

# the sofia bulletin

Is there meaning? What is true? How should I live?



The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full...  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,  
*Dover Beach, Matthew Arnold*

Photo R Ford  
Cables and connectors; ancient, modern  
and emerging

SOFIA exploring issues of life and meaning  
website and archive of articles: [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org)  
blog: [www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php](http://www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php)  
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/sofiatalk/>

## EDITORIAL

As you will see from the details on page 10, the one-day SOFIA Conference is coming together nicely..

The AGM immediately follows the conference (see page 3) and includes the foreshadowed item on our name.

This *Bulletin* demonstrates another possible front-page layout. In the March-April edition I incorporated a logo with a solitary lower case 'i' among all the upper-case letters (SOFiA). It enchanted some but irritated others beyond measure.

This time I've made it all lower-case. I like its direct simplicity, and the way it contrasts with the formality of its name in full (*the sofia bulletin*).

But this is just for *the sofia bulletin*. If the name of our organisation is changed at the AGM I have assumed it will become SOFIA, ie all upper case, so I have put SOFIA at the bottom of the front page, followed by links to our on-line publications (which have always been lower case).

In this edition, I have included my interpretation of the survey on our name, and

my report to the committee on how it might affect *the sofia bulletin*.

Reflecting on our name is an example of our usual activities – seeking meaning. It's been illuminating – up to a point. After the AGM there will be a wash-up, but I expect the focus will be moving on; but moving on to what, I wonder?

For a break from the name change, in this edition you will find the third instalment in Lynne Renoir's trilogy, a brief report on the SOFIA expedition to Fraser Island, a comment on the Israel Folau affair and of course all the regular items.

I think it's a lively and varied read.

How about writing some thing on this busy period in the life of SOFIA? Please send copy to one of the addresses below.

Robin Ford  
[robinford@a1.com.au](mailto:robinford@a1.com.au)  
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LANE COVE 2066`

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Copy for the *Bulletin* is always welcome. Please send it to the address shown below

Editor and layout Robin Ford,  
[robinford@a1.com.au](mailto:robinford@a1.com.au)

### DISCLAIMER

Views expressed are those of each author and not necessarily those of the Editor or SOFIA.

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### **SOFIA 2019 One Day Conference: all welcome**

All At Sea On How To Live

#### **Where should we look now for moral guidance?**

Saturday 15 June, 10.30am – 3.30pm  
Queensland Art Gallery Lecture Theatre  
South Bank, Brisbane

It's FREE, but please register on-line so we can get numbers;

[Registration](#)

Lunch is available for purchase at several cafes nearby.

**Enquiries:** Rachel Matthews 0408 193 872

**Full details on Page 10**

### **Sea of Faith in Australia 2019 AGM (2018 Financial Year)**

Saturday 15 June 2019, 2:30pm to 3:30 pm

Lecture Theatre

State Library of Queensland

South Bank, Brisbane

As usual, the AGM will follow the 2019 one day Conference.

See page 20 for nomination forms for Office Holder and Management Committee positions.

#### **Origin of SOFIA**

SOFIA creates a space for people of all faiths and none to explore issues of life and meaning. Religion no longer provides satisfactory answers. SOFIA is a non-dogmatic environment in which to continue conversation.

It began in the UK with a television program on religions presented by renegade Anglican priest and academic Don Cupitt. The program's name is from lines in Matthew Arnold's poem *Dover Beach*:

The Sea of Faith  
Was once, too, at the full...  
But now I only hear  
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,

With its gentle irony, 'Sea of Faith' nicely held a tension between religion and a realisation that we humans had made it up.

Later we set up The Sea of Faith in Australia. Did two extra words undermine the irony, so 'faith' reverted to face value? Maybe. Just in case, we de-emphasised it by using SOFIA as name and logo.

As well as *the sofia Bulletin*, SOFIA organises meetings (in Queensland and Victoria), a web site, a blog, expeditions, and a one-day conference.

#### **Foreshadowed Motion at the AGM**

Extract from the minutes of the  
Management Committee 29 April 2019

c. Change to Network's name and/or aim.

i. Survey of members – results were discussed.

ii. Motion to be foreshadowed for discussion at the AGM:

That Sea of Faith in Australia Inc.

(a) change its name to 'SOFIA'; and

(b) express its mission as "exploring issues of life and meaning through reason, philosophy, ethics, religion and the arts", with this expressed succinctly, where appropriate, as "exploring issues of life and meaning".

## Mysticism And Ultimate Reality

*Lynne Renoir.*

Mystical practices have been known in most cultures throughout history. These altered states of consciousness consist of an immediate awareness that the whole of reality is one<sup>1</sup>. In what has been called “non-dual awareness”, individual things seem to lose their independent existence as everything is absorbed into a mysterious whole. There is no longer a subject or object of experience as personal identity is dissolved into the greater unity. Entry into this state requires that the mind be stilled and detached from all objects of desire. Mystics describe a sense of peace and bliss in the loss of their identifiable selves to this nameless mystery.

