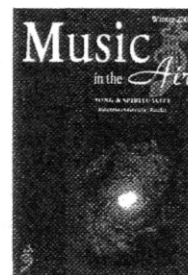
Sincerely

**Dr Robert Anderson**

**Member Physicians and Scientists for Responsible Genetics [www.psrg.org.nz](http://www.psrg.org.nz)**

1. Drucker Steven M., "Commission Fails its Mission" [www.biointegrity.org](http://www.biointegrity.org)

[readers can compare Bishop Randerson's thoughts in more detail in the Supplement which accompanies this Newsletter — ed]



## A CHANGE OF FOCUS — FROM "GOD" TO "LIFE"

An abridged version of the revised summary of a talk given at the Cathedral of St John, Napier by Alan Goss on 25th August 2002. In the Website version of this Newsletter it is unabridged.

### 1. The Proposal:

The three great monotheistic religions — Christianity, Judaism and Islam ... were centred around or focused on God. **The proposal is that the world is now entering into a new religious phase, a change from a God-focussed religion to a Life-focussed religion.** This heralds a new beginning, not a new set of beliefs or systems but a new way of looking at the world. The old is passing away, the new has come.

### 2. The Traditional Christian World View:

The traditional world view contemplated not just one world but two. Our real home was in the eternal world above, our temporary home was the transient world below. The world above was a three-storied complex, heaven for the good and obedient, purgatory for the purging of one's venial sins before entering into heaven, and hell for the damned.

### 3. The Task of the Church:

The church's task was to provide the means for people to do business with God. After simple beginnings the church developed a very intricate and complex system of creeds, confessions, doctrines, dogmas, the sacraments, the priesthood, to ensure people's safe passage to God.

### 4. Vast changes in our view of the church and the world:

Today people no longer believe in a literal hell, a place of everlasting punishment. The Reformation got rid of Purgatory. The present Pope has defined heaven as a state, not a place. The authority of the church has virtually disappeared, people want freedom from being told what they should think and do.

### 5. Reasons for the change:

Evolution; the tremendous advances in science and technology; the emergence of a global world; the media; scholarship which claims that many stories in the bible, like the creation story and Adam and Eve are myths — have made people question many of the church's traditional beliefs. The same critical approach was applied to the New Testament. These accounts are not hard historical fact but rather imaginative stories which nevertheless convey a message and a meaning for our everyday lives.

### 6. The God problem:

The word "God" is a symbol, it points to something. The God symbol can be used in wrong and dangerous ways. American Presidents invariably conclude an address with the words "God bless America". That is a nationalistic God, serving the nations cause. Describing God as a Father is patriarchal, even chauvinistic, it gives offense to many men as well as women. The word "God" is now rarely used in secular society except as an expletive. Only in the church is the God symbol used in any serious way.

Since the 18th century, the concept of God as an all

powerful super-person or being controlling the world (theism) has been dying — some claim it is already dead. [But] it still lurks in the church, in its prayers and hymns. The symbol "God" is being reconstructed, it can mean a spiritual ideal, a dream of what the world might become, a symbol for mankind's highest aspirations and values.

### 7. Strong like a Kauri?

Many of our hymns and songs picture God as strong, mighty, everlasting, as solid as a rock and as firm as an anchor: "My God is strong like a Kauri."

[But] our [experience of] everyday life is not like that. On the contrary our lives are passing, transient, uncertain, changing, flowing ... There is no final anchor to hold us, no lasting rock to cleave to, no strong kauri to permanently shelter under.

### 8. Ol' Man River and Coro' Street:

Our lives are like the song "Ol' Man River" — it "just keeps rolling along". Or, our lives are like Coronation Street which is a never-ending saga of love affairs, fights and squabbles, good and bad morals, births and deaths, comings and goings — and their church is the Rovers Return! Everything is temporary, passing, uncertain. There are no absolutes, no final answers.

### 9. The Religious Map is Changing:

The religious map, — the way we get our bearings in the world — is changing. As Don Cupitt clearly shows, people are still religious, but in a different way. They are using a different — and indeed a clearer and more colourful — religious language. "The grace of God" becomes "The gift of life"; "Commit your life to God (Jesus)" becomes "Get a life!"

