



Sea of Faith
Sea of Faith Network in Australia
BULLETIN

MARCH/APRIL 2016



photo Robin Ford

Bark of a pine tree, Bendigo Botanic Gardens, Victoria

The SOFIA website and archive of articles: www.sof-in-australia.org
The SoFiA blog at: www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php

E X P L O R E
religion faith meaning

EDITORIAL

This *Bulletin* includes important information on the AGM. If you cast your eyes briefly on the page opposite you'll see why.

The AGM this year will be combined with activities to recognise 18 years of SoFiA. These activities form a mini-conference on the topic *Islam in Australia*. There will be a multi-media presentation and quiz, lunch and a presentation by an outstanding speaker.

There is a charge for non-members, but for those who have paid their SoFiA membership for 2016 it is free. John Carr and Rachel Matthews are arranging the venue; please RSVP as noted in the feature on the

next page.

As well as announcing these excitements, this *Bulletin* reviews practical ideas for SoFiA group meetings, looks at the phenomenon of MOOCs and how they might help us explore religions, and ends with two reflective articles on the mysteries of existence, death and meaning.

I plan to get the next *Bulletin* out around the end of May, so I will need articles by 22 May 2016.

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SoFiA *Bulletin* is produced every two months
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Views expressed are those of each author and not necessarily those of the Editor or SoFiA.
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Feature

**Mini Conference
and
Annual General Meeting of Sea of Faith in Australia
Saturday 25 June 2016
Verandah Room, Fox Hotel
71-73 Melbourne Street, South Brisbane**

Program

10.30	Registration and Morning Tea
11.00 - 12.00	From <i>Sanctuary to Stop the Mosques</i> : A multi-media collage and quiz
12.00 – 1.00	Lunch
1.00 – 2.00	<i>Islam in Australia in the 21st Century</i> Faiza El Higzi, Manager of the Romero Centre:
2.00 – 3.30	SoFiA AGM



The Annual General Meeting of SoFiA will be held at 2.00 pm on Saturday 25 June. As it is 18 years since SoFiA was founded, we can say we have reached our majority. To recognise this, the AGM will be preceded by a celebratory lunch and two typical SoFiA sessions – a presentation by an outstanding speaker, and a more informal workshop. It will be a mini conference on the important current issue: *Islam in Australia*. For details of the AGM see page 16 and <http://www.sof-in-australia.org/>

The pre-lunch session, *From Sanctuary to Stop the Mosques*, will help members think through some of the issues that are likely to arise in Faiza’s presentation, particularly those relating to the Australian cultural context. It will focus on some of the media statements and reports (from across the spectrum of political and religious thought) in response to events involving Muslims in Australia and overseas. The genres of 'multi-media collage' and quiz both have a revered place in SoFiA conference programs.

The Verandah Room is on the 1st Floor of the Fox Hotel, which is located barely 100 metres from both South Brisbane Railway Station and the Cultural Centre Bus Station.

Our guest speaker, Faiza El Higzi, was born in the Sudan and trained as an architect. She has held a number of senior positions and is currently the Manager of the Romero Centre in Dutton Park, an agency of Mercy Community Services. Newly graduated, married and pregnant, she had to flee her native country and finally settled in Australia. Here she has worked in a number of roles, including senior policy advisor on multicultural issues. She has also become involved in a wide range of cultural areas, including health, cinema, sport and fashion. The brief she has accepted for this presentation – *Islam in Australia in the 21st Century* – is to consider some of the scenarios that may arise in the coming decades in response to religious and political movements and events throughout the world. You can hear her 2012 ABC interview with Richard Fidler here: <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2012/08/07/3562519.htm>

Schedule of fees: mini-conference and lunch

Financial Members of SoFiA	FREE
Non-members	\$30

RSVP John Carr needs to know who's coming for catering purposes. RSVP by **Friday 10 June** johncarr@ozemail.com.au. Please advise of any special dietary requirements.