Characteristics of mystical experience include a feeling of the sacred that transcends ordinary concerns in pointing towards ultimate reality and truth. For the duration of the events, mystics are aware of continuing consciousness, but their experiences cannot be reduced to language. Those who attempt to describe the sense of oneness acknowledge that their words are “hopelessly inadequate to convey the immensity and shattering impact” of what they have experienced<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, certain feelings of the events are retained that enable comparisons to be drawn between the accounts given in different cultural contexts.

Among mystics themselves is a division between those who desire to be absorbed into a unity with the ultimate mystery, and those who believe that a gulf exists between human beings and their Creator, and who seek merely a form of intimate relationship with him. These different approaches reflect the alternative views that God is inseparable from the individual, or that he is transcendent to the whole of creation. The latter belief is reflected in certain accounts given by mystics in the medieval period which involved the desire to be united with Christ, together with a recognition that the individual can never be

identical with the divine<sup>3</sup>. Mystics within the monotheistic traditions have generally portrayed themselves as holding to the idea of a personal deity, partly because such a belief would normally have formed part of their upbringing, and partly through their fear of rejection or persecution at the hands of religious authorities. On the other hand, mystics who accept the oneness of all reality do not attribute to the deity the status accorded to him in the traditions. The doctrine of a personal divinity, from their perspective, reflects the limitations of human thought in the various attempts that have been made to comprehend the mystery of our existence.

Whenever new religions are formed, their founders and some of their early followers are likely to have had experiences that are mystical, or that in other ways are profoundly life transforming. In the history of the traditions, such experiences typically morphed into sets of beliefs and teachings. The issue facing religious authorities was the extent to which they could incorporate the implications of these unusual experiences into orthodox doctrines. Mystics have at times been regarded as possessing special insights into truth, and the material they presented has been used to reinforce the teachings of the particular tradition. On other occasions their ideas have been seen as dangerous or subversive. An area of concern to religious authorities generally was the claim by mystics that through their experiences they were already participating in divinity, or that they had the capacity to become one with the divine.

Each of the traditions has caused mystics to suffer because of their beliefs. Within Judaism, the Hasidists sought to penetrate into the inner depths of their faith, and they did so by “reintroducing into Judaism the mythical and pantheistic dimensions of the life of the spirit”<sup>4</sup>. From early in its history until the 19th century, there was strong opposition to Hasidism, and its

followers suffered bitter persecution by the religious authorities<sup>5</sup>.

In his examination of early church history, Don Cupitt writes that power fell into the hands of a few who claimed the right to determine “correct” teachings and to decree the eternal fate of nonbelievers. After a period of time following the death of Jesus, “the religious professionals ... monopolized control of the sacred text, worship, doctrine, preaching, and religious law”<sup>6</sup>. Under what Cupitt describes as “a large and bureaucratic salvation-machine”, the possibility that individuals could have a direct personal experience of religious happiness and liberation was strongly resisted. In its place was the teaching that if people were submissive to the religious leaders in all matters of faith and practice, they would experience happiness, but only after death. From the time the early church became a hierarchical structure, individuals’ experiences that seemed to run counter to the approved teachings were condemned as heresy.

The medieval period witnessed a growth in mysticism, where the authoritarian structures of the church were bypassed in favour of personal spiritual journeys. As long as individuals recognised the gulf separating them from God, no action was taken by the authorities. But for those who claimed to have experienced some kind of identity with the divine, legal action or excommunication could ensue. Even the great theologian and mystic, Meister Eckhart, was charged with heresy by Pope John XXII in the 14th century. The writings on which he was condemned included statements such as “God must be very I, I very God, so consummately one that this he and this I are one ‘is’.”<sup>7</sup>

Mystics within the Muslim tradition have suffered a similar fate. The Islamic mystic and poet, al-Hallaj, claimed to have experienced a union with the divine. He wrote, “I am He whom I love, and He whom I love is I: We are two spirits dwelling in one body.”<sup>8</sup> Statements such as these enraged the authorities, and after al-Hallaj had been imprisoned for eleven years, he was brutally tortured to death. Today Sufis accept the union of the human and the divine, since they regard it as

“the Supreme Truth and therefore the ultimate goal of all mysticism”<sup>9</sup>.

The accounts given by mystics are consistent with a view held by some physicists that matter and thought arise from an indivisible wholeness,<sup>10</sup> and that the self-contained identity commonly attributed to beings and objects merely reflects our limited understanding as creatures living in a three-dimensional world. Should mystical experience involve access to a dimension transcending space and time, it would be expected that mystics would lose any sense of space as we know it, so that nothing would be experienced as being closer or further away. Similarly with regard to time, there would be no experience of sequentiality. Mystics commonly report that they lacked any awareness of distance or directionality, and that they had no sense of one impression being followed by another.

