



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 11 Issue 11

December,

## Schedule of Services

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

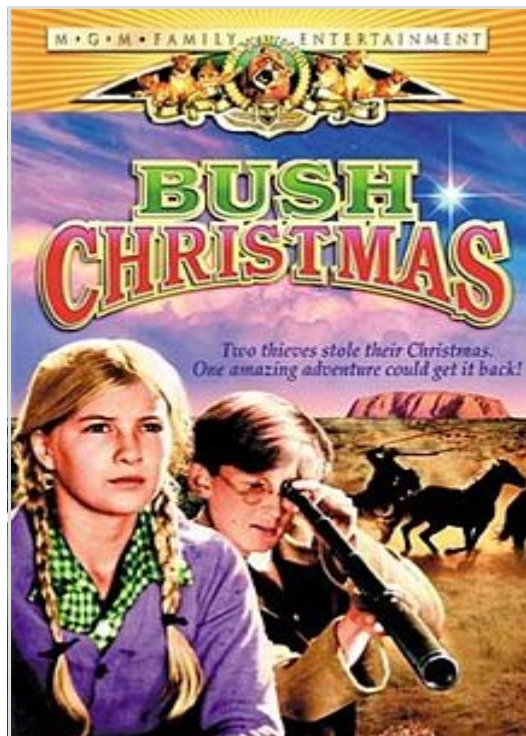
**6 December, Martin Horlacher, "Reason"**

The capacity to consciously make sense of this thing we call real life is perhaps the single most important thing that makes us all human. But reason constantly finds itself under attack from those who argue that only religion can offer us a better way forward. Which is right...and who, ultimately, will win? (This talk was cancelled in November).

**13 December** *PARTY!* We hope each of you will present a reading, poem, musical item or whatever you wish by way of contributing to the festivity of the season.

~~~~~  
**We will return after the break on 24 January. Rev. Geoff Usher will lead the service.**  
~~~~~

**"Bush Christmas", the not-to-be-missed Australian film of 1947.**



## A Varied Readership

***This journal, Esprit, has a readership which is wider than our congregation. Many readers have come to us via the website and quite a few are not Unitarians or Unitarian Universalists.***

***One of the latter is Rev. Sue Emeleus. She describes herself: "I am retired Anglican deacon. Taught science for 30 years in Sydney, Tanzania and PNG, Chaplain at the Children's Hospital at Westmead for 5 years. Sometimes go to Eric's CPRT group.\* Secretary of Women's Interfaith network in Sydney. On editorial panel for Eremos Institute. Married with four married children and ten grandchildren." (ie The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought with which Rev. Eric Stevenson is involved).***

***Sue has kindly responded to your editor's call for contributions for Esprit with two items reprinted here.***

**Sue's review of Val Webb's 2008 book: Like Catching Water in a Net: Human Attempts to Describe the Divine.**

Any discussion of the Unknowable is metaphorical and thus tentative, humanly imagined, limited and open-ended; and "truth" comes in many shapes and sizes, depending on where you stand. It is unhelpful to narrow God-talk to a few images, many of which are not necessarily the major images in the sacred texts. This book explores a plethora of Divine metaphors, asking where they came from and why; evaluates whether they still hold water or leak like sieves; and ponders where and how to go from here. It begins with the human inclination to ask about Something More; talks of the metaphorical nature of God-talk; and explores Divine images from saying nothing; describing what the Divine is not; whether the Divine is at all; Divine formlessness; images from nature; divine attributes; anthropomorphic images and the problem of such metaphors becoming reality, especially male ruler images. Metaphors across religions are included, not as a comprehensive inter-religious discussion but to demonstrate the common human search. The book examines the nature and authority of the Bible