Come Join Us!
An Invitation to a Celebration, a Mini-conference
and
the Annual General Meeting of Sea of Faith in Australia Inc. 25th June 2016
by Rodney Eivers, President SoFiA

On page 3, John Carr notes some reasons why you might choose to come and enjoy an entertaining day built around our Annual General Meeting in 2016. I would like to draw your attention to something that, if not the main event, does provide the rationale for holding a gathering of SoFiA at this time.

Sea of Faith in Australia was incorporated on 25 March 2003. It followed a period of loose gatherings of interested people. They had been coming together in various ways and in various states of Australia ever since a group of half a dozen or so thought it was a good idea at Brookfield (Brisbane) in 1998.

They had in mind the example of British and New Zealand Sea of Faith groups that were formed to pursue initiatives taken by British philosopher/theologian Don Cupitt, especially following his BBC TV series, *Sea of Faith*. This brought attention to the new challenges religion was facing (especially Christianity) and which had been developing in Europe for some 200 years.

The British group adopted the theme that religion is a human creation, but none-the-less worth exploring on that basis.

The Australian group found that stark and, while not opposed to that position, chose the theme "promoting the open exploration of issues of religion, faith and meaning".

Over the past 18 years, with the changes in community perceptions, and the declining influence of mainstream Christianity in western society, those associated with SoFiA have given continued attention to our purpose and reason for existence.

A key feature has turned out to be our role as a staging house for those who have left

organized religion but feel adrift. They still retain some concern for religion, faith and meaning in their lives.

Recent comments from a significant number of members have suggested that the staging house is no longer important to them. There are other satisfying activities in their lives.

Nevertheless it is my opinion that our basic role remains. There are thousands of Australians now who are finding conventional religious orthodoxy untenable; there will probably continue to be many thousands of Australians in this position as time goes on. Making the break is not easy, and it is comforting to be able to share both the enlightenment and the disappointments of this process with like-minded people.

This is why I would urge you to continue to support Sea of Faith in Australia with your membership, and by inviting others to join. The Management Committee has proposed a major step this year towards facilitating ongoing membership. It will recommend to the AGM that membership from 2017 onward may be gained by simply paying a subscription of \$20 which will carry through for ten years.

If you can participate in SoFiA. by taking office, that would be a bonus, but simply by holding membership you will provide the moral support with which we can carry on our role of promoting the exploration of religion, faith and meaning with some assurance.

Is religion dying as a factor in Australia and in international society? Not if the daily news is any indication. Help us to play our part in making religion in Australia a healthy component of our world rather than one that has the potential to tear us apart.

Response

Letter to the Editor

Valerie Birkett

Dear Editor,

I refer to two articles in the January-February 2016 issue of the *Sea of Faith Bulletin*, one by Greg Speanitt *On being an Atheist* and the other a reflection by Bob Dungavell.

Theism is *one* way of imaging God. As regards Christianity, between Theism and Atheism, there is *panentheism* — God in all/all in God. Not to be a Theist need not mean that you are an Atheist.

So many writers have written of this difference. Only a few who readily come to mind include John Shelby Spong, Marcus Borg, Lloyd Geering, Richard Holloway, Catherine Keller, Karen Armstrong. And in Australia, Val Webb, Lorraine Parkinson, John Bodycomb. JS Spong has

an article entitled *Beyond Theism but not beyond God*.

Many millions of people who might call themselves Christians are Panentheistic Christians.

Jerry Stinson succinctly puts it this way, "God is a word symbol or metaphor for the best and most enduring values of humanity."

God as the goodness within each of us; God as love/care/compassion; God as our inner peace, our inner strength; God as the highest part of ourselves; God *in* you helping me God *in* me helping you — and on, and on, and on...

If you wish, you need Not be an Atheist if you are not a Theist.

Announcement

SoFiA Victoria

LECTURES - 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

19 May 2016

Andrew Rooke (Theosophical Society, Pasadena)

Hermetic Philosophy: A Journey into the Macro and Micro Cosmos.

16 June 2016

Alex McCullie (Tutor, [Centre for Adult Education](#))

Charles Darwin's Legacy: Scientific and Religious.

21 July 2016

Paul Murchison (Author, ["Who is this God?"](#))

Christ, Calvin and Eternal Torture.