### 10. Finding Your Happiness, Your Bliss:

The new life-centred religious age now emerging means that we will find our bliss here in this constantly changing and knowledge sharing world. Finding one's bliss in an eternal supernatural world above has been rendered obsolete. The traditional supernatural God above is not the answer now, it never was. Our bliss is in the present moment, the here and now. It's "in your face".

Alan M. Goss

[readers will recognise many themes acknowledged by Alan from Don Cupitt's later works — especially *The New Religion of Life in Everyday Speech* (1999), and *Emptiness and Brightness* — as well as from Lloyd Geering's *Tomorrow's God* — ed]

## Get the Goss on Goss

Alan Goss, at 80, is one of our most prolific contributors. He has published his memoirs under the title of *Only a Second Eleven Man*. Read about the Hawke's Bay Quake, World War II, youth at the helm, parishes and personalities, SCHNEHG, Goss of the Kong, and how his views have changed. Orders to the author, 4 McDonald Street, Napier. (phone (06)8359594, \$10 per copy incl. postage.

## LOCAL GROUPS

### Nelson

Earlier this year, Bill and Nancy Malcolm provided an entertaining and stimulating evening on the theme "Lichens, The Universe, And Everything".

It started with a slide-show on lichens, followed by an introduction to the philosophy of science. It finished with an animated discussion on a wide range of issues that included science and religion.

At their August meeting, Alex Brown and Brian Turner provided an overview of their work as chaplains and shared some insights about their experience in meeting people's personal and spiritual needs. Through Workplace Support, Brian is chaplain for NIWA and Landcare Research. Everything he has experienced in this work has tended to reinforce his current spiritual beliefs and values.

Alec Brown works on a voluntary basis as a hospital "chaplain". Government funding has remained static and over time, this has resulted in a funding shortfall for this work. Alec's experience has enhanced his understanding and acceptance of other faiths.

At their September meeting John and Hilary Mitchell demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of the European settlement of Nelson, its effect on Maori and the ownership of their land, by skillfully touching on the key issues within a very tight time frame. They outlined the history of land transactions largely orchestrated by the New Zealand Company, where a number of land sales were negotiated with the lower North Island chiefs who claimed ownership through conquest rather than with the tribes who were living there.

**Contact: Lindsay Vaughan (03) 548-4778**

### Auckland Central

David Hollands filled in for a planned speaker who couldn't appear, with a review of Lloyd Geering's "2100 A Faith Odyssey" [A SATRS book — see the panel on page 10 — ed]. He drew out the theme of "salvation" as applying to the earth and life-forms on it.

"The Sacred in Music for Worship" was the subject of their September meeting. Fiona McAlpine, a senior lecturer from the School of Music and Auckland University.

Fiona's central point was the difference between *religious music* and *music for religion*.

Their newsletter draws attention to "Spirited Conversations" — an initiative of the Women's Resource Centre which hold monthly gatherings in the Gully Lounge, Allelya Cafe, St. Kevin's Arcade, Karangahape Road. The latest date that we are aware of was September 13th.

**Contact: Jim Feist (09) 579-3225**

### Dunedin

Their newsletter refers to "People, Passion, Perception: living in a changing world" — a Summer School to be held in Wanaka 12-17 January 2003. The speakers will include Professor Gareth Jones of the Otago Medical School, Very Rev. Alistair Rae, and Rev. Dr Jim Symons of Denver, Colorado. The Registrar is Peter Marshall, 18 Rata St, Wanaka; email [pete.marshall@xtra.co.nz](mailto:pete.marshall@xtra.co.nz)

Their October meeting will look at Lloyd Geering's *Christianity Without God* and on November 28th they will hold an AGM followed by chat.

**Contact: Marjorie Spittle (03)482-1418**

### Christchurch

Their meeting of November 22 will deal with book reviews and December 13 will be in the form of a barbecue.

Their October newsletter contains an observation by Eugen Drewerman (see also page 2): "The wise Siddharta [the Buddha] would indeed have been able to say that what we call gods are only anxiety states of the psyche ... [however] ... Christianity has an essential complement [to Buddhism] in thinking that personality are not empty illusions."