The paths leading to mystical experience will vary in accordance with the life circumstances and capacities of the individual. Theorists in various fields have taken an interest in these altered states, and some writers have advanced the view that our minds are individual expressions of the universal mind. Karen Armstrong replaces the traditional view of God as “a separate, external reality and judge” with the idea that the divine is “somehow one with the ground of each person’s being”<sup>11</sup>. A similar idea is expressed by Stanislav Grof: “When we reach experiential identification with Absolute Consciousness, we realize that our own being is ultimately commensurate with the entire cosmic network, with all of existence. The recognition of our own divine nature, our identity with the cosmic source, is the most important discovery we can make during the process of deep self-exploration”<sup>12</sup>.

If the conscious universe is the source of all reality, it could in some sense be regarded as divine. On the other hand, if each individual is a unique expression of that totality, and is both a participator in, and a contributor to, the experience of the cosmos, there would seem to be no place for a transcendent God from whom we are estranged because of our sin. But in the

end, each of us has to find our own path to personal fulfilment, and this journey can lead us in many directions. Some of these will include the idea that a personal God loves us and wants to be in a relationship with us. Should an engagement with such a God fulfill our deepest needs, we may assume that a form of interconnectedness is occurring at the most profound level of our being.

This may be the case even when we hold the view that a vast gulf exists between ourselves and the creator. Alternatively we may come to accept that the apparent conflict between an identity with the transcendent, and the idea that we are individuals, separate from all other reality, can be resolved through the awareness that each of us is a unique expression of that ultimate mystery.

- 1 W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London: Macmillan, 1960), 78.
- 2 Stanislav Grof, *The Cosmic Game: Explorations in the Frontiers of Human Consciousness*, (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 27.
- 3 Karen Scott, "St. Catherine of Siena, 'Apostola'", *Church History*, 61, 1 (1992), 35.
- 4 Michael Oppenheim, "The Meaning of Hasidut: Martin Buber and Gershom Scholem", *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 49, 3, (1981), 417.
- 5 Maurice S. Friedman, *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, (New York: Harpers, 1960), Ch. 3.
- 6 Don Cupitt, *Mysticism After Modernity*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998), 3.
- 7 C. de B. Evans (trans.), *Meister Eckhart* by Franz Pfeiffer, (London: John M. Watkins, 1924), 247.
- 8 Karen Armstrong: *A History Of God*, (London: Vintage, 1999), 270.
- 9 Martin Lings, *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century*, (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1971), 126.
- 10 David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, (London: Routledge, 1980), ch. 3.
- 11 Armstrong, *op.cit.*, 269.
- 12 Grof, *op.cit.*, 38.

**Sea of Faith in Australia 2019 AGM  
(2018 Financial Year)**

Saturday 15 June 2019, 2:30pm to 3:30 pm

Lecture Theatre

State Library of Queensland

South Bank, Brisbane

As usual, the AGM will follow the 2019 one day Conference.

See page 20 for nomination forms for Office Holder and Management Committee positions.

If you are unable to attend the AGM you might like to appoint a proxy using the form on page 20.

Report

## Members' Views On Our Name

*The Editor reports on views expressed in an on-line survey*

### The story so far

Our organization has been considering a change of name. *the sofia bulletin* has received many written contributions over several months. With decision-day approaching, the Management Committee ran an on-line survey. This is what we found.

### Is SOFIA alive?

The response rate for our survey was good – 34 or 37% of the membership.

### What does SOFIA do?

SOFIA has:

- A publication every other month - *Bulletin*
- Meetings (Queensland and Victoria)
- Excursions (we have just completed an excellent trip to Fraser Island – nature, scenery, companionship and discussion)
- Conferences (next one 15 June 2019 details in this *Bulletin*)
- Website
- Facebook page

All of these involve discussion.

### What are SOFIA's themes?

Here are the titles of conferences held from 2012 (reverse date order):

- 2019 All At Sea On How To Live. Where can we look for moral guidance?
- 2018 Gender diversity
- 2017 Ecology in cities
- 2016 Islam in Australia
- 2015 Religion in education
- 2013 Religion and sex
- 2012 Faith, Meaning and Humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global Village

When searching old *Bulletins* for conference details I found a report on the 2012 conference by Peter Robinson. Here's an extract.

### Sea of Faith in Australia

#### 2012 Conference

Beyond Difference, Beyond Belief –  
Faith, Meaning and Humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century  
Global Village

#### Opening Address

Peter Robinson, conference Chair

31 August – 2 September

Some of you tonight, may hear the distant roar of the ocean, carried on the night air. This image, of the ebb and flow of religion and faith, lies at the heart of the Sea of Faith network.