Notices

Mini-conference and AGM

**Saturday 25 June 2016
Verandah Room, Fox Hotel
71-73 Melbourne St, South Brisbane**

This is a reminder for you to put the date in your diary, and RSVP for catering purposes to John Carr johncarr@ozemail.com.au.

For details of the mini-conference see page 3.

For the President's review of topics to be raised at the AGM, see page 4.

For nomination forms for the AGM see page 16.

Annual Subscriptions to SoFiA Are Now Due

To maintain your membership

Please either:

a) make a deposit to SoFiA Inc BSB 032 085 a/c 446904 with your name recorded on the transaction with the word 'subs'

or

b) mail a money order or cheque (made out to SoFiA Inc) to PO Box 1309 Upwey Vic 3158.

Note: The bank account details are !NEW! again for 2016

Subscription rates for 2016

Membership category	Paper Bulletin	Email Bulletin
Individual	\$35	\$20
Concession individual	\$25	\$20
Couple (one copy of the Bulletin)	\$45	\$30

Minimise paper work

There's no need to complete a membership form if your contact details and *Bulletin* preference (posted or email attachment) remain the same. But if they have changed, or you no longer wish to remain a member, please let me know at:

cordeliarmary@gmail.com

(or send a note to PO Box 1309 Upwey Vic 3158).

Thank you

If you have already paid. Thank you. Your prompt payment is appreciated.

Any Questions?

If you are unsure about any of the above, please contact me.

Cordelia
Membership Secretary

SoFiA and What It Could Do

Andrew D'A. E. Bush reviews options for activities as he ponders group meetings that might be arranged in Sydney.

Where to

The question asked is "Where to for SoFiA?", which I take to mean "What would I like SoFiA to do", at least in part. Perhaps this question should be "What would I like SoFiA to be, and to do"? Here are some of my ideas.

Book club

Firstly, in Sydney, (which is where I live), I'd like SoFiA to start a monthly book club. By consensus, this group could choose books, say two or three months ahead of the monthly, or bi-monthly meeting. One or two people could take responsibility for preparing a paper, and some questions for discussion for each meeting, and then the meeting could be open to contributions by anyone who wishes to make a contribution.

The format of the book club meeting can be either simply to meet for the club's group discussion, or to meet for an informal dinner first, and then to move in to the book club activity. The dinner would allow people who come to the book club gathering to socialise, and I think the social dimension of most groups is important, and a good means of cementing a sense of activity, enjoyment, and loyalty, especially if we can all develop a greater sense of belonging. A book club would allow all of us to learn, by reading the set book, and allow a diversity of learning by the variety of books that members could suggest. We would also learn from the variety of other member's ideas and thoughts. The members themselves should choose the various books that the book club reads and discusses. This may mean each member giving a brief talk of say five minutes on why he or she wants the group to read and discuss this book.

Invited speakers

This is my first thought. Now, also within our national community, we have a rich diversity of beliefs and faiths, and a rich diversity of people

with none. Could we find academics and scholars within at least some of this variety, and ask them to be guest speakers at some of our meetings on their beliefs or faiths, or no belief or faith? We could ask: What has brought them to the point or situation that they are in now? What do they see as the constructive and positive contributions their belief or faith or having no faith is making to our nation and/or wider community? What do they expect of others, within the same community, who do not share their beliefs and faiths?

Like-minded groups

Here, we may want to look at holding some of these activities in partnership with other organisations. A good example here is this. The Australian Skeptics are holding a dinner meeting in April which is focused on "The Evolution of Anti-Evolutionism", where the speaker will be Professor Graham Oppy, head of the School of Philosophical, Historical, and International Studies at Monash University. The Australian Skeptics tend to get about a hundred and fifty people at their dinner meetings. This subject may be of interest to nobody bar me. Also, we may wish to have an input into the organising of some activities, but doing so in partnership with other organisations may well benefit both them and SoFiA. It could help us in our promotion of SoFiA, also.

