



Sea of Faith
Sea of Faith Network in Australia
BULLETIN

March/April 2017



photo Robin Ford

Motel shower recess,
between Canberra and Melbourne

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

Ecology 1. the branch of Biology dealing with the relations of organisms to one another and to their physical surroundings

Ecology 2 (Human Ecology) the study of the interaction of people with their environment.

So says the Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary. In Brisbane, the Queens Wharf project is a perfect opportunity for exploring ecology in cities, and our Mini-conference (details opposite) is not going to miss out.

You can come early (09:00am) and make a day of it (as we will, coming from Sydney) or you can start at 10:30am near the Pagoda, or even join in at 11:00am at the State Library (also the location for the AGM that follows).

On page 4 there are details of the AGM. plus a reminder about SoFiA membership subscriptions. If you haven't paid yet, you might like to put this *Bulletin* down for a moment and do it now.

Next we have a response to an article from the November/December *Bulletin*. You

might like to continue that conversation, or perhaps you will want to respond to the article on homophobia, or the one on morality and sex (it concludes we are doing ok and aren't about to go to hell in a hand cart). Or, on a very different topic, there's a science fiction parable that asks, "Are we going to subdue nature or live sustainably." Two items on Jesus bring us back to the theology on page 4.

In turbulent times old certainties are up for negotiation. Do you see opportunities that excite you? Or developments that distress you? I hope you will consider sharing your thoughts with *Bulletin* readers (email them to me at the address below).

Finally, my computer has seen turbulent times recently too, so if you've sent something to me and it hasn't appeared yet, it might have taken a wrong turn down a folder path and lost its way; I'd appreciate a reminder.

Robin Ford

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Subs

\$20 for 10 years.

Due now.

See p4 and p15 for more details

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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Mini-Conference 2017

What Can we Learn About Ecology in Cities from The Queens Wharf Casino Project?

Saturday 10 June 2017

10:30am to 2:30pm

(with optional preview from 9:00am)

South Bank, Brisbane

Context

Major development projects, whether City or Country, raise political, economic, social and ethical issues that often lead to major conflicts amongst stake-holders — conflicts that can affect the whole nation.

The massive Queens Wharf Development Project in Brisbane's CBD is a case in point (<http://www.statedevelopment.qld.gov.au/major-projects/queens-wharf-brisbane.html>). The battle-lines are drawn.

Those for the project see jobs, profits and valuable community facilities — in this case, a huge new casino, luxury hotels and dramatic public spaces.

Those against it fear wasted resources, pollution, destroyed heritage, disruption of traffic, increased crime; and nothing in it for ordinary Australians except low-level service jobs.

Conference activities

The main program starts on South Bank; if you like, you can view the site at closer range from George Street beforehand. Activities are:

- observation of the actual site, for context
- typical SoFiA interactive challenges, for enlightenment
- short presentations and discussions, for education

During the scheduled breaks participants will arrange their own meals at one of the many South Bank cafés.

There will be no charge for the Mini-Conference, but a donation of \$10 per person would help defray the costs of the meeting room.

Please let us know if you intend to come so that we can send you further information on speakers and activities as the date approaches.

RSVP to

johncarr@ozemail.com.au

The Program

Optional preview

- 09.00-09:45 View Queens Wharf site from George Street (meet at Queens Gardens)
09:45-10:00 Walk to South Bank
10:00-10:30 Informal morning tea (participants to arrange at local cafés)

Main program

- 10.30-11:15 Assemble on Riverwalk, in front of the Nepalese Pagoda (near the Wheel of Brisbane)
View Queens Wharf site from South Bank
Welcome and short briefing followed by informal discussion
11:15-11:30 Move to Meeting Room 1B, State Library of Queensland
11:30-12:30 Interactive challenges (quiz, survey, video, discussion etc)
12:30-01:30 Lunch (participants to arrange at local cafés)
01:30-02:30 Presentations and discussion
02:30-03:30 SoFiA AGM

Announcements

2017 AGM (2016 Financial Year)

Saturday 10 June 2017

Meeting Room 1B,
State Library of Queensland

South Bank, Brisbane

2:30pm to 3:30 pm

Following last year's successful pattern, the AGM will follow the 2017 one day Mini-Conference. See page 16 for nomination forms for Office Holders and Management Committee positions.

Membership Application/Renewal

Membership subscriptions became due January 2017. Thank you to those who have paid.

