



Sea of Faith  
Sea of Faith Network in Australia  
**BULLETIN**

JULY/AUGUST 2016



photo Robin Ford

Poles and wires, Lane Cove, NSW

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E X P L O R E  
religion faith meaning

## EDITORIAL

The very successful Mini Conference on Islam (25 June 2016) is still fresh in my mind. If you weren't among the 40 or so of us there, you can get a good sense of it from John Carr's article in this *Bulletin*. You might like to write something in response.

With this event we found a sweet spot in meeting formats. We gained a good audience, everyone enjoyed it, and it was within our organisational capacity. There's already talk of another.

The AGM followed the conference and I have briefly summarised some important points. They include the new Committee members and the new deal on membership fees from 2017.

In my Editor's report to the AGM I was fearful that the supply of copy might keep fading. But something turned up. The result is this 20-page *Bulletin*. As well as items associated with the Mini Conference, and a delightful promotion for the Common Dreams Conference, there are some thoughts of my

own. But the *Bulletin* is a hand-to-mouth existence at present.

I'm sure that if you are a member of SoFiA you'll have something to say that would entertain, challenge, infuriate, intrigue, or delight SoFiA members. So, please get it down in writing, and send it to me, preferably in electronic form but for short items even readable hand-writing would do.

Of course, SoFiA doesn't have a monopoly on creative "Exploration of Religion, Faith and Meaning". So if you are not a member and have something you'd like to say, we'd welcome that too.

Contributions by 20 September 2016 please.

Robin Ford

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SoFiA *Bulletin* is produced every two months  
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## Some Perspectives on Islam

*John Carr reflects upon an excellent day*

The Mini-Conference held in conjunction with the SoFiA AGM on Saturday 25 June focused on events and issues relating to Islam. There were two sessions. The first was a light-hearted activity developed and conducted by Greg Spearritt that encouraged participants to reflect on recent public discourse about Islam within Australia. The second, looking more to the future, was a presentation by Dr Nora Amath, followed by questions and discussion.

The conflict between Muslim factions within Islamic countries and between Muslims and non-Muslims throughout the world is extremely complex and possibly the most contentious of all current issues. A timely object lesson was provided by the UK referendum on its membership of the European Union only a couple of days beforehand. One of the main factors in the vote for the UK to leave the EU – the so-called ‘Brexit’ – was the widespread, strident opposition to the rising level of migration from Eastern Europe and of refugees from the Middle East. In turn, a major factor in the increase in the numbers of refugees was the violence in Muslim countries.

What we in Australia, like citizens of other countries, are currently facing is a recursive series of actions and reactions. A suicide bomber or a drone-directed rocket destroys a hospital, restaurant or mosque somewhere in the world and kills a large number of bystanders – men, women and children. Many Australians, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, immediately react to the event, some loudly, a few violently. Other Australians then react to this event, some even more loudly and violently, then other Australians react ... And so on and so on *ad nauseam*.

To explore this dangerous situation, we could not go back to ‘the beginning’, as no beginning was evident. Should we have gone back to the invasion of Iraq of 2003, to ‘Nine

Eleven’ of 2001, to the United States’ long-standing support for Wahhabist Saudi Arabia, to the Sykes-Pekoe Agreement of 1916, the Crusades, the birth of Muhammad? Every event and movement in history is the result of earlier events and movements.

In the first session we chose to start with a ‘pre-match entertainment’ presentation titled *From Sanctuary to Stop the Mosques*. In essence it was a reflective quiz about Islam in Australia, featuring facts about Muslims and how they are often perceived. (Take the quiz yourself: see page 14).

Throughout the presentation, brief discussion among participants took place on the following topics. (Participants were encouraged, where appropriate, to deconstruct the questions.)

1. Tell the person beside you about one of your Muslim acquaintances — a number of people didn’t have one.
2. What can non-Muslim Australians take for granted that Muslim Australians cannot? – this in the context of an election poster for the Australian Liberty Alliance which read “Protect our democracy from Islam”.
3. Do Muslim values align or conflict with Australian values?
4. In Australia, should we be able to freely criticise, parody or (even if unjustly) ridicule religion, including Islam? – the context here being, in part, that some satirists, including *The Australian* cartoonist Bill Leak, have had to move their family out of their home for a time following threats from Islamists
5. One of Bill Leak’s cartoons has two people in full Burka, with one turning around and asking the other, “Does my bomb look big in this?” Is this acceptable?
6. Do we err on the side of blaming Western actions for the rise of Islamist terrorism?

In the session after lunch, Nora Amath began by speaking of her own experience as a Muslim woman living in Australia. Born in Vietnam, raised in the USA, Nora married a sixth-generation Australian, a Muslim, when they were both studying in Malaysia. They have now lived in Australia for 17 years and have three teenage children. For Australian Muslims, Nora said, life changed dramatically after 11 September 2001. They have been constantly confronted by aggressive verbal behaviour, focusing on their dress, religion and supposed family history. In



Nora's own words:

I am a very visible Muslim female and like many other hijab wearing Muslim females around the world, I sometimes have had to bear the brunt of the antagonism, the anger, the discrimination and ultimately the fear from the general public when they see me. I represent the 'them' in the dichotomy of 'us' and 'them'.

Most telling, perhaps, are the hectoring questions her husband gets regarding "where he comes from". As he identifies the suburbs and towns of New South Wales where he, his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents were born, he is met each time with yet another, "But where did they really come from?" This is code for "Why don't you look like us?"

This kind of treatment must surely have an adverse effect on young Muslims, potentially contributing to dangerous alienation. Nora spoke of the construction of successive waves of migrants to this country as 'the Other'. On the

whole, in the past, Australia survived the resulting alienation and fragmentation very successfully, as the 'new' Australians adopted many attitudes and customs of 'old' Australians and 'old' Australians made accommodations and adopted aspects of the newcomers' culture. It remains to be seen how we shall fare in this generation. Overwhelmingly, young Muslims adopt most Australian customs and attitudes and are happy to identify as Australian. A small minority, however, will become increasingly resentful and open to extremist propaganda.