and the claim that the Jewish Jesus was / became God, with consequences for all subsequent God-talk and religious truth claims. Contemporary challenges from science and inter-religious dialogue lead to new images which may or may not satisfy God-seekers. Rather than an apologetic for or against the Divine, the book invites readers to observe, think and ask, responding to one's own questions and experience in order to decide whether or not a Divine shape fits in one's world view.

~~~~~

## How Inter-Faith Dialogue happens in the Women's Inter-Faith Network (WIN) in Sydney.

(A panel contribution by Rev Sue Emeleus at the Asia Pacific Interfaith Forum on Women, Faith and a Culture of Peace, at Griffith University, February, 2008)

### Introduction.

In August 1999 the Catholic Bishops in Sydney organised an interfaith conference. A Muslim woman looked around the room at the end of the conference and said "Wouldn't it be good if we met regularly". A Jewish delegate, Josie Lacey, took up the challenge and requested that regular meetings be held in Polding House where Sr Trish Madigan, another delegate, had her office. The first meeting was held in October 1999. The Movement was officially launched at Parliament House in March 2001, with Dr Rachel Kohn the keynote speaker.

The group set about writing a Constitution which you can find on WIN's website <http://www.fecca.org.au/Interfaith/index.html> Very early in their meetings together, Rev Helen Richmond set out some principles in an address she gave.

Whether we are first, second, third or fourth generation migrants to this land we are all relative new comers in comparison to the Indigenous people who have been here for 40,000 years or more. We begin by acknowledging indigenous custodians of place where we meet. "Let us pause to give thanks for those who cared for this land since time immemorial and ask the Creator for wisdom to learn another way of relating to each other in

this land.”

Max Warren, an early Christian voice for interfaith dialogue said: when we approach people of another culture or faith we should first take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy ground.

We live in critical times when the relationships between our faiths have been threatened by violence.

(Speaking about her Christian tradition) Much of what we inherited from our history and tradition is not only wrong but is dangerous. We need to critique our tradition to see if it is liberating good news.

One important way we can work towards peace is to build relationships between people so we begin to truly see, hear and know each other. It is a humanising endeavour. It involves learning to trust one another, letting the “other” who is different, whom we have learnt to fear or despise, or, at best, just tolerate, be embraced as a fellow human being...We need to take seriously our differences, but also to see beyond our differences to our common humanity; to celebrate the variety of God’s creation.

### **How our Sydney WIN group Works**

At present we meet in Parliament House for two hours, on the fourth Thursday morning of each month.

WIN members come as individuals, representing their Faith, but not representing an organisation. We receive funding from no other group, and are not part of any other organisation. Other organisations that do not engage in dialogue have invited us to join them, but so far we have resisted. We have, however, accepted the hospitality of FECCA for the purpose of setting up our web page.

We have tried different denominational venues, but all feel more at ease in a venue that does not belong to any of us. It required having a sympathetic member of the Parliament House staff. Other groups have found local councils to be receptive of the idea.

Membership is limited to two members from each faith group, or sub group, ensuring that all are represented and heard, and that no single Faith dominates. Others may come as observers, with the agreement of all members (we communicate regularly by email), but it is hoped that after observing the

way we work, such observers will be encouraged to set up their own WIN group. On a number of occasions we have had journalists as observers.

Our Constitution requires a convenor to stand down after two years, but a convenor may return later for another two year stint. Convenor and secretary are elected annually at the AGM meeting. We do have a treasurer, but there has been little cost involved in any of our activities.

We begin with a short period of silence, introduced by one of our members (usually our Hindu member, Mataji, who has been with the group since the beginning.) I feel during those “minutes of silence” that there is a Presence palpably with us.

The first hour of each meeting is usually taken up with reports of activities that members have attended, and descriptions of future activities to which members are invited. A highlight has been attending celebrations of each faith, or special inter-faith gatherings.

The second hour is vital. Each topic is addressed by a different member in turn. It took my first two years to finish hearing about the spiritual journey of the person speaking. There is no confrontation or debate, but deep listening and open ended questions which allow the presenter to give more of herself and her understanding of her own faith. At first we had two speakers in the second part of the morning, but as our confidence in each other deepened, we realised each speaker needed at least an hour.

We took another year to hear what each member’s understanding of Prayer was from her Faith’s perspective. Death and Dying took a similar time, and we recently finished many months’ exploration of Mysticism. As long standing members have begun to leave and new members replace them, we sometimes return to earlier topics.

On occasions we have organised larger multicultural events. The one at Government House in 2005 (our Governor Marie Bashir is most sympathetic, and an MP was chair for that day) resulted in the formation of a number of new WIN groups. At that function, each faith group performed an item of singing or dancing or something characteristic of that faith. People went to a huge amount of trouble to prepare and present

the most delightful array of items.

The photo of a large group of those inter-faith members at Government House is an indication of the closeness of the women who come.

Sub groups of members have also worked together to present forums or panels in such places as high schools who wish to add something to their religious studies programme. Students are invited to submit questions which any panel member may address from her faith's perspective.

### **My own participation.**

Inter-faith dialogue is not something I heard about in my own Anglican Church in Sydney. When I took a break from Anglicanism one Sunday, I visited a Quaker meeting in Wahroonga. In discussion at morning tea, one of the Quaker friends asked if I would like to join the Sydney WIN group as they did not yet have an Anglican. In my six years there I have formed deep friendships, and learnt a great deal about my own faith as I have had to think through many issues. Of course I have also come to understand and appreciate much about other faiths as well.

When I preached my first sermon in the church where I now work on Sundays, a number of my friends from WIN came and added a blessing in the liturgy. My church at Paddington is wonderfully inclusive in their attitudes to others. But it is not typical of Sydney Anglicanism.

### **The Importance of Dialogue.**

a) First, some quotes from Laurence Freeman (Director of World Community of Christian Meditation).

Faith can only deepen and mature in dialogue, and through the attempts to share it. Fear of dialogue is the virus that breeds intolerance, and ultimately unleashes verbal or physical violence against those different from us.

(After a pilgrimage with others of different faiths) Our pilgrimage gave us that taste of the first fruits of that new friendship between religions which must be the defining characteristic of this new millennium.

No text is sacred if used to abuse, violate, or trivialise humans and other earth crea-

tures.

b) Leonard Swindler's ground Rules for Inter-religious dialogue.

The primary purpose of dialogue is to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality and then to act accordingly.

It is necessary that each participant enter into dialogue across the faith line, but also with one's co-religionists. (I have found this latter group to be much harder to dialogue with than my inter-faith group).

Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.

Each partner must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in other partners. No trust: no dialogue.

Each partner must define herself. Only the Christian can define from the inside what it means to be a Christian. But as I learn, I will change and hence continually deepen, expand and modify my self definition as a Christian, being careful to remain in constant dialogue with other Christians.

### **Summary so far.**

Dialogue is the defining characteristic of WIN.

Multicultural events are not dialogue, although they may include some.

Groups with a disproportionate number of any one group do not encourage honest dialogue.

Dialogue as described here is a long, fairly slow process. In eight years we have not seen more than one new group per year, on average. But the members of these groups are also members of countless other groups, so the fruit of our dialogue may be hard to measure just yet.

Our friendships have deepened, we care about each other's families, we attend each other's celebrations and family events. And each of our own faiths has deepened.

We are always interested to hear about other groups, and how they work.

***(The above has been edited only to remove references to slides. JT)***

***Your editor asked Sue whether the original group still worked in much the same***

**way and whether there are offshoot groups, noting the website doesn't show much of 2015 activities. She replied:**

**Yes, the Sydney WIN group works in the same way, and there are now other groups, a younger women's group in Sydney, and one in Hurstville and Wollongong. Because the groups deliberately try to have a similar number of each faith group, it is often hard to set them up because there are many Christians willing to join such a group, but not much opportunity to find a range of participants. We have had quite a few visitors to our meetings in Parliament House, but only one of those, the Hurstville group, resulted from such a visit. The website doesn't have a WIN member able to post items on it, and I don't even know how and when they receive items for posting on it.**

**If any of your readers would like to visit our group, we would welcome them, in the hope that they might know some people who might be willing to meet regularly to dialogue. It's a very slow process. Blessings, Sue**

