

We Start With...

A two minute period of silence - a moment of peace.

From the Chair

Happy New Year to you all. I hope that Christmas and New Year has been a good time for you.

Your committee has met and, to meet some particular requirements, **we are going to meet on the third Thursday of each month**, beginning in February. I trust this is OK for you; you may need to alter your diary entries.

The committee had a fruitful discussion about the future of Dunedin Sea of Faith, as we get to be a smaller group. We'd like to open this discussion up to all who attend meetings, and will do so at our March meeting after the AGM.

Gretchen

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Our Next Meeting

A rose by any other name

(Romeo and Juliet)

At last conference the old idea of our funny title *Sea of Faith* came up again. I think everyone knows that this topic has come up again and again at conferences but no-one has managed to give an alternative title that appeals or really describes what we do. The words were used by Professor Don Cupitt in a six-part 1984 BBC TV series about the history of Christianity in the modern world in response to advances in science, politics and secularisation.

We remember that it comes from the poem "*Dover Beach*" by Matthew Arnold in 1867

The sea is calm tonight.

The tide is full, the moon lies fair
Upon the straits; on the French coast the light
Gleams and is gone; the cliffs of England stand,
Glimmering and vast, out in the tranquil bay.
Come to the window, sweet is the night-air!
Only, from the long line of spray
Where the sea meets the moon-blanch'd land,
Listen! You hear the grating roar
Of pebbles which the waves draw back, and fling,
At their return, up the high strand,
Begin, and cease, and then again begin,
With tremulous cadence slow, and bring
The eternal note of sadness in.

Sophocles long ago
Heard it on the Ægean, and it brought
Into his mind the turbid ebb and flow
Of human misery; we
Find also in the sound a thought,
Hearing it by this distant northern sea.

The Sea of Faith

*Was once, too, at the full, and round earth's shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furled.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.*

Ah, love, let us be true
To one another! For the world, which seems
To lie before us like a land of dreams,
So various, so beautiful, so new,
Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night.

Expert Analysis

Here is an analysis from the web site *The Victorian Web*

http://www.victorianweb.org/authors/arnold/touch_e4.html

"Dover Beach" is a melancholic poem. Matthew Arnold uses the means of 'pathetic fallacy', when he attributes or rather projects the human feeling of sadness onto an inanimate object like the sea.

The first stanza opens with the description of a nightly scene at the seaside. The lyrical self calls his addressee to the window, to share the visual beauty of the scene. Then he calls her attention to the aural experience, which is somehow less beautiful. The lyrical self projects his own feelings of melancholy on to the sound of *"the grating roar /Of pebbles, which the waves draw back, and fling/ At their return, up the high strand"* This sound causes an emotion of "sadness" in him.

The second stanza introduces the Greek author Sophocles' idea of *"the turbid ebb and flow of human misery"*. A contrast is formed to the scenery of the previous stanza. Sophocles apparently heard the similar sound at the "Aegean" sea and thus developed his ideas. Arnold then reconnects this idea to the present. Although there is a distance in time and space (from the Aegean in the Eastern Mediterranean to Dover Beach on the south coast of England — *"northern sea"*), the general feeling prevails.

In the third stanza, the sea is turned into the *"Sea of Faith"*, which is a metaphor for a time (probably the Middle Ages) when religion could still be experienced without the doubt that the modern (Victorian) age brought about through Darwinism, the Industrial revolution, Imperialism, a crisis in religion, etc.) Arnold illustrates this by using an image of clothes. When religion was still intact, the world was dressed (*"like the folds of a bright girdle furled"*). Now that this faith is gone, the world lies there stripped naked and bleak. (*"the vast edges drear/ And naked shingles of the world"*).

The fourth and final stanza begins with a dramatic pledge by the lyrical self. He asks his love to be "true", meaning faithful, to him. (*"Ah, love, let us be true /To one another!"*). For the beautiful scenery that presents itself to them (*"for the world, which seems/ To lie before us like a land of dreams,/ So various, so beautiful, so new"*) is really not what it seems to be. On the contrary, as he accentuates with a series of denials, this world does not contain any basic human values. These have disappeared, along with the light and religion and left humanity in darkness. "We" could just refer to the lyrical self and his love, but it could also be interpreted as the lyrical self-addressing humanity. The pleasant scenery turns into a *"darkling plain"*, where only hostile, frightening sounds of fighting armies can be heard:

*And we are here as on a darkling plain
Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
Where ignorant armies clash by night."*

What's In a Name? Renaming Sea of Faith?