If you haven't paid yet, it's time to renew your membership. The new fee structure is a fantastic deal — \$20.00 for ten years' membership. Why not take a break; do it now?

If you have friends who might be interested in SoFiA, this deal makes it a good time to join.

See page 15 for forms (if you need them - many renewals won't) and what to do.

Response

The Soul and/or the Spirit?

by Rev Dr Paul Tonson

Thanks to Beryl Meyers for her entrée to this subject (*SoFiA Bulletin* November/December 2016). In her brief sortie, there are some pointers of general relevance to the ethos and thought of SoFiA that I would like to highlight.

The first point is that language is a matter of common usage, such as "soul destroying", "music for the soul"; and "soul searching". Popular usage of some religious language across so many years and cultures has given many words such a wide semantic field that they are no longer useful. Such a word is 'god'.

I believe one task of progressive theology is to focus on the language of belief as distinct from beliefs per se. I call this a metacritical task. Instead of asking whether or not we believe some dogma, we ask whether the language is meaningful. Our critique is applied first to the

language, not to the dogmatic proposition. This critique is an appropriately subversive activity.

Whether certain language is meaningful will depend on whether the categories behind the language are meaningful. This brings us to the discussion in the previous issue about the Greek categories that underlie creedal propositions. One of the most prominent is 'substance'; Christ is said to be of one substance with the father. 'Substance' is a category from Plato, often paired with 'Form'.

In my view, the imposition of Platonic Greek categories on Christian thought has become a millstone around our necks, not least the false dichotomy between humanity and divinity. If such Greek categories are no longer meaningful, because we do not think about reality in this dualistic way, then the Christology, set out by church fathers after prolonged and

agonizing discussions, is simply meaningless to us. So we look for other language to talk about God in the life of Jesus.

For my part, I do not consider that we can simply dump the language of classical Christian theology in which the Christian story has been told. I prefer to consider alternative language that we might use. My own practice has been to utilise words from lived human experience common to all worldviews, rather than from religion. This means to choose existential rather than metaphysical terms.

Beryl's reflections show how the above considerations apply to the word 'soul'. Perhaps most people will agree that the word soul refers to some inward aspect of human life. But we do not need to think of soul as 'a part of us'. This illustrates a second general point, that our theology needs to avoid using words such as soul or spirit or God as substantive nouns. We need to reframe them as qualities of life.

To explain a little, questioning Christian people sometimes say to me that the traditional idea of God has lost meaning — the notion of God as a being, and God as having independent agency in the world. But these same people may find they can hold to the scriptural idea of God in whom we live and move and have our being, since this notion of God is a quality not a being.

Similarly my humanist and atheist friends, who share the ethical altruism of people of faith, find the idea of God and of the supernatural incredible. But the idea that human life and nature has a spiritual aspect is open for discussion.

This returns us to the word 'spirit' which may be meaningful within a wide range of worldviews, of faith or freethought, providing we desist from the idea of 'a spirit'. Spirit is a meaningful word to describe the quality of enthusiasm in a person, or even in a horse! This idea is congruent with biblical usage, in both Hebrew and Greek languages, in which spirit is also breath and life force and dynamic. After I die, I will have the same body as before, but no breath, no spirit.

We may take a further step to note that spirit as enthusiasm is more than mere breath. We have a powerful word in English that crosses this spectrum of meaning, namely 'motivation'. Etymologically, the physical aspect of motivation is evident in relation to movement. But motivation is also about what moves us to action, suggesting that thought and feeling and will-power are at work. This suggests to me that our use of the word spirit must embrace these three elements in some way.

Another approach that makes this point relates to the word 'spiritual'. Within the above framework, I reject as false the dichotomy between physical and spiritual. Rather I see a spiritual aspect to the outward elements of physical and social life as much as to the inward elements of thought, feeling and will.

I conclude that spirit and spiritual refer to an integrating quality of life, a dynamic within us that fosters and expresses wholeness. This surely embraces caring interest in the living that Beryl refers to; our wholeness is predicated on caring for oneself and for others. Soul also may be understood in the same framework as a quality of life. However, the three examples of usage that Beryl cited indicate that soul differs from spirit in one sense, that it refers more to a receptive and reflective aspect of life rather than a generating aspect.

Others may elaborate the two terms further but my reflections are an invitation to express the idea of spirit and soul without recourse to the language of God or divinity. I have also written without recourse to metaphor but I welcome the cooking analogy Beryl has introduced, that soul or spirit are like an essence that enhance our being.