One organisation that we could look carefully at working with is known as "Common Dreams". The goals of this organisation, and our own, are somewhat different, but they are compatible, in my opinion. We are interested, it seems to me, in knowing what Spirituality is, and how to experience and understand this aspect of our beings. Towards this goal we are interested in exploring this aspect of our lives, as well as the place of religion, (formal and informal religion), in our lives. As quite a few of us have come out of

the context of a formal religion, i.e. some denomination of the Christian Church, another area that we could deal with, both in and through the book club, as well as at other gatherings, is what are the alternatives to conventional and/or traditional beliefs? As it's just after Easter, a possibility here is; what are the alternatives to resurrection, accepted by many to mean a "bodily resurrection"?

We are few

Whether we hold activities and events in partnership with others, or simply on our own, I wonder if we have enough people to organise the events we wish to see. Our limited human resources may mean it would be better to meet less often, but make the event worthwhile. I've quoted The Australian Skeptics above, to which I belong, and they meet every two months, and sometimes only quarterly, and this seems to suit many members. We have the additional challenge that our membership is scattered widely.

There is a need

Yet, I think there is a considerable thirst for knowledge in our wider community, and I base this on some discussions I had last year about running some 'progressive' courses on Christianity through some Community and Evening Colleges with a group of people. I was surprised at how extensive the interest was that was expressed in the courses proposed. We, at

SoFiA, may need to plug in to this expression of interest. One of the best means of doing so would be to have a diverse range of activities that the potential participants and people themselves decide upon, or even vote upon. It is a much harder row to hoe to have people involved in the decision making, but it may bear much fruit.

Meaning

If I were to put this in terms that others have used, I would need to say that, to me, the "ultimate" is truth, and that is as varied as people are themselves. If I worship anything, anything at all, it is "truth", which must come with justice and lead to acts of compassion, and be focused on others. Truth, I think, is worth exploring, and especially as truth is different for different people; which simply makes it harder to explore and search for. I suggest with truth comes authenticity, and with compassion comes a clear focus on others, with a recognition we live in community, not in isolation. The challenge is how we do this.

Next?

These are my suggestions to date, though I will continue to think about this issue. It's important to SoFiA, if not vital. If my comments have raised any questions, please ask me. I will respond.

Thank you for allowing me to have my tuppence worth.

Report

Extracted From a Brookfield Group March Meeting Activity Existential Anxiety

by Andrew Walker

Abstract:

I will focus on Existence along with Why? How? Where?

There has been some discussion on the direction and focus of the Brookfield SoFiA group. In my opinion the focus has been mainly on faith (perhaps I'm stating the obvious).

Here is my opinion. I would not advocate abandoning faith altogether as a strategy for alleviating our existential anxiety. However, I believe we would benefit by shifting from a focus on faith as the main answer and explore further, other coping strategies that we use to overcome

our existential anxieties so we can build on how we utilise these strategies and improve them.

This has nothing to do with any 'ism'. To attach what I am saying to existentialism would probably distort the meaning I am trying to convey.

Getting started

As words are labels for ideas, it's best I clarify what I mean by Existential Anxiety. It is simply the anxiety we feel when we ask the big questions of:

- Why both we and existence itself exist?
- How best can we create value for ourselves and others?
- How best can we regulate ourselves (and "them pesky others")?

One answer is simply accepting that, to some degree, not knowing is OK. One can pursue knowledge and answers (as much as one feels capable of) while at the same time 'not knowing'.

Another answer lies in choosing where we need to focus. So, obviously, rather than focussing on the anxiety itself our focus needs to be on generating answers, so they can be built on,.

Of course, while focus needs to be maintained on existential anxiety and answers rather than the personal anxieties of individuals, it may be that some of these personal anxieties may be directly related to existential anxiety and the individual may be willing to share them.

Existential anxiety is actually a healthy human response. It indicates to us that there is something that needs to be attended to. So let's identify and attend to it!

Procedure

You may say you have no such anxiety. Good! That means you have come up with some answers, so please tease them out and bring them to the discussion or have the group help tease them out with you.

All answers need to be respected even if you disagree. Because, when respect is gone, co-

operation and hope of resolution goes with it. Besides, disrespect is hurtful.