~~~~~  
**Sharing the Christmas spirit is a true celebration of diversity**

**OPINION**  
**By Randa Abdel-Fattah**  
**Updated 24 Dec 2012**

Religious festivals are an important way to experience the diversity of our multicultural community and to transform that experience from a take-away dinner of ethnic cuisine to something dignified, mutually respectful and worthwhile, writes Randa Abdel-Fattah.

In a multicultural, diverse society there are countless ways in which people negotiate the everyday lived experience and reality of diversity.

Sociologists such as Amanda Wise and Selvaraj Velayutham describe this 'everyday multiculturalism' perspective as a way to explore how people experience and negotiate cultural difference on the ground in everyday situa-

tions.

We are, at almost every point of our day, immersed in cultural diversity: faces, clothes, smells, attitudes, values, traditions, behaviours, beliefs, rituals.

For me, religious festivals and celebrations have become an important way to teach my children about how we can transform living with diversity from the superficial 'I eat ethnic food', to something dignified, mutually respectful and worthwhile.

.....

And so, just as my daughter several months ago shared with her classmates an account of what Eid means to her, including giving gifts to her peers, we are now at the end of the year and receiving Christmas cards from her classmates.

It is important to me that my daughter also gives her classmates Christmas cards, despite the fact we do not celebrate Christmas.