I differ from Beryl in coming to the matter of God at the end, since I hope my existential approach can serve as a common ground for reflection about spirituality across the faith-freethought spectrum. This shared reflection is a crucial and timely agenda in a society where many people consider themselves spiritual but not religious (SBNR)

In papers I have presented locally to SoFiA and to humanist and atheist audiences, I have floated a new term in order to precipitate a fresh conversation; namely the term 'godness'. This term represents my argument that we are concerned with a quality of life, not a substantive being. But it also intends to place our reflections in the context of traditional conceptions of God.

In my view, godness is an enduring, universal quality of life that stands over against

the temporal and particular qualities of individual existence. In this sense, each individual life is a product of godness. It seems to me that the essential feature of what we call a faith attitude towards life is not a belief in the existence of God. Rather faith is about the sense we have of life as a privilege and a gift and about the direction and motivation that this sense of life brings. Soul and spirit are our capacities to recognise and respond to godness.

Point of view

On Homophobia

by John Carr

Recently, a friend said that she thought that 'homophobia' was a misnomer. 'Phobia' means 'fear,' she said, and homophobes don't fear homosexuals so much as hate them. In fact, the Oxford dictionary defines 'phobia' more widely as a fear or aversion, while Wikipedia says that homophobia can be based on feelings of [contempt](#), [prejudice](#), aversion, [hatred](#) or [antipathy](#) for homosexuals or homosexuality. In contemporary pop psychology culture, 'phobia' is used quite loosely in everyday conversation and reporting, but my friend was applying a more restrictive definition.

Nevertheless, her comment got me thinking. That homophobes hate gays is not in question. It is possible, however, that some men genuinely fear gay men, presumably fearing to be propositioned, groped or worse. This possibility continues to be used in some jurisdictions as a defence for attacks made against gay men, even murder. "I thought he was going to kiss me, Your Honour, so I killed him." In Queensland, this 'gay panic' defence was finally struck down by legislation only on 20 March this year.

But I think fear is actually the basis for a great deal of homophobia. Not so much fear of homosexuals as individuals, but fear of homosexuality. Above all, I think, this is based on the very real fear that the boy or man will be labelled a homosexual – whether he is or not.

Men and women alike have policed cultural gender norms for centuries, ensuring, among other things, that women stay in

subservient roles. As God intended! As a result, in many, perhaps most, communities, boys grow up fearing being branded 'sissy' or 'girl' more than anything. Long ago, I had a school principal who would chastise badly behaved boys on the daily school parade by saying, 'You're no better than girls. If you do this again, I'll make you wear a dress for the rest of the day.' In the same vein, many football coaches and army drill instructors sarcastically call their male charges 'girls' or 'ladies' if they show a lack of energy or aggression. An extreme example of the use of this kind of gendered opprobrium by those in authority occurred a couple of years ago, when the then Queensland Government decided that bikies should have to wear pink uniforms in jail.

But who suffers from the effects of homophobia? Is it really a matter of serious concern for society, as only a few percent of the population are gay males? I believe it matters a great deal, not only because it causes a great deal of pain and suffering for this 'few percent', especially the young, but also because they are not the only ones who are affected.

Who else suffers from the effects of homophobia in a community?

- The rest of the 'differently gendered' (lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals and others know that they are equally reviled when gays are attacked)
- Boys and young men who aren't sure of their sexual orientation
- Boys and men who are wrongly branded gay

- Effeminate straight boys and men (the stand-up comedian, Michael McIntyre, has a great routine where he explores his experiences as a straight camp man)
- The family and friends of gays
- All girls and women, who provide the template of the 'other' that real men must avoid. Whatever their protestations of regard and love for women, homophobes

either fear women or have a deep-seated belief in their own superiority. Homophobia and violence against women are closely related.

Are there any winners? In modern Western society, it is hard to see how even the homophobes benefit. Increasingly, they are being called to account by more informed and sensitive friends and colleagues.

Point of View

Are Moderns More Moral?

by Greg Spearritt

The trend in world politics might suggest we're all off to hell in a handcart. Many folks, however – and not least among these are some who self-describe as 'religious' – take the view that right here at home the handcart has been gathering speed for many years. The cause? Moral decline in Australian society.

I want to take issue with that view, at least with respect to the topic of sex.

Without a doubt, what is morally acceptable in terms of sex and sexual behaviour has been changing furiously over the last 50 years. Mostly, though, I would say, for the better.