The answers you bring can be your own or ones you have adopted. Or you might simply come to see if you can find some you can adopt yourself.

Initially I suspect we shall generate many ideas. What we do besides recording them and how we generate more is up to us to decide, along with how we utilise them, both as a group and as individuals.

Don't be too anxious about bringing your opinions and ideas for sharing alongside others.

I have faith that we can develop strategies that serve us better in the future. If not us then who?

So I guess another one of the questions is where do we put our faith?

Post meeting

The meeting generated a wide ranging discussion which reminded me of some advice I was once given which was that, in social communication it pays to not stick to the one topic and to shift ones focus from time to time and enjoy the variety to avoid boring the listeners. I found this advice has proven worth remembering not only for talking to others but also for the self-talk that we are always engaged in and especially the self-talk we have regarding our existentialist angsts.

The fact that we are not omnipotent in our understanding of 'what is' means anything we focus on is limited. Shifting our focus will help broaden our view and help us avoid blinding ourselves to possibilities we have yet to imagine or encounter.

There was no exhaustive list of coping strategies after this meeting. I wonder if it is worth pursuing or is it best left to the unconscious.

The conscious me says, pursue!

One thing is for sure, There is more than one answer.

A Tale of Two MOOCs

by Robin Ford

I've been working on a MOOC.

A what? I hear many of you say! Well, in full it is a, **Massive Open Online Course**.

I'll take the letters of the acronym in reverse order,

- **Course:** It's a course of study (often associated with a university).
- **On-line:** It is presented through the internet.
- **Open:** Anyone can do it — and usually it's free (pay if you want a certificate of completion).
- **Massive:** Enrolment is often huge. The one I'm involved with has just started and at 5 000 joining students is relatively small.

When major universities around the world began to present courses in this way it generated great excitement, but after initial hype the excitement settled down and people are now taking stock of where they have got to.

Typical completion rates are quoted at 10%. This is low, but to be expected because you can enrol at the click of a mouse without commitment. Many students will dip in and out of a course as it suits their circumstances and interest.

Lyndell (SoFiA Treasurer) is about to start a MOOC. It is with EdX, and produced by Harvard University. It is titled *World Religions Through Their Scriptures*. There are six four-week parts. Five of the parts will each cover one major tradition; the remaining part will be an over-view. The five traditions are:

- Buddhism
- Islam
- Judaism
- Hinduism
- Christianity

I don't know the current enrolment but it had already reached 24 000 in March.

I'll let you know how we all get on.

The MOOC that I have been working on is offered by UNSW and distributed by the UK outfit FutureLearn. It is called *Through Engineers' Eyes: Engineering Mechanics by experiment, analysis and design*. It went live today (as I type). with just shy of 5 000 "joiners" of whom about 1 000 are active so far.

It's an introductory level course, and the enrolment details are fascinating. We expected high school students to be interested, but despite the introductory nature of the course most of those enrolled already have a degree (if not a masters or PhD) and are doing the course purely for the satisfaction it provides. And they come from around the world; over 80 countries are represented. I expect this sort of distribution applies to other courses too.

There are many MOOCs to choose from. For example, looking through the FutureLearn offerings I found these two:

Muslims in Britain: Changes and Challenges
(Cardiff University)

Develop your understanding of Muslims and their faith through an exploration of communities in Britain. 4 weeks

Religion and Conflict
(University of Groningen)

Understand and analyze the role of religion in conflicts and peace-building in present-day societies. 6 weeks

And there are more courses available at no charge via EdX or Coursera for example. If you want to follow up on any of these a web search should get you started.

Review

Digitalia

This is the Editor's review of what is happening on the SoFiA website, the SoFiA blog, sofiatalk and Facebook. See the SoFiA website 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 : I found a sad reminder that there are places around the world where SoFiA could not operate. [Secular activist who criticised Islamism killed in Dhaka](#) (*The Guardian*, Australia) 8 April 2016 - Hundreds of protesters have taken to the streets of Dhaka to demand the capture and punishment of those responsible for the murder of a law student who criticised Islamism on his Facebook page.