But it seems to me that mutual respect and recognition are at the heart of living with diversity. It is a way of me showing my daughter that she gives up nothing of her faith and identity by respecting and honouring the faith and identity of others. I never want her to feel that her identity is negatively defined by what it is not - an ugly line of discourse that plagues political debates on Australian identity and multiculturalism.

.....

Maybe then our children will learn that like good manners, respectfully living with difference is something you need to learn how to do. And the joy of giving that surrounds all the festivals of the world's faiths seems to me to be a wonderful starting point.

Randa Abdel-Fattah is a lawyer, human rights activist and award-winning author.

***This extract comes from "The Drum" , ABC. Note the date. I sincerely hope this mother is as optimistic today. The whole item is worth reading. JT*** <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2012-12-24/abdel-fattah-multicultural-christmas/4439612>

## Tim Flannery: Atmosphere of Hope: Searching for solutions to the climate crisis

### **Extracts from Matt Wade's review in SMH**

..... Flannery warns the challenge is "now gargantuan" and that deep, rapid cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are urgently required. "We need new tools because we've now been emitting carbon pollution at a worst-case scenario rate for a decade," he said. "There is great inertia in the system that will carry us into increasingly dangerous climate territory."

Flannery predicts addressing climate change will "define the lives of generations". Even so, he is buoyed by a clutch of innovative technologies and strategies he labels a "third way" to address climate change. "The reason I have that hopeful perspective is because I researched these new third way technologies and realised they really do have the potential to pull us back from the brink," Flannery said. "I think a lot of people will be surprised by that and I hope it energises people."

Flannery labels them a "third way" because they are distinct from the two other well-known strategies to combat climate change – emission reduction and geoengineering schemes to interfere in the climate system. The most concrete and well-costed geoengineering proposal is for sulphur to be injected into the earth's stratosphere to reflect sunlight back into space, allowing the planet's surface to cool. The oceans have also been proposed as a venue for large-scale interventions to combat global warming. One suggestion is to add iron to the oceans to stimulate biological growth that absorbs CO<sub>2</sub> from the air and eventually sinks to the seabed. But these geoengineering options are untested, and could have dangerous side effects. Flannery says they are tantamount to "using poison to fight a poison".

Flannery says the third way alternatives he has identified are very different from radical geoengineering proposals because they "recreate, enhance or restore" the processes that created a balance of greenhouse gasses prior to human interference. "They do not seek to fight one poison [excess carbon] with an-

other [for example sulphur]," he writes. "Instead they look to restore or learn from processes that are as old as life itself. The third way is in large part about creating our future out of thin air." This encompasses proposals and experiments that mostly draw CO<sub>2</sub> out of the air and sea at a faster rate than occurs presently, and to store it safely. "It's what plants and a fair few rocks do."

Some third way alternatives are already quite well-known, such as large-scale reforestation and the addition of biochar to the soil. Biochar is a type of charcoal produced from the slow, oxygen-free burning of organic material. Creating biochar stores carbon for long periods and can be added to soil and improve soil quality. But Flannery sees even greater potential in less familiar methods to draw carbon from the atmosphere including large-scale seaweed farming, the manufacture of carbon-negative cement and new techniques for making plastic that draws CO<sub>2</sub> from the air. He canvasses strategies to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> by the "enhanced weathering" of silicate rocks and even making "CO<sub>2</sub> snow" in the Antarctic that could be stored in ice pits. Scientists are also investigating how the earth's albedo, or reflectiveness, could help cool the planet. By painting infrastructure white, cities might offset some of the warming they are now experiencing.

In Flannery's assessment third way strategies could together be pulling about four gigatonnes of carbon out of the atmosphere a year by 2050, about 40 per cent of current emissions. "These are the technologies we need to be focussing on, that will give us a future," he says. But these innovations will only be effective if major investments are made in developing them now. "It's a bit like solar," Flannery says. "For the last 30 years solar PV has been reducing its cost by about 10 per cent per annum but for 25 of those 30 years it was still outrageously expensive and wasn't really competitive ... Many of these third way technologies are the same – we need to start investing in them now to make sure we have the tools there in future when we really need them, in 2030 or 2040 as the climate crisis deepens. Then we will be really searching for ways to deal with this and the only way we'll have the tools is if we start in-

-vesting now.”

.....