Let's consider some 'signature' issues.

Information

I remember someone telling me about a sex-education booklet they'd come across in the 1960s which began with the words: "You may have noticed, between your legs...".

Talk about sex was so hedged about in those days it's a wonder anyone came out of sex education classes knowing what caused pregnancies. The 60s may have been the era of free love, but as a 60s child in a small Queensland town I now suspect that the efforts of my parents and the sex ed sessions I attended in Grade 6 merely raised me from 'clueless' to the lofty heights of 'almost clueless'.

Teachers today who take early childhood classes continue to face the ever-present fear that some unsuspecting child will ask where they came from. But things have changed. A tale I heard, possibly apocryphal but definitely plausible, tells of the contemporary six-year-old

girl who asks that very question. When the teacher begins to um and ah the girl immediately says, "Oh, never mind, I'll just google it."

These days we have, arguably, too much information. To be sure, there's also plenty of misinformation, but on the topic of sex that was always the case. Just because your best friend or big brother claimed to know what was what in the 60s, that was no guarantee what they said had any actual basis in fact — usually it didn't.

Masturbation

Masturbation is notorious in our history as a source of insanity, blindness and moral decrepitude. None other than the *New England Journal of Medicine* in 1835 declared that

No cause is more influential in producing Insanity, and, in a special manner, perpetuating the disease, than Masturbation... [T]he victim of Masturbation passes from one degree of imbecility to another, till all the powers of the system, mental, physical and moral, are blotted out forever! ¹

That attitude was still well reflected in the 1970s in the little devotional booklet I received upon my confirmation at the tender age of 12. It was pretty much just 'avoid at all costs' (though to be fair, that was probably for fear of my mortal soul rather than mere insanity).

In those days if you got sunburnt received wisdom was to stand under the hottest shower you could stand. Now we treat sunburn with cool water and ice packs. Attitudes to masturbation have done a U-turn as well. Turns out it's genuinely good for you and ought to be encouraged! Now we read about "10 Reasons to

make masturbation part of your wellness routine".² (Don't know what they are? Google it!).

Pre-Marital Sex

A real sign of the times for me is the fact that of all the clergy I know, and I know a good number, I can think of just one whose children didn't 'shack up' before marriage. In 1977 just 25 percent of all couples had lived together before marrying; now, the ABS tells us, it's over 80 percent.

The ideal of the virgin on the wedding day (well, the girl anyhow: who ever cared if the boy was?) lives on in the wet dreams of folks like the American evangelical virginity 'pledgers'. *The Onion* nailed this nicely in its 1999 article, "Horribly Awkward First Sexual Encounter 'Worth The Wait' For Christian Newlyweds".³ The pledge doesn't work, by the way – it typically just delays the onset of sexual activity by about 18 months.⁴

But wouldn't this cohabiting trend be disastrous for the longevity of marriage? It seems not. In the 1970s and 80s the risk of divorce was indeed higher for those who'd cohabited before marrying, but once the incidence of living together passed the 50 percent mark, that declined. It's now about the same as for couples who don't cohabit. One analysis suggests the change has to do in part with what is considered normal, that is, it's about social acceptance.⁵

Extra-Marital Sex

We know that even in Christian circles marital infidelity is far from uncommon. For the populace as a whole, the Sexual Health Australia website tells us that

Most estimates indicate that around 60% of men and 45% of women are willing to report that an affair has occurred sometime in their marriage and it suggests that 70% of all marriages experience an affair.⁶

70 percent! The figure may not always have been this high, but if so that may reflect the opportunities that social media, mobile phones and the internet offer rather than any great increase in a propensity to 'stray'.

What is definitely different nowadays is that the issue of monogamy/non-monogamy can be more freely and honestly discussed. The press now commonly runs articles about 'open marriages' and polyamory. In my view it's an issue the churches ought to be dealing with. While it's certainly possible to have a totally monogamous relationship, the statistics don't lie: it's not easy. We're not evolved for it (or 'designed' for it, if you think that way).

At its core, this is an issue about ethics and honesty. If two adults in a relationship (married or not) respect each other enough to be honest about their desires and agree that occasional non-monogamy is ok – provided they agree on the ground rules – where is the problem? It's far more preferable, in my view, to the dishonesty of affairs.