In her presentation, Nora acknowledged the need for Islam to undertake some 'internal repair' and this was a topic taken up in some of the questions put to her. Nora reported on some of the progressive initiatives within the wider Islamic community in recent years.

One major international event was the second Forum for *Promoting Peace in Muslim Societies*, held in Abu Dhabi last year. The scholars at this event called for a "

There are numerous Muslim organisations within Australia that promote moderate or liberal views. Some come under the umbrella of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils (AFIC) or of individual mosque communities, while others are totally independent. Liberal organisations include: Muslims for Progressive Values, Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of Humanity (AMARAH), the Australian Muslim Women's Centre for Human Rights, and Crescents of Brisbane. Most interfaith organisations, like Believing Women for a Culture of Peace, also attract moderate Muslim members.

Noting that the examples given were all take from liberal democracies, questions were then asked about the situation of non-Muslims living in Islamic countries. And what of the schism between Sunni and Shia, and between these and other Islamic 'denominations'. Nora cited Morocco and Tunisia as providing relatively 'good news', but concerns were then raised regarding apparent regression in moderate Muslim countries like Turkey and Indonesia. She spoke of the adoption earlier this year of the *Marrakesh*

*Declaration* by scholars and representatives from 120 countries. This document is a legal framework that calls for action on "The Rights of Religious Minorities in Predominantly Muslim Majority Communities". It acknowledges that "conditions in various parts of the Muslim World have deteriorated dangerously due to the use of violence and armed struggle as a tool for settling conflicts and imposing one's point of view". It then makes a commitment to a number of basic principles set down in *Muhammad's Charter of Medina* in 622 CE. Most significantly, these include,

"the principles of constitutional contractual citizenship, such as freedom of movement, property ownership, mutual solidarity and defence, as well as principles of justice and equality before the law.

The Declaration asserts that the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights are in harmony with the Charter of Medina.

Only time will tell, of course, how successful such democratic, liberalising movements within Islam will be. Gaining widespread acceptance among most Muslims in the liberal democracies may be possible. However, there is still not much evidence that they can carry 100% of even highly Westernized Muslims with them, or protect their own young from the effects of rising anti-Muslim prejudice. It will be infinitely more difficult to make progress in Islamic nations like Iran, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Iraq and Afghanistan.

Exactly a week after the Mini-Conference, the Australian Federal elections were held. Amongst the more alarming outcomes of the election was the strength of support for extreme conservative independents and minor parties. Pauline Hanson's One Nation Party received up to 10% of the vote in some electorates, gaining it a

significant presence in the new parliament. Amongst Hanson's post-election demands were the end of Muslim immigration, the banning of new mosques and the banning of burqas and niqabs in public places. Apart from the difficulty, if not impossibility, of implementing any of these measures, the mere utterance must foment a strong reaction across the demographic spectrum and heighten the sense of alienation of Muslim youth. In Hanson's rhetoric, the nature of her 'other' is clear – Muslims and Asians – but what is more slippery is whom she constructs as 'us', for she moves randomly from 'we' and 'us', to 'our country', 'our society' and 'the silent majority'.

In the wider world, the pattern of action and reaction anticipated in the program for this Mini-Conference has been all too fully realised. Barely a day has gone by without another act of extreme violence, often in the most unlikely, peaceful places. On the Muslim side, the perpetrators are usually young, have a history of crime and, while they espouse allegiance to extreme Islamic ideology, their actual knowledge of Islam is often superficial and only recently embraced. The targets are usually 'soft' and include other Muslims, whether from the same or a rival sect. On the 'anti-terror' side, the ethical basis for military attacks has always been compromised by the scale of the collateral damage. A new layer of ethical confusion has been added in Syria, as former antagonists find themselves temporarily and locally on 'the same side'.

A popular slogan some years ago was "Think globally, act locally". Appropriate action for Australian Progressives, of any religion or none, must surely be to do whatever they can in their own community to educate, to explain, to calm and to show respect for all views except those of extremist zealots of all kinds.

**AGM Sea Of Faith In Australia Inc.  
Saturday, 25 June 2016  
Fox Hotel, Brisbane**

*reported by Robin Ford*

I have summarised those parts of the AGM that are likely to be of particular interest to *Bulletin* readers.

**Election of management committee:**

President:	Rodney Eivers
Vice-President:	Glen Beasley
Secretary:	Greg Spearritt
Treasurer & Membership Sec:	Lyndell Ford
Committee Members:	Rachel Matthews John Carr Cordelia Hull

**Final paragraph of the President's report**

So we look to the future. There are uncertainties, for sure. But there are people, curious about religion, faith and meaning. Most of them will be finding some dissatisfaction with their past or present religious affiliations. They may feel isolated in their questioning and searching. The challenge for Sea of Faith in Australia Inc. is to locate those people. Let us respond to their questioning minds and invite them to share in mental, philosophical and spiritual exploration with us.

**Membership secretary's report**

Since the last AGM, SoFiA has gained 10 new memberships (all individuals): six in Qld; two in Victoria; and one each in NSW and South Australia.

We have had total of 21 specific resignations, plus six others that have lapsed.

**Bulletin Editor's report**

Six *Bulletins* have been produced in the past year. Although the editor has received enough copy, its rate of supply is diminishing. Several of the regular contributors are no longer members.

If the reduction in copy continues the *Bulletin* will get thinner. So, members, and others, please start writing!