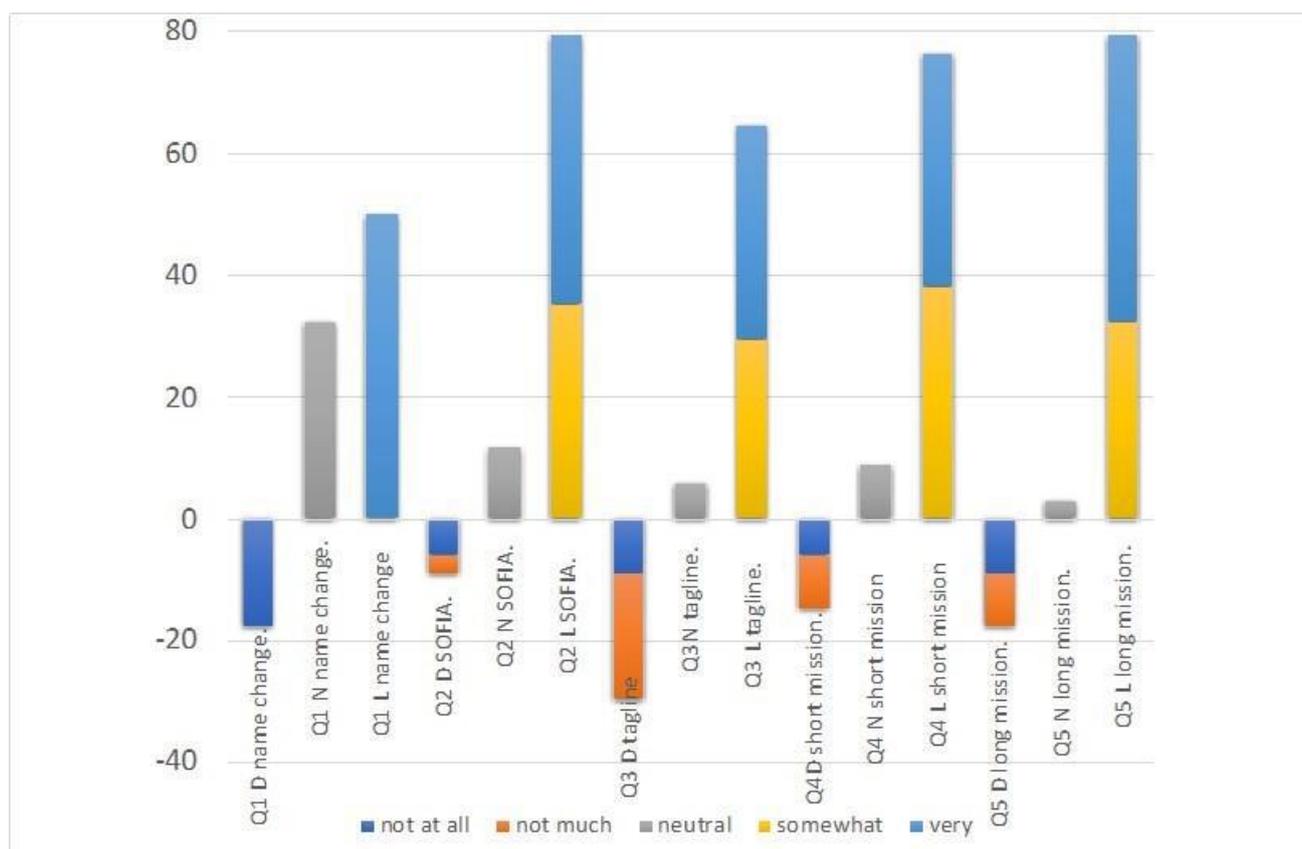
As a national forum for the discussion of religion, faith and meaning, SoFiA affirms the continuing importance of religious thought as a creative human endeavour – one that must continue to change in order to remain relevant for people. SoFiA offers a critical thinking environment, and encourages honest scholarship and respectful dialogue.

My impression from the many people I speak with is that most people are surfing the sea of faith already. While organised religion tells people to 'swim between the flags', more and more people it seems, are choosing to swim beyond the flags.

The conference title, 'Beyond Difference, Beyond Belief – Faith, Meaning and Humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century Global Village', captures the sense of what the organisers of this conference hoped to convey – we are moving to a post-modern global society.

### Where to next?

There is the matter of the name. To give myself an over-view of the survey, I collected all the results onto a single chart. Each question has three columns. The column for the two levels of disagreement is below the line, the one for neutral is above the line, and the one for the two levels of agreement is also above the line.



Here are the questions from the survey, and my interpretations of the responses.

		D = dislike,	N = neutral	L = like	
1	Are you in favour of c name?				ige; 18% are not and 32% might be – depending upon what is proposed.
2	If the name were to change, how well do you like 'SOFIA'				If there is to be a name change there is support for SOFIA
3	Assuming a change, how well do you like the tagline 'exploring wisdom - ancient, modern and emerging'?				There is less support for the tag line, and more members chose one of the negative options (29%). Note: the tagline was subsequently deleted from the proposal.
4	Assuming a change, how well do you like the aim/mission of 'openly exploring issues of life and meaning'?				There is more support for the proposed 'aim' (fewer members chose the negative options than with the tag-line).
5	Assuming a change, how well do you like the more detailed aim/mission of 'openly exploring issues of life and meaning through reason, philosophy, ethics, religion and the arts'?				The more detailed aim had roughly the same support as the concise one.

Written comments suggested adjustments to the English expression. More importantly there are passionate pleas for keeping the metaphor of the 'Sea of Faith' somewhere, no matter what the other changes might be. And

should 'faith' disappear from the name, it will still be a topic of discussion. Similar comments had been received by to the *Bulletin* earlier.