This will be a controversial view. It will be objected that it's likely to be unsustainable, that one party or another will grow jealous or someone will fall in love with another person, and that is indeed a risk. But it's a risk in apparently monogamous marriages too. And love, the kind you have for a long-term partner, is not infatuation: it's a decision and a commitment which requires work to be sustained.⁷

Prostitution

Gone are the days when Russ Hinze could tell reporters there's no prostitution in Brisbane's Fortitude Valley while a crane hoists a spa bath into Bubbles Bath House behind him. The oldest profession isn't going away, but the good news is it's now legal and regulated in Australia. That means more respect and security for the women involved as well as better sexual health for both sex workers and their clients.

Same-sex Relationships

We're almost there. Surely, now, gay marriage is inevitable in Oz, despite the best efforts of Toowoomba's David van Gend of the Australian Marriage Forum and his friends at the ACL to deny a basic human right based on people's sexual orientation. It goes without saying that morality has much improved on this general issue in recent decades, to the extent

that we now have politicians and even the Pope apologising for past policies which saw LGBTI people treated as criminals.

Pornography

It is decidedly unfortunate that pornography is now ubiquitous, and that it constitutes a significant part of sex education for many children. By all accounts it's an industry where exploitation is commonplace, though it may be that there is some overstatement on this point.

Of course, there's a great deal in the mainstream press — magazines and TV especially — that would have been considered pornographic not so long ago (and perhaps should still be). The new TV show *Undressed*, for example, asks contestants who meet each other for the first time to strip to their underwear and spend half an hour in bed. Then of course there's the *Fifty Shades* phenomenon.

Having porn closer to the mainstream of Australian life can't necessarily be considered a moral advance. There is, however, the rise of porn that is touted as 'ethical' — the Australian site *BrightDesire.com*, for example ("Female-

owned and operated"; "we collaborate with our performers, pay them properly and treat them with respect").

Sexual Abuse

Of the 3,000-odd Catholic priests in Australia, one in 20 has been charged with child sexual abuse offences.⁸ It can only be a good thing that our overblown and unwarranted respect for authority has crashed over the last 50 years: the harm that so many 'upstanding' and 'respectable' members of society have done to children is astonishing. Outing the problem and providing strategies to reduce it is a great moral advance.

And so

None of this is intended to trivialise the very real potential for harm inherent in many of these issues. On balance, though, I would argue we're in a substantially better place than we were in the white-picket heyday of morality. A moral decline? No sir. Not perfection, but at the very least it could be called a moral incline.

REFERENCES

1. <http://www.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/NEJM183503250120703>
2. <http://www.insightliker.com/sexual-health/10-reasons-to-make-masturbation-part-of-your-wellness-routine-be-healthy-be-happy/>
3. <http://www.theonion.com/article/horribly-awkward-first-sexual-encounter-worth-the--1614>
4. <http://theconversation.com/what-happens-to-men-who-stay-abstinent-until-marriage-47898>
5. <http://www.smh.com.au/national/divorce-declining-and-marriages-more-successful-as-australians-marry-later-in-life-20170107-gtniyi.html>
6. http://www.sexualhealthaustralia.com.au/affairs_infidelity.html
7. An excellent article addressing this topic is 'On Being The Only Ones' by philosophers C.S.I. Jenkins and Jonathan Jenkins Ichikawa (<https://tinyurl.com/z6flk7w>); see also 'I Have Multiple Loves' by Carrie Jenkins (<http://www.chronicle.com/article/I-Have-Multiple-Loves-/239077>).
8. <https://www.themonthly.com.au/blog/richard-cooke/2016/23/2016/1479858182/letting-catholic-priests-australia-was-mistake>

Review

Digitalia

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

SoFiA website www.sof-in-australia.org : I was saddened (though not surprised) by this item in *Religion News*: "Newcastle Anglican bishop Greg Thompson quits after working hard to deal with abuse issues (ABC News)". "... Bishop Thompson last year told the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse his efforts to expose a decades-old culture of abuse and cover-ups had led to a concerted push to get rid of him."

SoFiA blog at www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php (also accessible from the website):

What a delicious flow of words from Annabel Crabb (SMH 24 February 2017):

How – if you were a young person today – would you see your seniors as anything but a grabby crowd of legislative brawlers who got their degrees for free and their homes for a song, and are conspiring together to have you foot the bill for their retirement as they drink the last of the Grange in the polluted ruins of the planet that is now exclusively yours to fix?

Facebook Sea of Faith in Australia: Two recent posts caught my interest: a quote from Don Cupitt and a link to an article on Ayaan Hirsi Ali. Iconoclasts both.

sofiatalk No new postings.