**General business:**

Motion on the Setting of Fees

*That*

- i) the membership fee from the start of 2017 be \$20 non-refundable for a 10-year period;
- ii) members be invited to make additional donations as they wish;
- iii) 2015 members who have not renewed for 2016 be notified of these new arrangements;
- iv) the membership fee entitles members to receive the SoFiA *Bulletin* in whichever format they prefer (paper or electronic); and
- v) members be encouraged to pay fees by the preferred method, ie electronic funds transfer.

Moved: Greg Spearritt Seconded: Lyndell Ford

Motion carried.

**Next AGM:**

The next AGM will be in June 2017 at a specific date to be determined by the Management Committee

Point Of View

## The Sea Of Faith In Australia

*These ideas are from Greg Spearritt's introductory slide show at the Mini Conference held on 25 June 2016.*

### The Sea of Faith in Australia is

- a place where people feel free to draw on the rich spiritual heritage of the past (including the Christian tradition) without being bound by it
- committed to pushing boundaries and 'sitting light' to conclusions
- a forum for the non-dogmatic discussion of ideas and experiences
- a safe and sympathetic place for people to explore what they really do (or could possibly) believe
- not a church

### What do people discuss within The Sea of Faith in Australia?

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>What is 'spiritual experience'?</i></li><li>• <i>Religion and feminism</i></li><li>• <i>Is consumerism evil?</i></li><li>• <i>Is there a 'self'?</i></li><li>• <i>C.S. Lewis: help or hindrance?</i></li><li>• <i>Quantum physics and spirituality</i></li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Faith and evolution</i></li><li>• <i>Is atheism a religion?</i></li><li>• <i>What is the basis for ethics today?</i></li><li>• <i>Are Australians racist?</i></li><li>• <i>Religious humour</i></li><li>• <i>Does evil exist?</i></li></ul>
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### Members of Sea of Faith in Australia welcome

- people from all faith communities as well as those with no involvement in organised religion
- anyone who's interested in the non-dogmatic discussion of the big questions of life

### What do Members of Sea of Faith in Australia gain?

- *We find stimulation and fellowship in the common quest for meaning and fulfilment.*

Announcement

## From Eremos

*NSW readers in particular might be interested in this event.*

<p>Al-Ghazzali Interfaith Centre and Eremos co-present <i>Muslim Women &amp; Spiritual Revival In Australia</i> Conversations of insights and knowledge from the Islamic faith with Shaza Rifi, Angela Rodgers and Firdousi Obeidullah.</p>	
Date:	Sunday 14th August, 2016, 2.00-4.30pm
Venue:	Al-Ghazzali Centre. 299 Belmore Rd, Riverwood, NSW (Riverwood Station 1 minute walk away; street parking available)
<p>Registrations appreciated: <a href="http://bit.ly/eremosagc">http://bit.ly/eremosagc</a> Afternoon tea provided. Everyone is welcome!</p>	
<p>There is no charge for this event. Donations may be offered on the day if you wish.</p>	

## Point Of View

**And Adam Begat...***Robin Ford begins to explore intergenerational equity***Context**

I'm no expert in intergenerational equity; just an educated Baby Boomer with an internet connection, and a niggling thought that later generations are not going to get a fair go.

Since I started writing this I have encountered many items in print and on the radio that discuss intergenerational equity. It seems that I have caught a wave on this topic.

I have summarised how people have identified generations, the characteristics that have been attributed to them and how later generations might be faring. And I end with a suggestion for a mini conference.

**Identifying generations**

If communities are in a steady state, everyone passes through the same recognisable phases as they mature, and everyone in turn gets the same deal. Fairness doesn't come into it.

However, significant events punctuate this equilibrium, segmenting the continuous flow of generations along the stream of time. The baby boom after World War 2 was one such major disruption, and it gave its name to a generation.

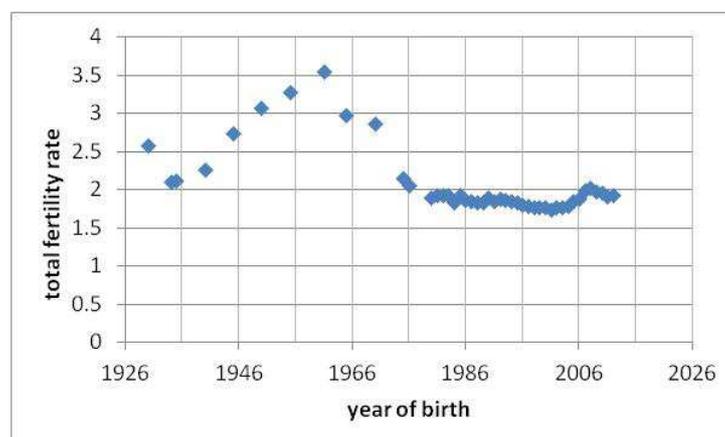
**A booming birth rate**

I knew that I was part of the baby boom while I was at primary school.

What did that boom look like?

As the graph shows, the fertility rate dropped in the 1930s. (Data from Australian Institute of Family Studies website).

It jumped in 1945 and rose to a peak in 1961 before steadily declining. By



the 1970s it was around the same rate as the 1930s. (I learnt from the web that fertility rate — a complex calculation — indicates the average number of children for each woman).

**An identifiable cohort**

The children of this boom subsequently became treated as a life-long identifiable group, with presumed characteristics in common. Other 'generations' were identified within the periods before and after this cohort.

The notional generations listed in this table are typical of what you'll find on the web.

Roughly these generations are 20 years apart.

Name	Birth-date range
Grey, greatest, GI generation	1900 - 1924
Silent generation	1925-1942
Baby boomers	1946-1964
Gen X	Early 1960-early 1980
Millennials	Early 1980s-around 2000
Gen Z	mid 1990s-

All this is based on the plausible hypothesis that the characteristics of a cohort are defined by significant events of their era. For example, the silent generation lived through the great depression; the Baby Boomers grew up in the aftermath of WW 2.