There is a plea for us to "get on with it". This year's AGM will tell.

Regular Items

### *Digitalia*

*The Editor's review of activity on the SoFiA website, the SoFiA blog, and Facebook. See the SoFiA website [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org) for instructions and links on accessing the SoFiA Facebook page*

SOFA website: [www.sof-in-australia.org](http://www.sof-in-australia.org) . I couldn't go past this item

*Pasta strainers and pirates: how the Church of the Flying Spaghetti Monster was born* (The Guardian, Australia) May 18 - As F Scott Fitzgerald once observed, the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.

This is fun and serious at the same time. Here are two quotes as examples. 'Instead of 10 commandments, it offers eight "I'd really rather you didn'ts"', and 'the only difference between FSM and other religions is that they are wrong and we are right'.

SOFiA blog: [www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php](http://www.sof-in-australia.org/blog.php) or via the website. Last year, Greg Spearritt suggested we get out of our comfort zone and read a range of views on Religious Freedom. In a post on September 2018 he wrote:

The culture and gender wars are in full swing in Australia at present. One of the upcoming skirmishes concerns 'freedom of religion'.

The debate on this topic is current again.

Greg continues:

...So we need to weigh up both pro(gressive)s and con(servative)s on the issue. A few salutary articles are listed below."

Facebook: Sea of Faith in Australia James Norman shared a link to a Guardian article by Stan Grant. I've just read Stan Grant's book *Australia Day* . It's a tough road he has chosen – holding his Aboriginal ancestry and his Irish ancestry in creative tension (rather than simplifying it to just one). But it seems he can do no other. He concludes with a document that he describes like this:

This is my Declaration of Country, my song of this country. For that is what lasts.

It offers a tough road for us all – but it comes with hone



On the only flat road on Fraser Island

Announcement

**All At Sea On How To Live**  
SOFIA 2019 One Day Conference

**Where should we look now for moral guidance?**

**Saturday 15 June, 10.30am – 3.30pm**

Queensland Art Gallery  
Lecture Theatre  
South Bank, Brisbane

[Registration](#) is FREE; all welcome.

Lunch is available for purchase at several nearby cafés  
Enquiries: Rachel Matthews 0408 193 872



**Speakers**

(1) Rodney Eivers: *Can a completely neutral stance towards ethics replace the unifying function of religion?*

Perhaps from the influence of his mother and an early association with Christianity, Rodney started life with an aim to make the world a better place. In his teenage years he concluded that the prime need of human beings was food, which led him to become an agricultural adviser in Papua New Guinea. However, he soon came to realise that a more urgent factor than food for human beings, especially in Australian society, was

**Program**

10.00	Registration/Welcome
10.30	Speakers
12.15	Lunch (available for purchase AT nearby cafes/restaurants)
1.30	Panel session with Q&A
2.30	SOFIA AGM

personal relationships. For 30 years he instructed in Parent Effectiveness Training, a democratic approach to child-raising, which reignited Rodney's interest in Christianity as a social binding force. With

the collapse of a common institutional Christianity in Western society – to which, ironically, Rodney contributes with his espousal of 'progressive' Christianity – he has become uneasy about where people today imbibe those values which contribute to building a harmonious community. Rodney is currently President of Sea of Faith in Australia.

(2) Gail Parataz: *Religion as Culture – how Judaism has different strands of observance within an overall religious culture*

Gail was born in Sri Lanka (Ceylon at the time) and emigrated with her family to Melbourne when she was a very young child. She lived there for 30 years before moving to Brisbane. Gail is married to David and has 2 sons – Benjamin 26 years and Jonathon 24 years. She has been a high school Art teacher and her last teaching post was at Brisbane Girls' Grammar School. Nowadays Gail is the Interfaith Chair on the Queensland Jewish Board of Deputies (QJBD) and is also the Chair of the Queensland Faith Communities Council (QFCC).

(3) Professor Sarva Daam Singh: *Pursuit of peace and happiness in a world riven by intolerance*

Sarva Daman Singh stresses the indivisibility of humanity and its cultural diversity as a natural expression of its bountiful creativity. Professor Sarva Daman Singh, BA(Hons), M.A., PhD (University of London), PhD (University of Queensland, Australia), F.R.A.S., was born at Angai, in District Mathura of Uttar Pradesh, India and migrated to Australia in 1974. He won many

awards and five gold medals during the course of a distinguished educational career at the universities of Lucknow and London. He has taught at the University of Lucknow; National Academy of Administration, Government of India, Mussoorie; Vikram University, Ujjain; and the University of Queensland, Australia; and held chairs of Indian History, Culture and Archaeology. He is at present Director of the Institute of Asian Studies, Brisbane. He was the Honorary Consul of India in Queensland from 2003 to 2011.