SoFiA blog at www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php (also accessible from the website): This posting on the blog caught my eye. *Ouch* (23 March 16) posted by Greg Spearritt "Elizabeth Farrelly of the *Sydney Morning Herald* doesn't pull her punches. In a [reflection on the Easter season](#) she writes: 'the church, with its chosen people-ism, its patriarchal rigidity, its systemic refusal to care properly for children, women or nature, has trapped Jesus inside a rigid cage of judgment, hypocrisy and cliché, 'Climate change, she suggests, may be our deadliest sin.'"

Facebook Sea of Faith in Australia: Jim Norman posted a link to an interview with Greta Gosper who is an atheist minister in a congregation of the United Church of Canada. She is being "reviewed" on her "fitness for ministry". I followed a link to her website, which is most interesting.

sofiatalk No new postings this time.

Postlude

Passing

by Greg Spearritt

It may resonate with many SoFers when I say that I'm "of an age".

From its earliest days our Australian Sea of Faith network has been at least mildly geriatric. I don't find this surprising. An interest in philosophical/intellectual/spiritual reflection arises for many people only after prolonged experience of life. It's when we get our breath back after charging through our formative, career-oriented and reproductive years that many of us start to notice our surroundings.

I was younger than the average SoFiA member at the outset of our network, but I find myself now 17 years older. (Yes, we're 18 years old this Easter!) Family funerals for my parents' generation have been in full swing for some ten years, and they've given me much to reflect on. Two things stand out.

First, terminology. For a long time I dismissed the language of "passing away" as an unnecessary euphemism or even a kind of dishonesty, a refusal to look the true nature of life in the face. Why not just say "died"? I've changed my mind. Don Cupitt has been instrumental in persuading me that life is indeed a passing parade. We arise, we perform and we fade away. Cupitt's image of the fountain is a beautiful one: from a distance the fountain seems solid, but closer inspection shows that it's composed of individual drops continually coming into being and passing away. That's life. The solidity is a beautiful illusion. In the words of Canadian singer-songwriter Bruce Cockburn, "Take your place with grace / And then be on your way".

Second, a reflection on funeral services. The trend seems to be away from religious ceremony, unless you wish to be one of those who define 'religious' so broadly it practically loses all meaning.

I've been to two contrasting ceremonies recently. One was 'progressive Christian', the other quite secular. I much preferred the latter, though funerals are of course about the wishes of the living as much as the departed, so compromises are sometimes necessary.

The 'religious' ceremony petitioned "Divine Love, Wellspring of our existence" and "Compassionate Spirit of Life" to "build us into a loving community" and "lift us to find another meaning in life's circumstances". It's inoffensive stuff and it means well, but for me it's too motherhood-and-apple-pie wordy (apologies for the American reference), and it has the serious flaw of assuming the existence of some Entity that gives a bugger about human life.

The secular funeral, however, had me captivated at times. Full of well-chosen poetry and music which truly reflected the life and interests of the departed, it really did lift my spirit. A couple of examples:

From *Everyone Sang* by Siegfried Sassoon¹:

Everyone burst out singing;
And I was filled with such delight
As prisoned birds must find in freedom
Winging wildly across the white
Orchards and dark green fields; on – on –
And out of sight.

From *Everyman* by John Whitehead²:

And I who hoped for nothing, am most grateful
For every hand that did not wound, for every
Moment that was not sadness. Though I came
On to the earth bare-handed I shall take
Beyond the night a swag of memories,
A seasoned heart, an acquiescent mind.

Both ceremonies brought a level of comfort in sad (though inevitable) circumstances. In the latter commemoration of a death, however, I found something to take away to help me live. It was about 'passing on' to those still living, a gift of the departed to those who are still in the process of passing away.