**Contact: Ian Crumpton (03) 342-5375**

### Wairarapa

Your editor, along with 30 or so others, thoroughly enjoyed himself at a one-day seminar held at a country lodge arranged by the Wairarapa Group on October 19th.

The theme was "Coping With Change", expanded to "is the church as an institution capable of change for its future survival?"

The speakers were **Rev. Margaret Mayman** (St Andrews-on-the-Terrace, Wellington; **Fr. Eddie Condra** from a Wairarapa parish; and **Barrie Allom**, former Anglican priest and author of *Beyond Belief* [see page 9].

No speaker expressed optimism — Margaret saw pockets of residual value in the church, Eddie talked of the church "in the twilight" and needing to act differently for that reason. Barrie saw no prospect of change.

Quotes of the day (for me) were:

- "its not **super**-natural, its **deeply** natural": *Margaret Mayman*
- "The existence of God is a possibility that you choose to accept". *Eddie Condra*
- "The ultimate question is existential, not metaphysical or theological": *Barrie Allom*

Excellent interaction and conversation rounded out a stimulating day.

**Contact: Helen Dew (06) 379-8034**



## IN BRIEF

### Forthcoming Conferences:

- **SnowStar Conference**, to be held at the Sheraton Fallsview Hotel, Niagara Falls, Ontario, from March 11-15, 2003.
- **SoFN London**: a one-day Conference on diversity and Division within religious traditions "A World of Difference": March 29, 2003, London.

Your editor can supply you with details

### More Creative Uncertainty

- "I think, therefore I am" — Descartes
- "I doubt, therefore I might be" — Anon

### Batchelor Interview

The Resource Centre (address on page 10) has a video-tape of a 50 minute interview by your editor of Stephen Batchelor. The reference number is V21.

### Beyond Belief

**Barrie Allom** was briefly (September 2000-January 2001) Chairperson of the SoFN in NZ before illness forced him to step down.

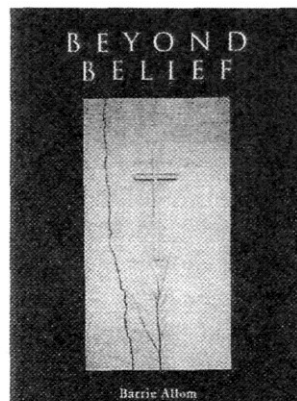
He now seems (to your editor who heard him speak recently) fully recovered.

His recently-published *Beyond Belief* is the story of how Barrie grew up driven by conflicting forces: fear of rejection, failure and loneliness; ambition to succeed and to be significant.

It's an absorbing book and we invite a review for publication in a forthcoming Newsletter.

You can buy a copy (\$29.95 includes GST and postage) from "Beyond Belief" PO Box 504 Masterton.

Don't forget to include your name and address.



"What is happening really, in crudest terms, is that there is in our Western culture a need, both a personal and a social need, for another way of looking at the world that is perhaps more complete, more satisfying, that addresses certain questions in our lives that we don't find answers for in our own traditions. Buddhism seems to offer some response to those needs. If it didn't, I don't think there would be any interest in it."

Stephen Batchelor

## FAITH IN CYBERSPACE

### Spong in Cyberspace

**RETIRED BISHOP JOHN SPONG** offers a new online service in which you can receive a fresh weekly essay from him. Advance publicity says:

"His weekly columns will be penetrating, passionate and controversial. They will not avoid the difficult issues and they will call things as Bishop Spong sees them. The hope is that through this medium he can engage readers at the intersection of their faith and the world."

The deal also gives you a weekly Q & A session where Bishop Spong answers your questions. The cost is US\$34.95 annually. Have a free look at

[www.johnshelbyspong.com](http://www.johnshelbyspong.com)

### Gresham College

Supported by the Corporation of London and the Worshipful Company of Mercers, Gresham College has been providing free public lectures for over 400 years.

They offer a CD of pdf files which contains the complete indexed transcripts to 295 lectures and publications from 1991.