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 - sofmeb@yahoo.com.au

20 April 2017

Neil Blood (UCA)

"Exploring Don Cupitt's suggestion:

- To give ethics priority in defining and shaping religious life."

18 May 2017

Andrew Rooke (Theosophical Society)

"Ghosts: Do they actually exist? If so, what are they?"

15 June 2017

Peter Sanders (UCA)

"Pondering the Universe."

20 July 2017

Paul Tonson (Progressive Agnostic Christian)

"The Faith-Freethought Divide is a False Dichotomy."

Coal Comfort — a Parable

by Robin Ford

President Trump proposes "really clean coal". In Australia the Prime Minister proposes clean coal too. Australia's plans for electricity supply are in disarray. Are storms in the tropics more severe now? Will we subdue 'nature' or live sustainably?

Cosmologists talk of multi-verses (multiple universes), and time travel. This parable is set in a parallel place and another time, where nuclear power came first and coal was found much later, but concerns over power supply, way of life and sustainability resemble ours today.

Report

Researchers from the Centre for Earth's Bounty, State University of Northern Queensland (SUNQ), will today formally announce a breakthrough in using coal to produce electricity.

Power from coal was looked at some years ago in the UK by Professor Otto Frisch (*On the feasibility of coal-driven power stations*, Otto Frisch, Yearbook of the Royal Institute for the Utilisation of Energy Resources for the Year MMMCMLV, p1001, also available at <http://www.mpoweruk.com/coal.htm>). To quote Professor Frisch's report:

The recent discovery of coal (black, fossilized plant remains) in a number of places offers an interesting alternative to the production of power from [nuclear] fission. Some of the places where coal has been found show indeed signs of previous exploitation by prehistoric men, who, however, probably used it for jewels and to blacken their faces at religious ceremonies.

Frisch concluded that it was impractical to get power from coal because large quantities would have to be machined into fuel elements (there are fuel elements in nuclear power plants but they are small and long lasting). And he saw dangers: for example out-of-control coal fires and toxic gases from combustion. (<http://www.mpoweruk.com/coal.htm>).

In a first for Australia, SUNQ computer models show that we don't need to machine fuel elements. We can just pulverise the coal, and use

air to blow the powder into a furnace, which then heats a steam boiler, as in nuclear power plants.

According to SUNQ, the dangers that worried Professor Frisch can be managed by siting the power stations in remote areas. SUNQ also highlighted serious problems with our nuclear power stations. Firstly, we still don't have a good way to dispose of radioactive waste: secondly, while nuclear power is very safe and accidents are infrequent, when they do occur the effects are dramatic and long-lasting (we are still managing accident sites from centuries ago).

A SUNQ spokesperson said,

To reduce waste and the risk of accidents, present policy is to limit the number of power stations. This is why we manage the demand for electricity, mainly through price.

Coal-driven power stations would produce almost limitless electricity. We could phase out nuclear, prices would come down, and we could use as much electrical power as we want.

According to economic modelling commissioned for the project, only modest subsidies would be needed for coal driven power stations to be price competitive with existing nuclear generation, and building and operating them would create 2 700 jobs over six years, many in regional areas.

When news of this project leaked to the media, it produced widespread opposition. Protesters claim that mining scars the landscape, affects the water table, and even with robots and autonomous vehicles is a dangerous occupation. They also say that burning coal releases carbon dioxide into the atmosphere where it acts like a greenhouse and causes dangerous increases in global temperatures.

In a written response, SUNQ researchers claimed that the science of global warming is yet to be proven, and in any case perceived problems from carbon dioxide can be avoided by capturing it and storing it underground.

So far, coal driven power stations are only mathematical models. With suitable funding, the SUNQ researchers hope to have a practical demonstrator up and running in five years.

When the show *Affirmative v Negative* recently debated the proposition: "We should build coal-powered electrical generation plants." *Affirmative* claimed that our existing power generation system is broken, while *Negative* countered that even if our current system has problems, coal is not the answer.

What other options are there? Work continues on nuclear fusion, but its promise of unlimited clean energy is at least thirty years away. Windmills might be a possibility, and there are interesting preliminary studies on converting sunlight directly into electricity. But these are speculative; cost-effective practical systems are decades away.

While we wait, could coal-driven power stations be the stop-gap technology we need?