References

The Albatross Book of Living Verse, ed Louis Untermeyer (London: Collins, 1948)

Murmurs in the Rose: Poems by John Whitehead (London: Fortune, 1951)

Epilogue

Random thoughts in a Katoomba café

by Barbara McKenzie

I'm sitting by the window of a coffee shop in Katoomba, musing. A youngish woman in a rose-pink dress, a flamboyant string of beads and a hat with a floral scarf around it settles herself at a table outside; a grubby four-wheel-drive roars down the road; a massive tourist bus grinds up in the opposite direction; there's a rush of steam from the coffee machine behind me and the barista bangs coffee grounds out of his metal gadget as he holds court to a couple of peasant-clad regulars.

I get up and help myself to a glass of water from the rickety tap by the wall and return with it

to my little varnished table. When is my coffee going to arrive?

"Sorry, what was yours?" The barista has read my mind. He'd forgotten me, amid the takeaways.

My flat white arrives quickly after that, and it's excellent.

The thoughts passing through my head aren't original, or even particularly coherent. They're about loss and gain, joy and sorrow, endings and beginnings, pairings and separations, fulfilment and compromise. My coffee-scented pondering is of the "What's it all about?" variety and thus destined, probably, for an enduring

question mark. But my thoughts aren't depressing ones. There's something about my stay in the Blue Mountains that is sharpening my senses, giving an edge to my emotions, making me extra-conscious of being alive. And I'm thinking how fortunate, on balance, I've been.

It seems to me the Buddhists have it right when they advocate an acceptance of impermanence; because whatever we've got, good or bad, there will come a time sooner or later when we haven't got it. Like it or not, it's true. It's why entering into a relationship is setting ourselves up for loss. Equally, it's why we shouldn't hold onto sorrow, but instead allow more beginnings; the sorrow won't necessarily disappear, but we need to let it transform itself into something more manageable.

The hard fact is that life is all about loss. We're losing something all the time. It's up to us what we gain instead, and what we do with it.

The door of the café squeals open, and there's more metallic thumping and another splutter of steam from behind the counter.

Life is a finite-sized vessel, I'm thinking, with room for only a certain number of gains. You have to lose some before you gain some. Or am I pushing the analogy too far?

"Thank you, mate," someone calls out, and the door shrieks open and shut again.

"The *New York Times*—I'm subscribing," a voice says from the table behind mine. "Election year and all that."

Some accordion music starts up in a tango rhythm.

"Every pundit's been wrong. Constantly."

Another voice responds inaudibly.

"I reckon he's getting there. The Republicans are panicking."

Donald Trump. Heaven help us.

There's an ancient fan suspended from the tongue-and-groove ceiling, wobbling around at an alarming angle—I have to assume it's been doing so for years and won't come crashing down. The coiled energy-saving lamps poking out from the metal casings below it would explode all over the place. I'm not going to think about it.

"Nothing in the *Herald*," The voice persists.

I look around at the fibro walls of the café, adorned with a polyglot collection of framed pictures, at the pocked paint on the door, at the looking-glass lettering that's visible through the posters covering half the front window, at the little benches and tables on the pavement outside. I like this place. It has atmosphere. And, somewhere like Katoomba, a grey-haired woman lingering over a single coffee and compulsively scribbling in a notebook is unlikely to attract attention, or even an inquiry of "Can I get you anything else?"

I'm thinking now about my ancestors, stretching back (*up* is how my mind's eye pictures it) into perpetuity. Or is perpetuity forwards? Or downwards? It doesn't matter. What matters to me is that, although long dead, those who have gone before me still exist—because by a miraculous chain of chance occurrences they paired and procreated, exchanged their genes and passed some of them down to me. Not only that; there's nurture as well as nature, environment as well as DNA. Traditions, habits, preferences, even character traits and aptitudes—they're not just genetic. No human ever knows the extent of influence they have on others.

So where to from here? There's my daughter, bless her, and I hope she will have children. But even if she doesn't, and the genetic heritage finishes with her, the vast web of influence will continue as long as the human race exists, and she'll have contributed a generous share of kindness and compassion.

"Can I get you anything else?" The barista's voice breaks into my reverie. I've underestimated him.