If you are a SoF member in NZ and would like a copy of the CD then contact our Resource Centre (address on page 10) and send \$5 which will cover the cost of duplicating the CD for you plus post and packing.

Some titles in the "Divinity" section are:

- *Healing And Spirit*
- *Living With Doubt (also ..Jesus .. Revelation)*
- *The End Of Religion*
- *The Media And Religion*
- *The Myth Of Justification (also ..Original Sin ..Resurrection ..The Incarnation)*

Look at their website at [www.gresham.ac.uk](http://www.gresham.ac.uk) — you can also view archived lectures in streaming video on a suitably-configured computer.

### Military

You can get a view of what's going on in the world from a military perspective in *Parameters*, the Army War College Quarterly at

<http://carlisle-www.army.mil/usawc/Parameters/a-index.htm> Recent titles include

- *The Moral Limits of Strategic Attack*
- *Thinking Asymmetrically in Times of Terror*
- *What Not to Learn from Afghanistan*
- *The Attacks of 9/11: Evidence of a Clash of Religions?*
- *Religious Fundamentalism in India and Beyond.*
- *Chaos as Strategy*

## ALL ABOUT US

The Sea of Faith Network (NZ) is an association of people who have a common interest in exploring religious thought and expression from a non-dogmatic and human-oriented standpoint. 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 home page is at  
<http://sof.wellington.net.nz>

Our Steering Committee publishes a regular Newsletter, maintains a website, assists in setting up local discussion groups, and organises an annual Conference.

The current **Chairperson** is Frank Gaze, 2 Telford Toe, Oakura (New Plymouth) 4650, Phone 06-752-7447

Members may obtain tapes, books etc from the **SoF Resource Centre** at 34 Briarley St, Tauranga (see the catalogue on the website).

For membership requests and for the address of your nearest local group, contact the **Membership Secretary**, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Northland, Wellington phone 04-934-8054.

To offer a comment on any material appearing in the Newsletter or to submit copy for publication, contact the **Editor**: Noel Cheer, 26 Clipper Street, Titahi Bay, Phone 04-236-7533, Fax 04-236-7534, email: [noel.cheer@attglobal.net](mailto:noel.cheer@attglobal.net)

*The only copy appearing in this Newsletter that may be construed as reflecting Sea of Faith policy is that which is accompanied by a by-line of a member of the Steering Committee.*

### In addition ....

"**SoF**" is 28 page A4, six-times-a-year magazine produced by the UK Sea of Faith Network. They offer it to New Zealand Sea Faith members currently at \$NZ65 for a year's subscription.

To subscribe for a year, send \$65 to "The Membership Secretary, SoF, 133 Orangi Kaupapa Road, Wellington". Write your cheque to "SoF (NZ)".

Many of the study booklets referred to in this Newsletter are available from The St Andrew's Trust for the Study of Religion and Society:  
<http://satsr.wellington.net.nz>

## LAST WORD FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

**Traditional religion  
was about power; the job of the priest  
was to divert the destructive energy of  
the god away from his powerless  
worshippers.**

Nowadays power is curbed not by priests but by law and ethics: professionals working within an agreed ethical framework and robust legal sanctions.

This was the nub of the GM Commission report, which Richard Randerson effectively summarised for us at Conference.

One way for the powerless to seize power is by terrorism or crime, which brings attention in the form of notoriety and punishment. And some of the naturally powerful in our society, the media and the politicians, seem unable to restrain themselves from exercising that power to encourage the attention-seekers. We have recently seen a good example of the media extracting as much as they can from a story of this kind, which appeared to glorify the most appalling of crimes.

I believe that our media and our politicians each need to develop new ethical codes. Ethics, according to Richard Rorty, is about developing a consensus to protect the weak from the strong. If the attention-seekers knew they were never going to be named in the media, and only mentioned indirectly on page 15, there would be less incentive to continue their unrestrained infantile behaviour.

Perhaps someone would like to take this topic up and develop a workshop or a presentation for your local group or for next conference?

*Frank Gaze, Chairperson 2002-2003*

*p.s. if you didn't get to Conference, you can hear one of the best moments by downloading a sound-bite from our website: Lloyd Geering answering a question from Panel Quizmaster Noel Cheer.*