Point of view

Jesus' Claim to Be God's Son

Her interest piqued by two speculative books, Beryl Meyers wonders what Jesus did between the ages of 13 and 30. Did he take an extended gap year? Would this explain some of the stories told about him?

[note: hyperlinks added by the Editor]

These thoughts have been inspired by two books. The first, written around 1887 by [Nicolas Notovitch](#), is *The Unknown Life of Jesus Christ*, translated from the French by Virchand R Gandhi, revised by G L Christie (Martino Publishing, 2016) [I couldn't find this edition, but the 2008 edition by Dover looks similar. Ed] Notovitch claims that the information is from an ancient manuscript discovered in a Buddhist monastery in Tibet.

The second book is: *The Last Years of Jesus: Documentary evidence of Jesus' 17-Year Journey to the East*, [Clare Prophet](#) (Summit University Press., 1984). This is a good read whether you are an orthodox Christian, an agnostic or sceptic.

Reaching the stage of religious curiosity in the historical person called Jesus of Nazareth. I felt there were many questions left unanswered in the Bible. Why is Jesus' life from 13 to 30 years never mentioned? The logically minded would say that the men who chose the books that were to constitute the New Testament thought it better that their story of Jesus' life should cover his birth and early life, then take a break, before starting again after he reached the age of 30. Did those scholars know of Jesus' wanderings and what he learnt about other religions?

The people who use the 'miracles' as proof of Jesus' divinity, have usually only read Christian texts that rehash the bible stories. They may no longer believe the story of the virgin birth, but to

them, making out that Jesus was an intelligent ordinary man of history would take away their foundational belief.

Imagine someone in a group watching Jesus healing a blind person. The story would be handed down as a miracle. This usage is similar to the way some people use the word today, for example when someone gets a healing response in what previously was thought a hopeless case. In his travels, did Jesus learn healing arts, such as the healing property of spit, and the psychology of telling a person they will get better? Churches rely on teaching people that they must have faith and must believe the words of the Bible. That may have been sufficient for previous generations when you were considered educated if you could just read or write. In those times people were not encouraged to think, reason or question.

During Jesus' time, news often arrived in towns and villages via merchant caravans, travellers and sailors from other countries. Just as our young people today (after leaving school) often want to find out about the world by travel, Jesus could have been inspired by listening to these travellers' tales to go to see for himself. His life to the age of 13 would have been subject to the Jewish tradition of being given a name, circumcised, taught the Torah and taught a trade. Next his parents would arrange a future marriage

to a Jewish woman. With his life mapped out for him like this he might have felt rebellious; he might have wanted to travel and learn. Even today, boys who have been through the religious bar mitzvah ceremony at 13 are morally and ethically responsible for their decisions and actions and are considered to have the rights of a fully grown man.

With the exception of some committed atheists, a belief in a God (of some sort) seems to be part of humanity. Some want to believe in someone or something that has control over everything and so is to be esteemed and worshipped. When Jesus is reported as using the word 'Father' it is as if 'God' was his biological father; this would have given him the authority he needed for his preaching (he knew that no-one could prove otherwise, although his authority might have been undermined if Joseph

(widower?) had not taken Jesus' mother, Mary, as his wife, thus legitimizing the baby's birth.)

Jesus, with his 17 years of travelling and learning about other religions, beliefs and practices, would have expanded his knowledge so much that, on returning home, he would have been altered, not only physically, but mentally. His knowledge of healing would have increased far beyond the home-remedies stage and that also would have commanded great attention. All-in-all, being so much more educated than any of his friends, family or followers, he may have deluded himself that he was the looked-for Messiah of the Old Testament.

It seems that mankind always has a need to look to a greater being, someone to whom they can appeal for comfort and help in times of stress and misfortune. It may be that after his extended travels Jesus realised this and felt that he could be that someone.



photo R Ford

Henley Beach Jetty, SA

Epilogue

Jesus

by Cordelia Hull

You poor, poor guy - so many folk over the centuries claiming they know who you 'really' were, or what you 'really' meant to say.

Did *you* know who you 'really' were? Or what you 'really' meant to say?

I thought not.