Generations are often identified well after the group in question has arrived. For example,

the writers of one web article couldn't find mention of Baby Boomers as a cultural group before 1977.

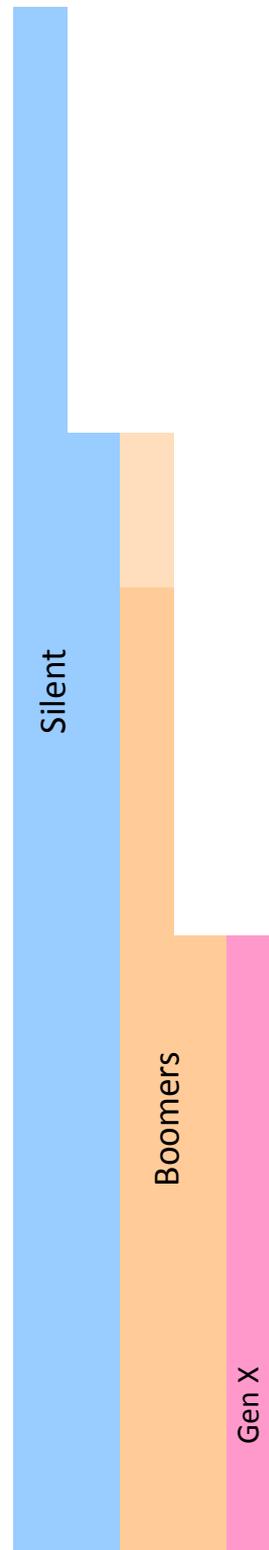
Unsurprisingly these categories and date ranges are contested.

In the chart on the next two pages I have listed events that could be significant in synchronising the views of a cohort. They are a

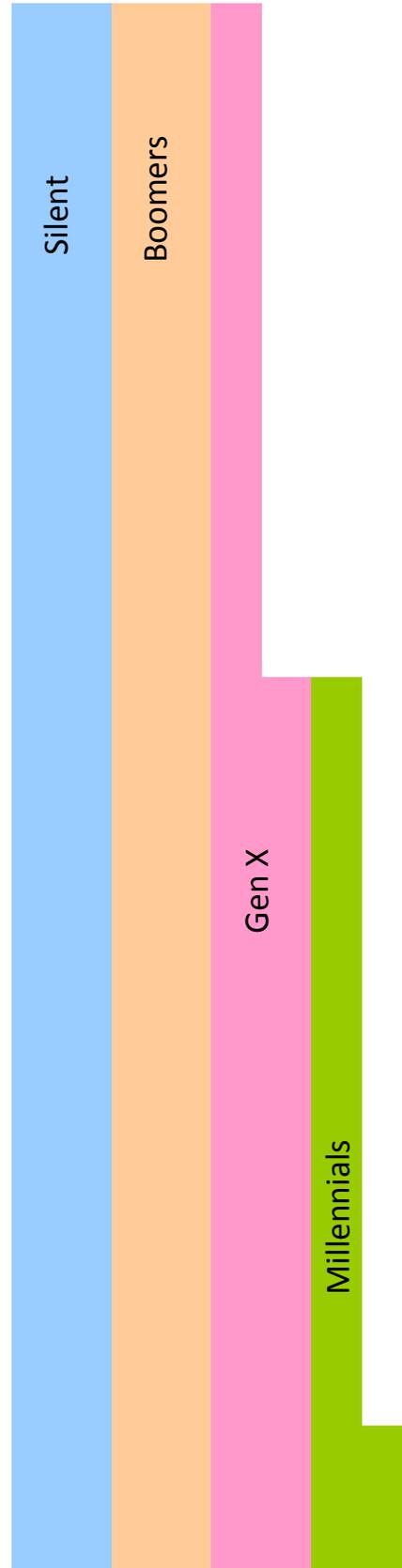
somewhat random; readers might like to write in with their own suggestions.

I have indicated the generations by side-bars (adjusting them to a common 20 year duration).

date	Event
1926	
1929	Great depression starts
1932	Great depression ends
1932	Harbour bridge opened
1938	Nylon
1939	WW II start
1939	Jet engine prototypes
1943	commercial penicillin
1945	WW II ends
1945	Atomic bomb dropped on Japan
1946	Churchill "iron curtain" speech
1948	UK National Health Service
1948	LP records
1953	Holden FJ
1956	Television in Australia (channel 9)
1958	Boeing 707
1958	Toyota Land Cruiser in Australia
1961	Contraceptive pill available in Australia
1962	Vietnam war joined by Australia
1962	Telstar communications satellite
1963	Bishop John Robinson "Honest to god"
1964	Beatles visit Australia
1965	IBM 360 main frame computer
1966	Decimal currency introduced Australia
1966	Rio Tinto opens Pilbarra mine
1967	Aboriginal people included in constitution
1969	Neil Armstrong walks on moon
1970	Boeing 747
1970	DEC PDP11 mini-computer
1970	Germain Greer "The female Eunuch"
1970	Intra-ocular lens in widespread use
1971	Aboriginal flag designed
1972	Whitlam elected
1972	HP35 calculator displaces slide rule
1972	CAT scan
1973	Oil shock (US and Europe)
1973	UK joins European Union
1973	Last vestiges of white Australia policy revoked
1973	Sydney Opera House opened
1975	Whitlam dismissed



