



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre  
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli  
(near Milsons Point Station)

Tel: **0466 940 461**

Website: [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org)

Editor: Jan Tendys

**Volume 13, Issue 3**

**April, 2017**

## Schedule of Services

Services are held every Sunday at 10:30 at Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre

**2 April,                      Rev. Geoff Usher,                      “What Other Church?”**

Unitarians are among the few who do not claim that they alone possess the truth about God / nature / the universe / life.

What unites Unitarians is the value they set on the freedom to explore religious issues, the freedom to follow the dictates of reason and conscience, the freedom from the real or perceived constraints of creeds and dogmatic formulas. At the same time, they generally have strongly held common values and principles.

***THIS WILL ALSO BE OUR AGM, PLEASE COME.***

**9 April,                      No meeting.**

**16 April,                      No meeting.**

**23 April,                      Jan Tendys,                      “The Sensible Centre—Is that Us?”**

In ancient Greek philosophy, the “golden mean” is the desirable middle between two extremes, one of excess and the other of deficiency.

Can we apply this to some modern conundrums?

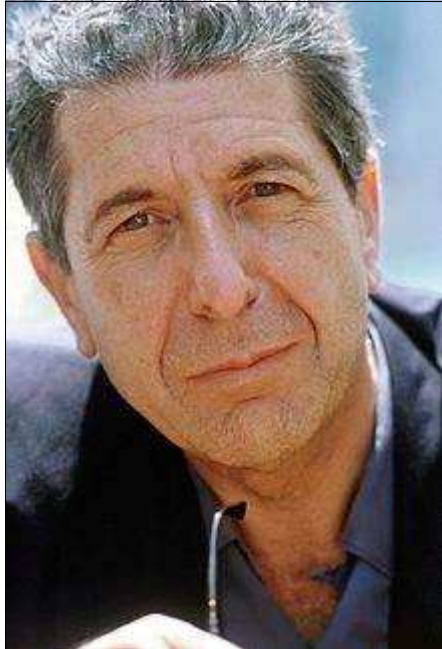
**30 April,                      Martin Horlacher,                      “Control-Alt-right”**

The so-called “alternative right” have risen to prominence lately, especially in the United States. But is this new form of ultra conservative nationalism to be taken seriously? Indeed, is it even “new”? And just what kind of influence is it having on political thought both American and international?

## Who was Leonard Cohen?

We recently had a most enjoyable service arranged by Caz Donnelly and Barbara O'Brien and featuring Eric Stephenson, in which we were treated to all things Leonard Cohen, and were able to reflect on the words and music of his "Dance me to the end of Love", "Like a Bird on a Wire", "Suzanne", "If it be thy will", "Anthem" and "Everybody Knows".

Photo: Jews for Jesus.



Caz gave a short biography of this multi-talented person:

Born September 1934 into a middle class Jewish family in Montreal, Canada, he was a musician, singer, songwriter, poet, novelist and painter. His works commented on and explored religion, politics, philosophy, social justice and personal relationships, often in cryptic, symbolic and metaphoric interpretation.

Educated at McGill University, he studied English, however, disappointed with his lack of financial success as a writer, he moved to the US to pursue a folk singing, and song-writing career. In the 1960s, many singers included his songs in their repertoires: Judy Collins, Joni Mitchell, Joan Baez, latterly Jennifer Warnes, Jeff Buckley and KD Lang to name a few.

By the end of the 90s, Cohen discovered that his manager and now former friend had embezzled most of his finances, leaving him almost penniless. He then reinvented himself and embarked on a series of world tours from 2003 to 2010, taking in London, Europe, New Zealand and Australia, receiving rapturous re-

ceptions and many standing ovations. Many of the audiences said that "his concerts were like attending a religious experience."

Cohen observed Jewish faith all his life, and this was reflected in some of his music and lyrics which included Old Testament quotes. He also became very interested and involved with Buddhism, and was ordained as a Zen Buddhist monk in 1996. As well, he showed a genuine interest in Jesus Christ saying:

"He may be the most beautiful guy who walked the face of this earth. Any guy who says 'Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the meek' has got to be a figure of unparalleled generosity and insight and madness...A man who declared himself to stand among the thieves, the prostitutes and the homeless. His position cannot be comprehended. It is an inhuman generosity. A generosity that would overthrow the world if it was embraced because nothing would weather that compassion." (source: Jews for Jesus. <http://ph.thenet24h.com/197987/some-jewish-views-jesus-jews-jesus.html>)  
.. Powerful words.