Alan Jackson

NEW TIME THIRD THURSDAY

Thursday, 15th FEBRUARY

St John's Church Hall,
Cnr Wright Street
& Highgate

Tea and Coffee

will be available from 5.30pm

The programme will start at
6.00pm

Contribution - \$5

According to Ian Hamilton, these lines refer to a passage in Thucydides, *The Battle of Epipolae*, where — in a night encounter — the two sides could not distinguish friend from foe".

Comment for our Discussion

Could it be that in 1867 Arnold saw the faith of people as being in recess whereas now, whilst we may think that we are in a secular society (one where church and state is separate) we are in the midst of a time of great spiritual awareness (think of the care which goes into modern marriage vows, the choice of venue for marriages, the time spent preparing eulogies at funerals and not just by clergy either). There are dozens of "thoughts for the day" in newspapers and magazines and these are often from non-Christian faith traditions but do speak to us at a meaningful level.

There are many strongly held faith traditions in New Zealand – faith schools of all kinds as well as different places where people of faith meet.

Maybe we should call our organisation "Oceans of Faith" to reflect today's widespread and deeply-held faiths.

Can you think of any other poem or popular song lyric perhaps, which conveys the idea of our search for meaning in life?

As we get older, we are less tied to routine work, perhaps chasing promotion, raising children, altering or painting the family home and we turn to thoughts of the spirit and meaning of it all.

Monty Python made a film *The Meaning of Life* in 1983, and Douglas Adams has written about it – the answer is 42 or is it?

I picked up on a comment of Lloyd's at conference when he used the term *Nourishing Our Spirituality* and used that as the strapline in the November Newsletter – did you notice? What do you think?

We are a spiritual people whether we go to a church or not. We constantly look to make sense of our lives and our world amidst the major issues; Euthanasia, Youth Suicide, Climate Change,

Population Growth, Resource use, Plastics Pollution, Species Extinction, Robotics, Universal Basic Income, Racial Tensions, Feminism, Regional Wars, Brexit, Borders in Northern Ireland, Home Rule for Scotland, Ireland, Wales, using Te Reo - the list goes on.

The issues confront us daily – where do we stand? Are we at peace with our decisions? Do we need to modify our viewpoint in the light of new research?

Coming together at meetings like ours, attending lectures at University, joining in with Mornington Methodist Open Education group, attending talks at the Hospital Chaplaincy, Discussions on Ethics at St Paul's Cathedral and our Medical School, being part of the National Sea of Faith Organisation (\$20 per year) and receiving the bi-monthly newsletter whether by paper (\$30 extra) or e-mail (no further charge), watching some TED talks on YouTube, reading widely and then SHARING one's discoveries – that makes us the spiritually rich and generous folk we try to be and make our place a slightly better one for our presence and for our neighbours. It is important to be informed about issues so that we can discuss without bigotry, it is important to keep an open mind when new information comes along.

The world doesn't always have to be just as it is now – and we have the example of one great teacher who showed a way.

Euthanasia Submissions

Have your say by 20th February 2018

https://www.parliament.nz/en/pb/bills-and-laws/bills-proposed-laws/document/BILL_74307/end-of-life-choice-bill

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Gratitude Quotations

Alfred Painter:

Saying thank you is more than good manners. It is good spirituality.

Brother David Steindl-Rast:

Gratefulness is the key to a happy life that we hold in our hands, because if we are not grateful, then no matter how much we have we will not be happy -- because we will always want to have something else or something more.

Buddha:

Let us rise up and be thankful, for if we didn't learn a lot today, at least we learned a little, and if we didn't learn a little, at least we didn't get sick, and if we got sick, at least we didn't die; so, let us all be thankful.

Cicero:

Gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.

Denis Waitley:

Happiness cannot be travelled to, owned, earned, worn or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace and gratitude.

Eric Hoffer:

The hardest arithmetic to master is that which enables us to count our blessings.

Jean Jacques Rousseau:

There is nothing better than the encouragement of a good friend.

Johannes A. Gaertner:

To speak gratitude is courteous and pleasant, to enact gratitude is generous and noble, but to live gratitude is to touch Heaven.

John F. Kennedy:

As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them.

Marcel Proust:

Let us be grateful to people who make us happy; they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.

Meister Eckhart:

If the only prayer you said in your whole life was, "thank you," that would suffice.

Seneca:

There is as much greatness of mind in acknowledging a good turn, as in doing it.

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