- 1975 Vietnam war, Australia leaves
- 1975 Microsoft begins
- 1975 Medibank/Medicare launched
- 1976 VHS Videotape
- 1978 Vietnamese boat people welcomed
- 1980 Approx start of "the roaring 80s"
- 1981 IBM PC
- 1981 Space shuttle launched
- 1981 AIDS first encountered
- 1982 CD on sale
- 1982 Cochlear implant
- 1983 Australia wins America's cup
- 1983 Floating the A\$
- 1984 Apple Macintosh launched
- 1984 "Advance Australia Fair" is national Anthem
- 1984 Don Cupitt "Sea of Faith"
- 1984 Commonwealth sex-discrimination legislation
- 1986
- 1987 stock market slump
- 1988 SI (metric) system only legal units in Australia
- 1988 "A brief history of time" Stephen Hawkins
- 1989 HECS Scheme introduced
- 1989 Berlin Wall dismantled
- 1990 Keating "the recession we had to have"
- 1992 World wide web implemented
- 1992 Mabo decision
- 1995 DVD on sale
- 1996 Port Arthur massacre
- 1997 Google domain name registered
- 1997 Alan Bond, entrepreneur, in prison for fraud.
- 1998 International space station; first part in orbit
- 1999 Republic referendum fails
- 2001 Wikipedia launched
- 2001 Twin towers New York ("9/11")
- 2002 Bali Bombing
- 2003 Iraq war
- 2004 Facebook launched
- 2006
- 2007 Global Financial Crisis
- 2007 iPhone introduced
- 2008 Kevin Rudd says "sorry"
- 2013 Operation sovereign borders



## Inequity

When steady state is replaced by rapid change, each generation encounters its own set of conditions. They are different for each generation, and this might not be fair, either in financial terms or otherwise.

## Who are these generations?

### Baby Boomers (1946 to 1964)

Based on the demographic of the boom, the term 'Baby Boomers' is said by some to cover those who were born between about 1946 and 1964. But there is an alternative view that culturally they run from 1946 to about 1956, with later arrivals spilling over into the subsequent generation.

A compromise view I found on the web was to split the Boomers into an older group and a younger one. For the older group (1946-1955), World War 2 was a recent memory. For the younger group (1956 and 1964) World War 2 was a more distant memory. But both rode the post-war boom and grew up in the era of the contraceptive pill.

When they were young, computer technology was in its infancy. The IBM 360 Main frame was typical, with input by punched cards. A little earlier (1943) Thomas Watson, president of IBM had famously said "I think there is a world market for maybe five computers."

### Gen X (early 1960s-early 1980s)

Gen X was coined, says a Wikipedia article, by Douglas Copeland in his 1991 novel: *Gen X: tales for an accelerated culture*.

For them, World War 2 was a topic in history. They grew up with 'the roaring 80s', the 1987 stock market crash, and Paul Keating's "recession we had to have".

They were at the beginning of the digital revolution — the original Apple Macintosh was launched near the end of their birth-date range.

### Gen Y/Millennials

According to another Wikipedia article, this term was coined around 1987 (before "Gen X").

They were born right into the digital revolution. Google, Wikipedia and Facebook appeared within the span of their birthdates.

Theirs is the world of globalisation and technological disruption.

### Notional characteristics of the generations

The table below (based on a quick web search) lists possible characteristics of each generation. These are contested.

### Who am I concerned about?

Maybe Gen X will encounter problems when it comes time to retire, but I think that it's the Millennials and Gen Z who are most at risk of a rough deal. They are the children of the young Boomers and the early Gen Xs; alternatively they are the grandchildren of the old Boomers.

If they haven't already accumulated debt from education expenses, then they are about to, and they are caught up in the current shift from permanent employment to casual part-time work. Combining this with the current high cost of housing makes the prospect of owning a house problematic (give or take a property crash).

generation	Significant circumstances	Ascribed characteristics
Silent generation	Global economic depression, WW 2, post-war boom,	Grateful, frugal, life gets better, progress
Baby boomers	post-war boom, contraceptive pill	Entitlement, Have we had the best of it?
Gen X	Roaring 80s, globalisation is beginning, Digital revolution	Resourceful, independent, entrepreneurial
Millennials	Digital economy, globalisation is established, , world recession	Community minded - friends sustain you, "pragmatic idealism"
Gen Z	Possibly tightened economic circumstances, globalisation is the norm	Digital natives, too soon to say

And it's not only financial circumstances. Will the political and cultural environment be sustaining?

**Current roles of the generations**

If we take as representative of each generation the middle of the birth-date range listed in my first table, we get these data for the current age of each generation:

<b>generation</b>	<b>Indicative age today</b>
Silent generation	82
Baby boomers	61
Gen X	46
Millennials	26
Gen Z	10

The Silent Generation has retired.

Inter-generational equity will depend upon the changes that Baby Boomers initiated, and that Gen X has continued. For example, as I write we are discussing treatment of superannuation, health care and education funding.

Increasingly I depend on later generations for my comfort and well-being. They will be my doctor, service my car, sort out my computer, write and perform plays for me to watch, and take over the responsibilities of government.

In summary, later generations will decide the world that I will inhabit. If life is a series of

experiments, then we Baby Boomers are about to see the results of the parameters we set.

**Where to from here?**

As I write, the conventional view is that Australia has a structural budget deficit, an aging population, an economy undercut by the undertow of a mining boom, and a political system that is in disarray. And all this while world economies and polities are struggling.

On the other hand, we are rich in resources and have a creative and well educated population with a remarkable capacity for innovation and hard work. And the idea of a fair go still resonates. How can we harness this?

In the recent election period I heard young people say something like: "Please don't talk about us as though we are exhibits in a zoo." I could see what they meant. They were generally seen as 'other' by the Boomers and GenXs of the media.

It would be good to hear directly from the younger generations. Could SoFiA initiate a conversation between the generations? A mini-conference with representatives from the various generations might do it.