He died at age 82 in November 2016, leaving 2 children and 3 grandchildren.

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Dance me to your beauty with a burning violin  
Dance me through the panic till I'm gathered safely in  
Lift me like an olive branch and be my home-ward dove

Dance me to the end of love  
Dance me to the end of love

## HALLELUJAH!

*Rev. Eric Stevenson*

It was the choir singing the chorus at a wedding ceremony in 1997 that I first put contemporary meaning into Leonard Cohn's favourite song. Because I was taught the meaning of the word Hallelujah at Bible College, I understood that it was a kind of glorified "hooray". But the choir members didn't have a clue about the etymology; they (and the wedding guests) just enjoyed the melody.

**But if Leonard understood its literal meaning, what was he hooraying about?**

To try and find out, I go to the lyrics of the first two popular verses which are most likely his. They make reference to a blend of his Jewish acquaintance with the stories in the Scriptures. ...The shepherd boy harpist playing for the depressive King Saul, David's affair with Bathsheba, and Delilah's seduction of Samson. The genius in the words is that although Leonard gets these familiar Old Testament bible stories confused, the song still carries a powerful message.

In verse one, some commentators think he begins by addressing God. No, I think he is addressing the King Saul inside of all of us. David the shepherd boy played "cunningly" (I Samuel, 16, 16) and it pleased "the baffled Lord, (King Saul) composing Hallelujah". Our baffled King Sauls in this generation, to whom Leonard sings with healing power, are many and varied. Our King Sauls, like the real one, can be given to bouts of deep depression. Despite having attained positions of self sufficiency and comfort and independence and comparative affluence, they no longer find personal fulfilment in life. Saul, the king of Israel had acceded to a throne, and achieved a kingdom but lost his sense of achievement. The Spirit of the Lord had departed from him and an evil spirit troubled him (v 14-15). **So Leonard's music assumes a spiritual role, driving out our demons and teaching us to sing Hallelujah in praise of the life-energy which motivates us and which is responsible for the bad as well as the good.** In 1985 at the time of composing Hallelujah he said that it was his desire to affirm his faith in life. And

he does so without the trappings of doctrine and dogma, as he said, "not in some formal religious way, but with enthusiasm, with emotion".

And he is not alone. Many others in the classical and pop music scene have been using music to lift their spirits and ours. Franz Schubert in his Ode to Music sings, "Noble art, how often in dark hours, when the savage ring of life tightens round me, have you kindled warm love in my heart, have transported me to a better world. **Often a sigh has escaped from your harp**, a sweet sacred harmony of yours, has opened up the heavens to better times for me. O blesses art, (Music) I thank you for that!" Note Schubert's reference no doubt to our Bible story.

In verse two Leonard is now talking firstly to another King inside of us, the new King David. He moves from responding to our endogenous moods to coping with our failures and our disasters.... our secret sins, even our evil thoughts, our suppressed guilt, and our haunting sense of imperfection. He starts with a full confrontation of our natural sexual desires and criminally selfish passions. The original King David used and abused his power in order to satisfy his lust for the woman bathing on the roof. He got her husband killed by putting him in the front line of battle! How could he with integrity continue to reign in shame as the divinely chosen leader of God's people? And even harder, how could he cope with his self condemnation or face public ridicule for being such an idiot, seduced not by an innocent naked body but by the greedy desires and lascivious thoughts of his own mind?

Secondly, in verse two Leonard addresses the Samson inside of us. He is referring to the Samson of his Jewish scriptures who made the mistake of rushing into a foolish relationship. He is like the immature teenager whom we learned about in the news last week, who shared her private life on the

on the internet with her murderer. Our Samsons lack the wisdom to share their confidences appropriately. This Samson shared his private life with a deceitful and manipulative Delilah. She betrayed his deepest secret, exhausted the source of his energy and robbed him of his dignity. "She tied you to her kitchen chair, she broke your throne and cut your hair."