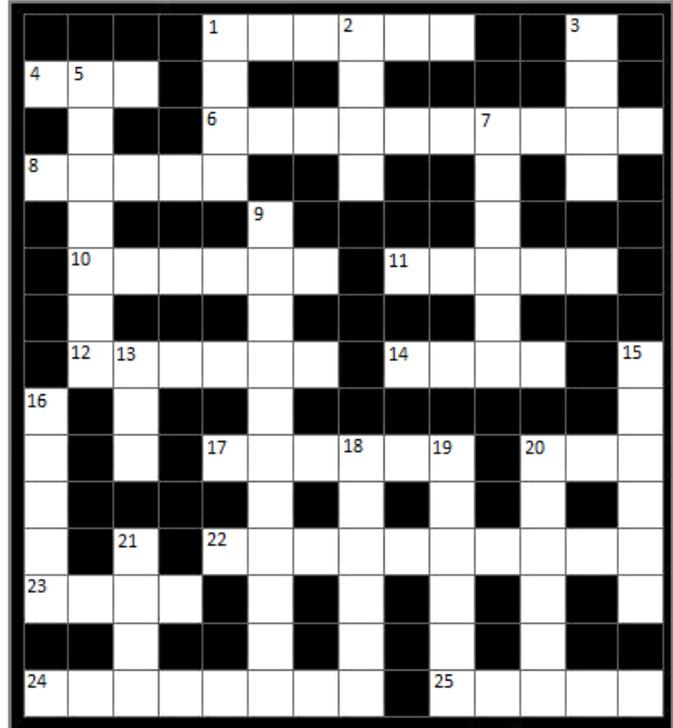
"No thanks. I'll just finish my water."

But it's time to go. I collect up my pad and pencil and set off along the street. My equanimity may be ephemeral. Nevertheless, I'm hoping those I've loved and lost reached similarly comforting conclusions about life before they took their final bow.

SoFiA Crossword #21



SoFiA Crossword #22 Prepared by Greg Spearritt



Across

1. Priest of an independent parish church
4. Overwhelming feeling of reverence
6. Journey of spiritual significance
8. A deadly sin
10. Sermon
11. Hindu or Buddhist sacred text
12. Sectarian term for someone of Catholic faith
14. Prayer leader of a mosque
17. Release form the cycle of birth and death (Hindu)
20. Precursor to 'reap'
22. The Book of the Way and Its Virtue – an ancient Chinese scripture (3, 2, 5)
23. Pejorative term for any figure representing a deity
24. Regard with great respect
25. Praise enthusiastically

Down

1. Bishop of Rome
2. Wise person
3. Family of spiritual practices originating in India
5. Religious praise
7. Religious syllable or phrase used in meditation
9. Speaking in tongues
11. Founder of Mormonism
13. Noah's ship
15. Spiritual movement of 20th and 21st century Western culture
16. Expounder of Islamic law
18. Self-immolation of widow (India)
19. Mysterious or secret
20. Breath
21. Zen puzzle

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)

Gold Coast 3rd Sunday, 2pm. Contact: Eva and Keith Duggan (07 5571 5375)

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.....

SoFiA

Sea of Faith in Australia Inc

Notice of Annual General Meeting for the Financial Year 2015

2.00 pm Saturday 25 June 2016

Verandah Room, Fox Hotel

71-73 Melbourne St, South Brisbane

Written nominations by post need to be received by Friday 10 June 2016.

Please post to The Secretary, C/- PO BOX 1309, Upwey, Vic 3158.

NOMINATION FORM

I, _____, being a member of Sea of Faith in Australia, hereby make the following nominations for positions on the Management Committee of Sea of Faith in Australia Inc. for the year commencing at the conclusion of the Annual General Meeting, 25 June 2016.

Signed _____ Date _____

POSITION	NAME	I agree to accept the nomination (signature)
President		
Vice-President		
Treasurer		
Committee		
Committee		
Committee		

I, _____, being a member of Sea of Faith in Australia, second the above nomination(s).

Signed _____ Date _____

PROXY FORM

I, _____ of _____
being a member of Sea of Faith in Australia Inc., appoint

_____ as my proxy to vote on my behalf at the Annual General Meeting of SoFiA Inc. to be held on 25 June 2016, and at any adjournment of the meeting.

Signed _____ Date _____