**In The Gaps**

**SoFiA welcomes**

people from all faith communities

**as well as those**

with no involvement in organised religion

**In fact**

anyone who's interested in the non-dogmatic discussion of the big questions of life

*From Greg Spearritt's slide show at the Mini conference  
reformatted by Robin Ford*

Announcement

**Enrich Your Spiritual Journey:  
Attend *Common Dreams* In Brisbane  
16 to 19 September 2016**

*Graeme Adsett passes on a conference recommendation*

The other day a retired Minister friend told me that he only goes to his Church now about once every six weeks, and then only to catch up with friends over morning tea. My surprised look prompted him to add, "I got so sick of parking my brains along with my car in the Church car park!" Again my quizzical look prompted a further comment, "Quite frankly, my spiritual life journey has taken me beyond what church worship is offering. Don't get me wrong, I still take the message of the Bible seriously, but I certainly don't take it literally. And, furthermore, to use a slogan, "God is Love, not a guy in the sky"!

Then, he went on to tell me about his excitement about the *Common Dreams* Conference this year from 16 to 19 September at Somerville House School in Brisbane. He explained that, if I wished to be exposed to ideas where "God is bigger than our ideas about God", and "where God evolves and so does our religion", I should join him at the conference with many others who are given the name "progressive Christians".

He told me that Dr Val Webb, an Australian scholar, would be giving a lecture entitled, *Always Progressing and Evolving: but from what*

*to where and how and why?* He went on to say that Dr Butler Bass, an independent scholar from the USA specializing in American religion and culture, would be giving a talk on *Spiritual Revolution: Vertical No More*. For sure, he suggested, such a topic would be supporting "God is Love, not a guy in the sky". My friend mentioned one more fellow from England, a Rev Canon Adrian Alker, the Chair of the Progressive Christianity Network in the UK, who would perhaps help him to think again about regular church attendance by paying attention to the Canon's topic, *Is a Radical Church Possible?*

My friend had to be somewhere else, but, before he raced away, I did promise that I would look up the total program at [www.commondreams.org.au](http://www.commondreams.org.au). He was sure that I would be more than impressed by the range of lectures, the electives, the panel discussion, the keynote speakers, and the special program for the younger brigade whom we refer to as Generation Y or the Millennials.

His parting words were, "I'll see you there! Be sure to pay up before the end of July to get the Early Bird price of \$395. If you can't come for everything, there are session prices too. So long!"

Announcement

**SoFiA Victoria**

Thursdays, 7.30pm. Gold coin donation appreciated.

Lectures are followed by questions, discussion and refreshments. All viewpoints are welcome.

VENUE: Carlton Library Meeting Room, 667 Rathdowne Street (corner Newry Street), North Carlton.

Melways Map: 2B J2. SoFiA Victoria email - [sofmelb@yahoo.com.au](mailto:sofmelb@yahoo.com.au)

18 August 2016 Willy Vloedmans ([Spiritualist](#))

*Meta-Physics and Spiritual Consciousness*

15 September 2016 John Gunson

(Author, [God, Ethics and the Secular Society](#))

[Learning to Live Without God](#)

20 October 2016 Danny Klopovic

*Traitors, Fanatics and Rebels: The Anabaptists and other Radicals.*

## From the Mini conference Quiz

*compiled by Greg Spearritt*

1. Which of these 15 Australians are not/were not Muslim?
  - a. Ahmed Fahour (CEO, Australia Post)
  - b. Asad Ansari (Director, Deloitte Australia)
  - c. John Ilhan (founder of Crazy John's mobile phone retail business)
  - d. Al Grassby (Minister for Immigration, Whitlam Labor Government)
  - e. Mark Arbib (former Labor Senator for NSW)
  - f. Ed Husic (Labor member for Chifley)
  - g. Mehreen Faruqi (NSW Greens MP)
  - h. Mona Shindy (Captain, Royal Australian Navy)
  - i. Warren Mundine (chair, Australian Government's Indigenous Advisory Council)
  - j. Cory Paterson (professional boxer and former NRL player)
  - k. Usman Khawaja (batsman, Australian cricket team)
  - l. Sabrina Houssami (Miss World Australia 2006)
  - m. Bülent Hass Dellal AO (Deputy Chair, SBS Board)
  - n. Waleed Aly (academic and radio/TV presenter)
  - o. Muhammed Haniff (Director, Buddhist Pure Land Learning College, Toowoomba)
2. True or false? A group known as Muslims Against Homophobia Australia (MAHA) is active in Australia.
3. What percentage of the Australian population is Muslim?
4. According to the International Ipsos Mori poll, by what factor do Australians overestimate the Australian Muslim population?
  - a. 2
  - b. 5
  - c. 7
  - d. 9
5. In what year was the first Mosque in Australia built?
  - a. 1861
  - b. 1881
  - c. 1901
  - d. 1931
6. When did Muslims first come to Australia?
7. What proportion of Muslims are Australian-born?
8. Which of the following News Ltd headlines are fake? (*I'm afraid I can't include this, but it was an instructive and fun activity. Ed*)

Point Of View

## Neo-Islamists

by John Carr

What motivates Islamists to commit violent acts in Western countries? Is it religion or politics? Or is it psychological? Politicians, academics and police are all interested in identifying the kinds of people who may become so radicalized that they resort to horrific violence. If relevant profiles can be found, they hope, preventive measures can be taken. It is obvious that there is not one single 'type' of potential Muslim terrorist, but some patterns have been discovered.

Of particular concern are the youths and young men who appear to change their personality and become seriously radicalised quite suddenly. Typically, these are men between the ages of 15 and 30, refugees or migrants who have lived in the country for some years themselves, or the sons of migrants. They rarely have a great deal of education, are often unemployed or have unskilled jobs and are often loners. Until recently, they have not shown much interest in their Faith. Their parents are usually observing Muslims, though not particularly devout, and are surprised and shocked when their sons carry out their acts of violence.

It appears that many of these young people have, in fact, been seriously alienated from their adopted culture for some time. If they have life goals, they have not been able to

achieve them and they have almost certainly suffered a degree of prejudice at the hands of the host society. Their long-standing feelings of resentment lead them to see radical Islam as the perfect path to empowerment and fulfilment. Young Muslims are by no means the first demographic to embrace this apparent solution to all their problems. Young men for centuries have welcomed the glorious war that would give them a heroic role in defence of their country and culture. The possibility of death barely gets a thought, even without the promise of a martyr's eternity in Paradise.