(4) Panel moderator

Neil Davidson is a community activator, catalyst and keynote listener who listens deeply, empathizes, synthesizes, and reflects back to diverse groups: interfaith gatherings, organizations, not-for-profits, NGOs and rural communities in ways that reveal patterns, weave threads and lift those present by unlocking hidden/ignored potentials. Neil takes photographs, writes poetry, and sometimes finds himself seeing/channeling the multiple wisdoms present in ways that surprises him and transforms those present. His academic background was Marine Biology and Geology.

**ENTRY IS FREE,  
but please register on-line so the organisers can estimate numbers**

[Registration](#)

## Ethics And Morality

After observing an unresolved email conversation, Rachel Matthews wrote:

Morality, values, ethics. I fear even within our small group of SoFiAns, these words have subtle differences of meaning. We have talked on many occasions about how language changes all the time. I'm just thinking through how, perhaps, each of these three words changes slightly according to what meaning you give to the other two. We all agree [perhaps] on the broad meaning of each, but because they are closely related, each person draws the line between one and another at a different spot.

Something to watch out for at the One-day Conference

Robin Ford

## The year of Jubilee

The March-April *Bulletin* was my 40<sup>th</sup>. The crossword in that *Bulletin* was #40, and, checking, I confirmed that my first *Bulletin* contained Crossword #1. So, Greg and I both missed a chance to celebrate a sort of Ruby Jubilee.

The Jubilee, according to Wikipedia (edited extract below), comes from the magical number seven.

The Jubilee ... year (every 50th year) and the Sabbatical year (every seventh year) are Biblical commandments concerning ownership of land and slaves. ... every seventh year farmers in the land of Israel are ... to let their land lie fallow. The ... Jubilee is the fiftieth year, that is, the year after seven Sabbatical cycles.



### EDITORIAL

My thanks to Peter Robinson and the Gold Coast team who organised a very well-run conference at the end of August. The programme was full and varied and the venue was excellent – with the qualification that though god may be a mystery, his mysteriousness is no match for that of the lifts at Twin Towns. The attendance (115 registrants in total) was far in excess of any previous conference.

Even the SoFIA AGM was an improvement. First we managed to secure some new blood for the Management Committee. We welcome Lyndell Whitehouse and Robin and Lyndell Ford. Second, we had a lengthy and helpful discussion about the bulletin. In the end we were able to agree on a plan which I am hopeful will secure its future.

Representative from groups agreed that for 2013 we should aim at producing six editions of the Bulletin and that the content of each edition will be the responsibility of groups as follows:

Jan/Feb	Toowoomba/Chinchilla
Mar/Apr	Gold Coast
May/June	Bayside
Jul/Aug	Melbourne
Sep/Oct	Brookfield
Nov/Dec	Sunshine Coast

Final editing will continue, for the time being, to be done by me though once the process is running smoothly I will hand over to a real editor. The tasks of formatting and layout have now passed from John Carr to Robin Ford. Distribution will continue to be done by myself and Cordelia. However groups are encouraged to take the process as far as they wish themselves particularly if they plan the have a theme to their edition. They should feel free to be innovative.

If individuals still wish to make personal contributions they will still be welcome. Please send these to the current temporary editor ie me.

I am only part way through the analysis of the survey but so far 50 of the 60 respondents regard the bulletin as 4 or 5 out of 5 on the value scale and most want it to continue at its present length and frequency. The items most valued are book reviews, personal stories and responses to previous bulletin items. Short items are particularly popular. A full report on the survey will appear in the November/December edition.

Peter Bore

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<b>From the conference</b>	<b>Points of view</b>	<b>Other items</b>
Opening address—Peter Robinson	Bob Spearitt	Announcement
Reflection—Jan White	Ralph Seadgley	Crossword puzzle
Review of opening presentation—Nancy Duncan	<b>Homily</b>	
Edited version of presentation—Peter Kirkwood	Terry Fitzpatrick	
Meditation—Jan White		

## SOFIA Crossword #1



Regular Items

## Science & Religion

*The intersect between religion and science seems to be one of perpetual interest. In this column, Greg Spearritt draws attention to recent scientific research that may have implications for our understanding of religion, or for religious belief and practice.*

### How do we make moral decisions?

Many of us, apparently, use different moral principles in different situations. Sometimes we're acting on feelings of guilt, sometimes on the principle of fairness. The authors of a recent study put it this way:

with moral behavior, people may not in fact always stick to the golden rule. While most people tend to exhibit some concern for others, others may demonstrate what we have called 'moral opportunism,' where they still want to look moral but want to maximize their own benefit.

Our results demonstrate that people may use different moral principles to make their decisions, and that some people are much more flexible and will apply different principles depending on the situation. This may explain why people that we like and respect occasionally do things that we find morally objectionable.

Web reference:

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2019-04-moral-behavior-context.html>

### Crusading DNA

The DNA of nine 13th century Crusaders buried in a pit in Lebanon shows that there's more to learn about who the Crusaders were and their interactions with the populations they encountered. The remains suggest that the soldiers making up the Crusader armies were genetically diverse and intermixed with the local population in the Near East.