Thus in one brilliant literary stroke, Leonard plunges us from reigning on our thrones to being tied to a kitchen chair by our own stupidity and naiveté! In his commentary he says that we humans are "irresistibly attracted to each other, and irresistibly lonely for each other". And to this we could add, "irresistibly in search of sharing our inner self with another understanding and accepting human being." But as both victims and beneficiaries of such a wondrous set of emotions and desires, we have no alternative but to learn to cope with them. In teaching us to do so and to, (as Leonard has written) "embrace it all", his lyrics take us from our highs to the pits. And from those humiliating places he inspires us to rise up and sing, "Hallelujah!"

Well I heard there was a sacred chord  
That David played and it pleased the Lord;  
But you don't really care for music do you?  
Well it goes like this: the for fourth, the fifth,  
The minor fall and the major lift,  
The baffled king composing Hallelujah!  
Your faith was strong but you needed proof,  
You saw her bathing on the roof,  
Her beauty and the moonlight overthrew you.  
She tied you to her kitchen chair,  
She broke your throne and cut your hair;  
And from your lips she drew the Hallelujah!

## CLOSING WORDS

We go out from this place with gratitude for every vocalist and every musician who has helped to lift our depression, calm our spirit, enthuse our endeavours, strengthen our resolve and affirm us with joy and a sense of fulfilment. We salute the lyricists, and composers to whose artistry we have been privileged to listen, and gifted to appreciate. As we go back into life, with all its ups and downs and all our strengths and failings, may we keep learning to sing the Hallelujah, again and again and again. "Hallelujah!"

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**Lyrics.** Cohen wrote many drafts of this song before his original recording of it. Not only do the lyrics vary in different versions by Cohen himself, but other artists have varied the words too. Cohen was content with that, saying that "many different Hallejujahs exist."

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### The Cherry Blossom Wand

I Will pluck from my tree a cherry-blossom  
wand,  
And carry it in my merciless hand,  
So I will drive you, so bewitch your eyes,  
With a beautiful thing that can never grow  
wise.

Light are the petals that fall from the bough,  
And lighter the love that I offer you now;  
In a spring day shall the tale be told  
Of the beautiful things that will never grow  
old.

The blossoms shall fall in the night wind,  
And I will leave you so, to be kind:  
Eternal in beauty, are short-lived flowers,  
Eternal in beauty, these exquisite hours.

I will pluck from my tree a cherry-blossom  
wand,  
And carry it in my merciless hand,  
So I will drive you, so bewitch your eyes,  
With a beautiful thing that shall never grow  
wise.

Anna Wickham

## Reality

Only a starveling singer seeks  
The stuff of songs among the Greeks.  
Juno is old,  
Jove's loves are cold;  
Tales over-told.  
By a new risen Attic stream  
A mortal singer dreamed a dream.  
Fixed he not Fancy's habitation,  
Nor set in bonds Imagination.  
There are new waters, and a new Humanity.  
For all old myths give us the dream to  
be.  
We are outwearied with Persephone;  
Rather than her, we'll sing Reality.

Anna Wickham

## Divorce

A voice from the dark is calling me.  
In the close house I nurse a fire.  
Out in the dark, cold winds rush free,  
To the rock heights of my desire.  
I smother in the house in the valley below,  
Let me out to the night, let me go, let me go.  
Spirits that ride the sweeping blast,  
Frozen in rigid tenderness,  
Wait! for I leave the fire at last

My little-love's warm loneliness.  
I smother in the house in the valley below.  
Let me out to the night, let me go, let me go.  
High on the hills are beating drums.  
Clear from a line of marching men  
To the rock's edge the hero comes  
He calls me, and he calls again.  
On the hill there is fighting, victory, or quick  
death.  
In the house is the fire, which I fan with sick  
breath.  
I smother in the house in the valley below,  
Let me out to the dark, let me go, let me go.