In some respects, young Islamists bear a particularly strong resemblance to the post-war Neo-Nazis in Germany and other Western countries. These young men knew very little of Nazism – its causes, history, ideology or actions. What they saw, were attracted to and fanatically adopted were some of the superficial trappings of Nazism – the uniforms, flags, songs, rituals and (most concerning) the racism and violence.

Fortunately, most Neo-Nazi movements died out quickly, because they did not have a substantial, ancient culture behind them, let alone a religion with spiritual clout. Neo-Islamist movements, however, have these advantages writ large and may enjoy a much longer life

Point Of View

## If You're Not Here Please Raise Your Hand.

We've handed over member records, and they are now on my system.

With the 2016 census problems in my mind, I'm sure that I've had many opportunities to get things wrong.

Perhaps I've missed something in the *Bulletin* circulation lists.

Could you please let me know of any mistakes or omissions. And could you check with people you know that all is ok.

Review

**Sami Shah**  
***The Islamic State of Australia***

ABC Radio National July 2016

*The Editor (Robin Ford) listened to these podcasts and hopes they will inspire contributions, whether brief comments or major articles.*

When Sami Shah, an ex-Muslim, migrated to Australia from Pakistan he hoped that he had left his troubled relationship with Islam behind him. But it didn't work out that way, so instead he set out on a quest to "investigate the place of Islam in Australia". In five half-hour episodes he opens up for us the wide spectrum of beliefs and behaviours that is called 'Islam'.

His approach is forthright yet respectful. It's quite a trick. Humour helps.

Interviews in his programs are wide ranging. As the ABC website has it, he talks with "moderate Muslims, Islamic preachers, ex-

Muslims like himself, and even people who don't believe Islam has any place in Australia."

The style is intriguing. It speaks of someone who has been immersed in the culture but is no longer part of the formal belief system. I detected antipathy, but no bitterness.

With an estimated 1.6 billion Muslims in a globalised world where Islam has become contentious we might ask "How are we all going to get along in Australia?" Perhaps this series, with its directness and respect, offers a way forward.

If you do listen to the podcasts I hope you'll consider writing something for the *Bulletin*.

Review

***Digitalia***

*This is the Editor's review of what is happening on the SoFiA website, the SoFiAblog, sofiatalk and Facebook. See the SoFiA website [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org) for instructions and links on how to access sofiatalk and the SoFiA Facebook page.*

SoFiA website [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org) : I have been following the attacks in Bangladesh on progressives and atheists. The following heading set me up for more disappointments "Religious Violence Bangladesh confronts fresh wave of terror as fear keeps secular campaigners underground (ABC News) " I subsequently heard the terrible tale of a brother strangling his sister to death because he didn't like what she had posted on the internet.

SoFiA blog at [www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php](http://www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php) (also accessible from the website): The post I found was promoting the Common Dreams Conference. You can't say that you haven't been advised that it's on!

Facebook Sea of Faith in Australia: Jim Norman shared a link to an article in *The Monthly* in which Mungo McCallum warns of the conflict that can be stirred up by the proposed plebiscite on the marriage laws

sofiatalk There is a new posting. It's advertising the *Common Dreams Conference* — what else?

Point Of View

**Answers to the Quiz Questions on page 11**

1. d, e & i
2. True
3. 2.2%
4. D
5. A
6. Muslim fisherman from Makassar in southern Sulawesi, Indonesia, began making their annual visits to Australia in the early 1700s.
7. 36%

*Quiz compiled by Greg Spearritt*

Postlude

**A walk in a suburban park**



Photo Robin Ford

Xanthorrhoea on the banks of the Lane Cove River, Lane Cove, NSW

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Epilogue

I had selected another poem here, but on a mizzling, melancholy Sunday morning, this one suggested itself to me.

I first encountered it in a delicious setting by English art-song composer Roger Quilter.

*selected by Robin Ford*

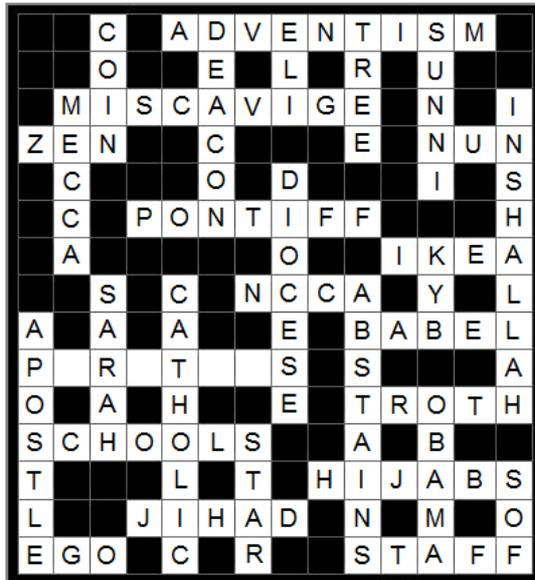
**Weep You No More, Sad Fountains**

Anonymous

Weep you no more, sad fountains;  
What need you flow so fast?  
Look how the snowy mountains  
Heaven's sun doth gently waste.  
But my sun's heavenly eyes  
View not your weeping,  
That now lie sleeping  
Softly, now softly lies  
Sleeping.

Sleep is a reconciling,  
A rest that peace begets.  
Doth not the sun rise smiling  
When fair at even he sets?  
Rest you then, rest, sad eyes,  
Melt not in weeping  
While she lies sleeping  
Softly, now softly lies  
Sleeping.