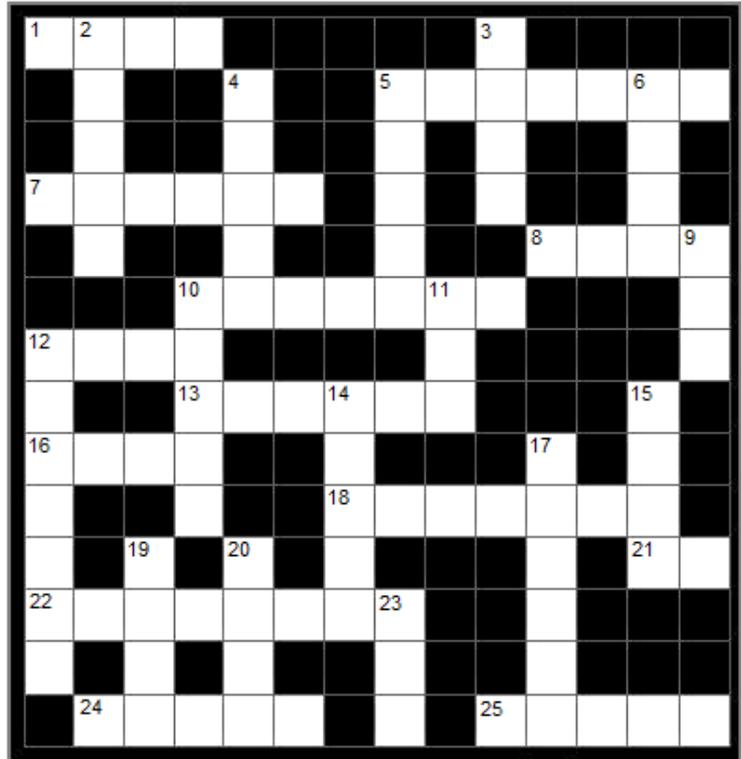
That means you *must* be human.

That's a good start.

SoFiA Crossword #27



SoFiA Crossword #28 Prepared by Greg Spearritt



Theme: Religious terminology

Across

1. *Crux ansata* (Latin: 'cross without a handle'), the ancient Egyptian hieroglyph for 'life'
5. Overly zealous religious person
7. Greek & Latin term for Easter
8. Invisible being with supernatural powers (Islam)
10. Influential 18th century American theologian instrumental in starting the Great Awakening
12. Son of Adam & Eve
13. Minister lower in rank than a priest (Christianity)
16. Semi-circular, hemispherical vault common at the liturgical east end of Byzantine & Gothic churches
18. Cessation of suffering; the third Noble Truth
21. City which hosted the world headquarters for the Jehovah's Witnesses until 2016 (init.)
22. One who identifies with a religious tradition
24. Belief in a remote supreme Being
25. Confession of faith

Down

2. Face veil that leaves the area around the eyes clear (Islam)
3. Deadly sin
4. Struggle (Islam)
5. Member of the mendicant orders of Catholicism, charged with living out their vows in the community rather than cloistered away
6. Sacred image
9. Bhikkhuni (Buddhism)
10. Lay person charged with authority and leadership (Christianity)
11. Where Darius put Daniel (Dan 6:16)
12. No self (Buddhism)
14. Authoritative set of texts
15. Riddle (Buddhism)
17. Modern version of the proto-Germanic term *austron*, meaning 'dawn'
19. Clarified butter used in rituals (Hinduism)
20. Greek god of love
23. Way or path (Chinese religion)

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.

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 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 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).

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

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

Sea of Faith in Australia Inc.: Membership Application/Renewal New Fee Structure (AGM 2016)

From January 2017 SoFiA will have a single membership category.

The fee is \$20.00 for ten years (non-refundable).

Those who joined at or after the June 2016 AGM will have already paid for the ten years from January 2017.

The standard method for delivering the *Bulletin* is email. Paper versions are available on request at no additional charge (donations towards printing costs are welcome).

If your details have not changed there is no need to fill in this form. Just send your payment as described below, being sure to identify it as "SoFiA subs" with your name.

Name(s).....

Address.....

.....

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

	<i>Bulletin</i> delivery	number	each	amount
Membership (10 years)	email/post		\$20	
Donation				
Total paid on line, (BSB 032 085 A/c 446904 ref your name) or by cheque (payable to SoFiA).				

Signature.....

SoFiA
Sea of Faith in Australia Inc
Notice of Annual General Meeting for the Financial Year 2016
Saturday 10 June 2017
South Bank, Brisbane

Written nominations by post need to be received by Wednesday 7 June 2017.
Please post to The Secretary, C/- 14 Richardson Street, Lane Cove, NSW 2066

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, 10 June 2017.

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 10 June 2017, and at any adjournment of the meeting.

Signed _____ Date _____