Web reference:

[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190418131410.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190418131410.htm)

### How superstitions spread

Superstitious beliefs may seem irrational, but they can nevertheless catch on in a society. Using an evolutionary approach, including game theory, biologists have showed how a jumble of individual beliefs, including superstitions, can coalesce into an accepted social norm.

Web reference:

[www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190418131334.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2019/04/190418131334.htm)



Report

***the sofia bulletin* And The Proposed Name Change**

*The name-change debate encouraged the Editor to reflect upon the purpose of SOFIA and the sofia bulletin*

**Questions around meaning**

These questions are my starting point:

- Is there meaning?
- What is truth?
- How should I live?

**Is there meaning?**

I believe that we can never find an answer to this question. I have come to that view as a matter of faith.

I get solace in exploring what we *can* say about it.

**What is truth?**

Each of us must find their own way to the truths we hold.

**How should I live?**

This is a big underlying question that I should keep actively in mind more than I do.

**Where can I explore these questions, and find guidance?**

There are so many ways of gaining wisdom. Over the years I have looked to traditions such as those listed in table 1 below.

Table 1 My sources

Family	Literature
Churches	Science
Religion	Radio National
sports communities	The arts in general
Philosophy	Politics
Sociology	Fine art
Informal conversation	The law

Others will have their own list. It might include those in table 2.

Table 2

service club	managerial strategies,
radio shock jocks	

**Pre-packaged or home-made?**

By “pre-packaged” I mean belonging to a group or ascribing to a tradition where others have done the thinking and I accept their conclusions as a matter of faith.

On the other hand if it is “home-made”, then I have constructed an apparently bespoke set of beliefs (I say “apparently” because somewhere along the line there will be precepts).

Each of us is likely to hold pre-packaged views in some areas and home-made in others.

For example, I might have my own views on what happens to me after I die, but I might take the views of the majority of climate scientists on matters of climate change.

**What does SOFIA offer me**

SOFIA offers a safe space in which to explore my three questions, and encourages me to keep working on “how should I live?”

Because my three questions on occasions will cover territory that religion has traditionally occupied, I am on the boundary of religions. But I don’t sign up to the package, so I need a space where I can investigate what they have to say without commitment. SOFIA provides this space.

**What about faith?**

As religions involve “faith”, I will be investigating matters of faith too.

So while religious faith is not (for me) a defining aspect of SOFIA, it is an unavoidable part of its activities, and I am glad that it is there.

I can see that ‘faith’ in our name could suggest that we are a religious organisation, and put off people who might benefit from SOFIA. So I am happy to go with SOFIA.

But I would expect *the sofia bulletin* to continue to have articles on various aspects of religion, written by people of any faith or none.

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.

20 June 2019

Dr Joe Sampson

([Humanist Society of Victoria](#))

*"A Critique of the Biblical God."*

18 July 2019

Steven Higson ([Agnostics Group](#))

*"How the Vikings found Jesus."*

15 August 2019

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

*"Tarot: Occult mumbo-jumbo, or tool for self-reflection?"*

19 September 2019

David Miller ([Existentialist Society](#))

*"Was Saint Paul influenced by Hellenized Zoroastrianism?"*

Postlude

## On the Folau Furore

John Carr

On 10 April this year, the Rugby player Israel Folau posted a tweet setting down some of his Christian beliefs in a kind of poster that appears to be based mainly on 1 Corinthians 6: 9-10.

This quickly became the subject of considerable discussion and dispute on radio, television, newspapers and social media. It is unlikely that it would have become such a major, divisive story if Folau were not a celebrity, one of the most famous footballers in the country.

In brief, the debate has generally been reduced to a binary opposition – freedom of speech and religion. versus breach of contract. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the actual details of the original post.

Supporters of Folau have usually been content to assert that he is entitled to proclaim his Biblically-based beliefs in public; opponents have focused on the harm his action might do to Rugby Union. Only occasionally have commentators expressed concern that the tweet and the ensuing debate will cause further pain to



members of the LGBTIQ community, and there are a number of other perspectives that have received almost no mention at all.

There is, for example, the oddity of the list of 'sinners'. There are several such lists in the epistles attributed to Paul and their items have been translated rather differently in the many

English translations from the King James Version onwards.

The term 'homosexual' was coined only in 1869 and, in Folau's mind, probably refers to male homosexuals alone, as it did in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century British laws and the subsequent laws imposed on the British colonies around the world. The great error in including it in a list of 'sinners' is that it presupposes that 'being homosexual' is a choice. Homosexuals, like the others on the list, will spend eternity in hell unless they 'repent' and thereby be 'saved' by Jesus.

We now know that sexual and gender identity are not a matter of choice. One cannot

repent of one's identity, whether driven by God or Nature. Literalist members of religions should know this, too. If they wish to attack the specific behaviour of some homosexual men and women (or heterosexual ones, for that matter), let them come out and do so, as the laws of many countries still do.

In defence of Paul, it also needs to be said that most English translations of 1 Corinthians 6 do not refer to Hell, but settle for something less brutally colourful. The King James Version, for example, warns sinners that they will 'not inherit the Kingdom of God'.