**SoFiA Crossword #23**

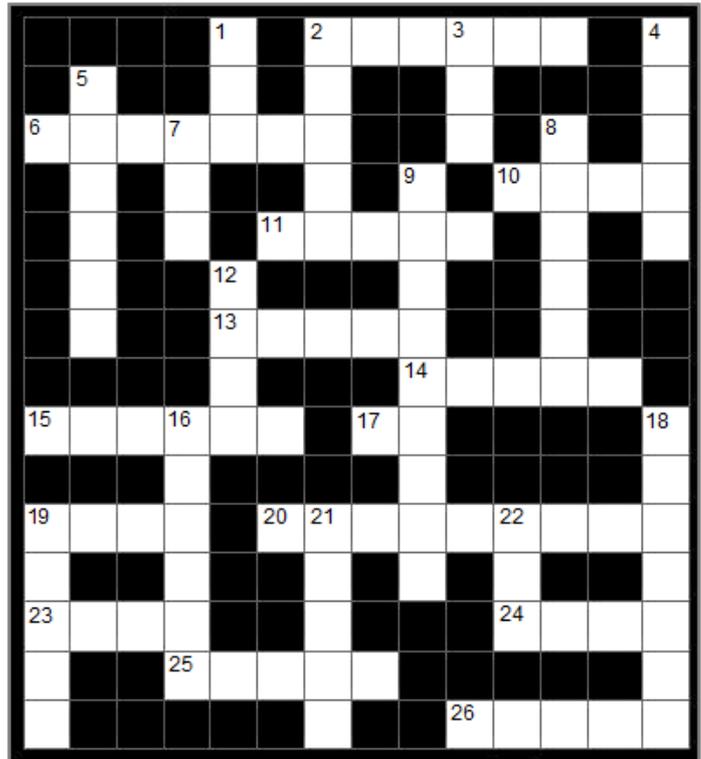


Theme: Islam

**Across**

- 2. Verbally transmitted record of the teachings, deeds and sayings of Muhammad which has become a body of traditional social and legal custom/practice for the Islamic community
- 6. Ninth month in the Islamic calendar
- 10. The smaller of the two main sects of Islam
- 11. Veil covering the head and chest
- 13. Destination for (at least) a once-in-a-lifetime pilgrimage
- 14. Daily prayers
- 15. Non-Muslim living in an Islamic state who must pay special taxes and whose right to practice their religion is subject to strict controls
- 17. Islamic terror group wreaking havoc in Syria & Iraq
- 19. Jahannam (Islam); Gehenna (Judaism)
- 20. Australian political party which declares, "Islam has no place in Australia if we are to live in a cohesive society"
- 23. Chapter of the Qur'an
- 24. Afghan mujahedeen commander & leader of the Taliban until his death in 2013
- 25. Permitted or lawful
- 26. Country which is almost 95% Islamic and is home to almost 5% of the world's Muslims

**SoFiA Crossword #24** Prepared by Greg Spearritt



**Down**

- 1. Muslim festival
- 2. Islamic denomination to which the vast majority of Indonesians belong
- 3. Christian religious role for which there is no Islamic equivalent
- 4. Evening meal at which Muslims break their daily fast during Ramadan
- 5. Report describing the words, actions or habits of the Prophet Muhammad
- 7. Islamic counter-terrorism expert and newly-elected federal member for the WA seat of Cowan
- 8. Islamic law
- 9. Muslim traders who visited Australia in the early 1700s
- 12. Leader of worship at a Sunni mosque
- 16. Honorific title for one educated in Islamic theology and sacred law
- 18. Tower built onto a mosque, from the top of which the daily call to prayer is made
- 19. Islamic Labor member for Chifley
- 21. Veil covering the head and face but not the eyes; usually worn with a loose black head-to-toe garment
- 22. Approx. percentage of Australians who are Muslim

## Sea of Faith in Australia

*promoting the open exploration of issues of religion, faith and meaning*

SoFiA publishes a bi-monthly bulletin. It organises conferences, public lectures and regional meetings. Through its website it maintains an archive of articles and a blog. It also runs email discussion groups.

**Contact:** mail: **PO Box 1309 UPWEY Vic. 3158**, email: **sofnetwork@gmail.com**  
 web: **www.sof-in-australia.org**, blog: **www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php**

**Brisbane Acacia Ridge** 3rd Sunday, 7.30pm. Contact: Rodney Eivers (07 3273 2049)

**Brisbane Brookfield** 1st Sunday, 7.30pm. Contact: Helen Mason (07 3870 8565)

**Brisbane Bayside** 3rd Monday. Contact: Judith Bore (07 3207 5428)

**Brisbane CBD** 2nd Sunday, 1pm to 2.30pm. Contact: Rachel Matthews (07 3217 9301 or 0408 193 872)

**Chinchilla** 1st & 3rd Thursday nights. Contact: Glen Beasley (07 4662 7738)

**Melbourne** 3rd Thursday, 7.30pm at the Carlton Library. Contact: David Miller (03 9467 2063).

**Rockhampton 'Explorers'** Fortnightly. Contact: Dick and Mary Oxborrow (07 4926 2178).

**Sydney** Under consideration. Contact: Lyndell and Robin Ford (02 9427 7078)

**Toowoomba** Monthly on a Monday night. Contact Greg Greg Spearritt [sof@a1.com.au]

### Sea of Faith in Australia Inc.: Membership Application/Renewal

Name(s).....

Address.....

.....

Email.....Phone number.....

*SoFiA supplies names and contact details to state coordinators/local group conveners for advising about network activities. Please tick if you do not want your contact details disclosed*

Membership category	Paper Bulletin	Email Bulletin	Amount, \$
Individual	\$35	\$20	
Concession individual	\$25	\$20	
Couple (one copy of the Bulletin)	\$45	\$30	
Donation			
Total to be paid on line, (BSB 032 085 A/c 446904 ref your name) or cheque (payable to SoFiA).			

Signature.....