Anna Wickham

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**Anna Wickham**, the pen name of Edith Alice Mary Harper, was born in 1883. Her childhood was marked by disruption and displacement, including two separate moves to Australia with her unconventional parents. She attended school in Australia and returned to England to study voice, though her marriage to Patrick Hepburn ended her career as a performer. She had four sons with Hepburn and began writing poetry in earnest during her marriage. Her first book, Songs, was published privately under the pen name John Oland around 1911. Around this time, she was committed to a mental asylum. However, the experience confirmed her devotion to poetry. Poetry collections published during her lifetime include The Contemplative Quarry (1915), The Man with a Hammer (1916), The Little Old House (1921), and Thirty-Six Poems (1926). Wickham's lyrical, acerbic, and frankly feminist poetry attracted the attention of Louis Untermeyer, who republished her work in the United States to enormous popularity.

Wickham lived on the Left Bank of Paris after the death of her son in 1922. She was notorious for her ties to many of Modernism's leading figures, including D.H. Lawrence, David Garnett, John Gawsworth, and Natalie Clifford Barney. It is rumored she once threw Dylan Thomas out of her house during a snowstorm. Wickham and her husband separated in 1926 but reunited right before he died in 1929. During the 1930s, Wickham continued to host literary gatherings at her home in London, befriending writers such as Malcolm Lowry. She committed suicide in 1947. Incredibly prolific in her lifetime, she left behind thousands of unpublished poems.

From *Poetry Foundation*  
<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poets/detail/anna-wickham>

This is the poem Anna shouted at her husband, not long before she was committed..

### **Nervous Prostration**

I married a man of the Croydon class  
When I was twenty-two.  
And I vex him, and he bores me  
Till we don't know what to do!  
It isn't good form in the Croydon class  
To say you love your wife,  
So I spend my days with the tradesmen's  
books  
And pray for the end of life.  
In green fields are blossoming trees  
And a golden wealth of gorse,  
And young birds sing for joy of worms:  
It's perfectly clear, of course,  
That it wouldn't be taste in the Croydon class  
To sing over dinner or tea:

But I sometimes wish the gentleman  
Would turn and talk to me  
But every man of the Croydon class  
Lives in terror of joy and speech  
"Words are betrayers", "Joys are brief"  
The maxims their wise ones teach.  
And for all my labour of love and life  
I shall be clothed and fed,  
And they'll give me an orderly funeral  
When I'm still enough to be dead.  
I married a man of the Croydon class  
When I was twenty-two.  
And I vex him, and he bores me  
Till we don't know what to do!  
And as I sit in his ordered house,  
I feel I must sob or shriek,  
To force a man of the Croydon class  
To live, or to love, or to speak!

On reading this, the hospital doctor encouraged her to keep writing.

Lest the impression be given that her husband was a monster and the cause of her psychotic episode, it needs to be said that she may well have been suffering from post natal depression. Theirs was an off-again, on-again love that survived (more or less) his being the most conventional of men and she being so unconventional. **JT**  
*Treat yourself to more to stories of this extraordinary and tragic woman*

<http://neglectedbooks.com/?p=4562>

## Reformation — Right and Wrong ???

*John Bunyan*

The 500th anniversary Reformation commemoration I hope will not be one-sided. We can rejoice in true reforms with benefits then and more benefits for us all in the long term. However, we should not forget the tragic consequences of the divisions.

I think of the destruction of much beauty and the loss of monastic social services in England and elsewhere, the loss of much genuine spirituality, and the seeds of secularisation. Far worse, was mutual persecution and intolerance, the burning of witches especially in Calvinist territories, the massacre of Protestants in France, and religious elements added to wars in Europe and in Britain.

I think of Sir Thomas More helping to hunt down Tyndale, and of the Marian Martyrs, but also of Margaret Clitheroe judicially crushed to death (horrifying Queen Elizabeth herself), of the burning of Servetus welcomed by Calvin and other leading Reformers, of simple Unitarian Bible Christians whom Cranmer, Coverdale and Ridley in court sentenced to death by burning, of young Quaker Mary Dyer hanged in Boston by the Puritans, of Edward Wightman, a Baptist burnt to death for heresy in England as late as 1612.