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## Epilogue

### **A Reflection on the 2019 expedition to Fraser Island**

John Carr

Dear all

Another great trip!

Thanks again to Greg and Glen for the perfect selection of time and place and the efficient planning;

Thanks to Greg, Glen, Barbara and Rodney for the safe, smooth chauffeuring, though it would have been more exciting for everyone if I had been driving;

Thanks to Barbara and Glen for the very welcome morning teas, especially the fruit cake;

Thanks to Robin, our court minstrel, for his wise, apposite verses, spoken and sung, ancient, modern and emerging;

Thanks to everyone for the continuous entertaining sound-track of SoF-type badinage and bulldust; and occasional profundity.

My security staff have alerted me to the fact that I have been accused of taking several nanny-naps during our postprandial discussions. This is fake news and I have ordered my legal staff to take appropriate action. It may be true that I rested my eyes once or twice, but so did OTHERS, whom I am quite prepared to 'out' if necessary.

Back to reality!

John



This dingo materialised as the Fraser Island party was standing on the beach beside their two four-wheel drive vehicles. One moment the dingo was there; the next moment it was gone. In between it padded to the water's edge. A spooky experience.

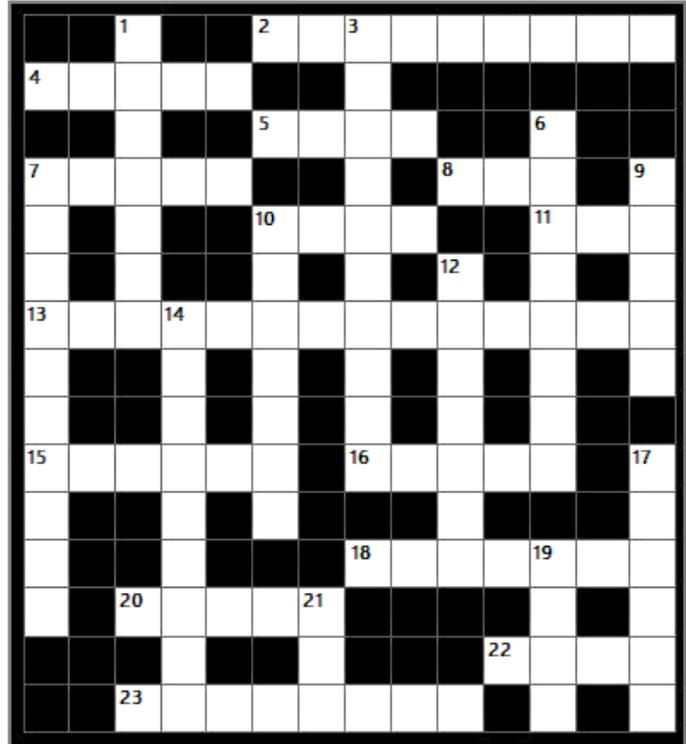
**SOFIA Crossword #40**



**Across**

- 2. Deprived of ecclesiastical status
- 4. Where to look for God
- 5. Australian ecclesiastical figure recently sentenced to prison for sexual abuse of minors
- 7. Church council
- 8. Don Cupitt's foremost analogy for religious faith
- 10. A material effigy that is worshipped
- 11. Bench for the faithful
- 13. Variety of Christian expression espoused by our current PM
- 15. Objects believed to bring good fortune
- 16. Beseches
- 18. Vessel for holy wine
- 20. Cards to be read
- 22. That which religion is claimed to do
- 23. Religion involving worship of the fallen angel

**SoFiA Crossword #41** Prepared by Greg Spearritt



**Down**

- 1. Australia's first clergyman
- 3. Term commonly used for Christians getting along
- 6. Rites signifying admission to the Christian Church
- 7. Entreat
- 9. Hindu religious teacher
- 10. An olfactory aide to a heavenly state of mind
- 12. Round of rebirth (Sanskrit)
- 14. Older and more conservative of the two major B traditions
- 17. Sets of tenets
- 19. Bird considered sacred in ancient Egypt
- 21. Number of the plagues of Egypt

**Editor's crib sheet**

When I check the crossword (a task I enjoy) I see how much I can do unaided, then I hit the web. *If you want to do it all by yourself, then read no further* but where the web alone is not enough you might find these oblique angles on Greg's clues helpful.

This time the internet gave up the clues more quickly. The two I found awkward were 16A and 7D – both to do with asking. When I got them, 16A

was obvious, but 7D I had never heard as a verb, although it makes sense when you think of the associated noun (a person).

## 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: **14 Richardson Street, Lane Cove NSW 2066**, 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** 3rd 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 (sofinau98@gmail.com)

### 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.....

## **Intentionally blank**

Continued/...

# SoFiA

## Sea of Faith in Australia Inc

### Notice of Annual General Meeting for the Financial Year 2018

**Saturday 15 June 2019**

**Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane: Lecture Theatre**

Written nominations by post need to be received by Wednesday 12 June 2019.

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, 15 June 2019.

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 15 June 2019, and at any adjournment of the meeting.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_