And, worst of all, I think of Luther's appalling verbal attacks upon the Jews that sowed more seeds of dreadful anti Judaism, bearing evil fruit under the Nazis who happily quoted him. Archdeacon T.C. Hammond wrote of this long ago but Thomas Kaufmann's recent scholarly, balanced, meticulous study, Luther's Jews: The Journey into Anti-Semitism leaves Luther condemned. I should observe not Luther's action at Wittenberg on October 31st, 1517, but instead October 28th, fifty years earlier, the date of the birth of Erasmus, eirenic \* Roman Catholic priest and reformer. One could add the 18th October, when John Hus (opponent of indulgences long before Luther, later martyred) in 1412 affirmed Jesus as our supreme Judge. Certainly any commemoration of the Refor-

mation should not be without honest regret and shame — and some reconciliation, I hope, between Christians but also between Christians and our Lord's own people who have suffered so terribly at Christian hands before and during and since the Reformation.

JOHN REYNOLDS BUNYAN, is a deacon and priest of the Diocese of Sydney, a parishioner of St. John the Baptist's, Canberra, an adherent of St Stephen's Uniting Church, Sydney, and a member of the historic Unitarian Christian church, King's Chapel, Boston, USA. He has served in Australia and England. In retirement, he is Honorary C. of E. Chaplain at Bankstown Hospital, and Honorary Chaplain of the Macarthur-Ingleburn National Servicemen's Association and of the Australian Intelligence Corps Association.

\* adjective: eirenic : aiming or aimed at peace. noun

noun: eirenic : a part of Christian theology concerned with reconciling different denominations and sects.

*The above was published in "arcvoice" produced by the Australian Reforming Catholics and contributed by Eric Stevenson.*

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## Secularisation

Unlike John Bunyan above, I am glad Australia is a largely secular society precisely because **uncontested** religion is so apt to engage in torture and horrible ways of putting people to death.

No one can deny the crimes of the secular USSR and even today's China. (They have done their share of good too). Some Fascist states were secular, some religious. The important thing is that the power of these dictatorships was contested. Religion & secular belief were both part of that.

It comes back, I believe, to the superiority of the pluralist society—which requires a citizenry which appreciates that fact.

*Jan Tendys.*

## Unitarian Universalist Humour

Q: Why did the UU cross the road?

A: To support the chicken in its search for its own path.

Thomas Starr King is credited with describing the difference between Universalists and Unitarians: "Universalists believe that God is too good to damn men; Unitarians believe that man is too good to be damned."

UU bumper stickers:

• "Honk If You're Not Sure" • "The Answer Is To Question"

A group of children at a Unitarian Universalist church school were trying to determine the sex of a rabbit. "There's only one way to decide," said one child, "let's take a vote on it."

A traveller couldn't find the local Unitarian Universalist church. After looking in the centre of town, in the suburbs, and out in the surrounding countryside. the traveller asked a farmer "Am I too far out for the UU church?" The farmer's reply: "Nobody is too far out for them."

A Unitarian is just a Quaker with Attention Deficit Disorder.

Fellow goes to a UU service for the first time, and later is asked what he thought of it. "Darndest church I ever went to," he replies, "the only time I heard the name of Jesus Christ was when the janitor fell down the stairs."

How can you tell a Unitarian Universalist? You can't; they already know it all.

Now I'll tell you a real story that happened in our Sunday school. The Kindergarten class was discussing "prayer", and the children seemed aware that the way you end a prayer was with "amen." Does anyone know what "amen" means, the teacher asked. There was a long silence. Then one little boy piped up, with appropriate, computer-age gestures, and said, "Well, I think it means, like, "send".

Christine Robinson  
Albuquerque, New Mexico

### Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship?

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter.** Full membership \$50 concession \$20 . If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website [www.sydneynunitarians.org](http://www.sydneynunitarians.org) . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or for an application form at the Sunday service.

***If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit.***

It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: [jtendys@yahoo.com.au](mailto:jtendys@yahoo.com.au) or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

***Do you have a topic of a spiritual / ethical nature that you would like to share with the congregation?*** As Unitarians, we support an "Open Pulpit" and invite members of the congregation to lead the service if they so wish. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*