He is adamant deep cuts in greenhouse gas emissions are needed despite the potential of the new technologies described in his new book. Flannery thinks there's only a 50-50 chance that any international agreement reached at the United Nations Climate Change Summit to be held in Paris later this year will limit average global temperatures to no more than 2 degrees Celsius warmer than the pre-industrial average. He is critical of the Abbott government's pre-summit commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions so they are 26-28 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. "That is clearly very inadequate both to stay within the 2 degrees and in terms of what is happening elsewhere in the world," Flannery said.

But he points out the Abbott government's direct action plan to tackle climate change encourages the use of some third way technologies identified by Flannery, especially biochar. "I'd say to the Australian government, in terms of the direct action policy, why not look more widely across these third way technologies and decide where the real opportunities are for Australia and reconceptualise the issue a bit," he says. Some of these new technologies have the potential to turn huge profits as well as helping to combat climate change. "What I really wanted to do in the book is refocus people's perceptions about the tools available to deal with the climate challenge, especially these third way technologies," Flannery said. "We are going to need them in future."

### **Reasons for climate hope**

The new breed of "third way" technologies that could help avert climate disaster:

Seaweed farms – the cultivation of seaweed could be used to absorb CO<sub>2</sub> efficiently and on a large scale.

Carbon-negative cement – the manufacture of cement contributes about 5 per cent of green house gas emissions but new methods of cement production are being developed that allow CO<sub>2</sub> to be absorbed and sequestered in cement over long periods.

Carbon-negative plastic – plastics are now oil-based but carbon-capture technolo-

gies have been developed that combine air with methane-based greenhouse gas emissions to produce a plastic material.

New carbon capture and storage – Conditions in some places on earth might allow the storage of CO<sub>2</sub> in liquid or solid form. One idea is to use the pressure deep in the ocean to keep CO<sub>2</sub> in liquid or solid form. Another is to capture and store CO<sub>2</sub> in the Antarctic as dry ice or CO<sub>2</sub> snow.

From: "Tim Flannery's message of hope: new third way technologies will help combat climate change", August 15, 2015

Read more: <http://www.smh.com.au/environment/tim-flannerys-message-of-hope-new-third-way-technologies-will-help-combat-climate-change-20150812-gixwuk.html#ixzz3sGznk98x>

### ***Extracts from Robin McKie's review in the Guardian***

He (Flannery) notes that projections now suggest that, at best, renewable energy sources will still only contribute a third of the planet's power needs by 2040, while demand for coal, gas and oil will still be rising. Carbon emissions will not fall. "This all adds up to a world which has lost the opportunity to keep warming within 2C but instead is committed to a world 3C warmer or even more;" he says.

.....

He sees hope in the fact that innovation "is driving economies as never before" but is low in expectation for individual technologies. On the other hand, a belief that some success can be achieved at the talks is more realistically based, he says, while the arguments of deniers have been shown to be "transparently wrong and outdated".

"The Guardian Weekly" 20.11.15 Originally printed in "Observer".

### ***From Peter Spinks review In SMH***

Flannery admits that, years ago, nuclear power was considered by many, himself included, as having a key part to play in the so-called clean-energy revolution.

Reviewing the state of the world's nuclear industry, he makes the noteworthy point that, by 2013, "global wind capacity had grown to 320 gigawatts – equivalent to the capacity of nuclear in 1990". His conclusion: "the chances of a nuclear revival seem slender indeed." \*

From "Atmosphere of Hope review: Tim Flannery's plans for our climate's future". September 2015. Read more <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/books/atmosphere-of-hope-review-tim-flannerys-plans-for-our-climates-future-20150909-gjegw1.html#ixzz3sH9B3Po5>

***\*by way of contrast to this last view:***

November 12, 2015, Paris, France — Four of the world's leading climate scientists, Dr. James Hansen, Dr. Tom Wigley, Dr. Ken Caldeira and Dr. Kerry Emanuel, will issue a stark challenge to world leaders and environmental campaigners attending the COP21 climate summit at a scheduled press conference in Paris on December 3.

**Dr. James Hansen, Dr. Tom Wigley, Dr. Ken Caldeira and Dr. Kerry Emanuel will present research showing the increasing urgency of fully decarbonizing the world economy. However, they will also show that renewables alone cannot realistically meet the goal of limiting global warming to 2 degrees C, and that a major expansion of nuclear power is essential to avoid dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system this century.**

The scientists will outline how only a combined strategy employing all the major sustainable clean energy options — including renewables and nuclear — can prevent the worst effects of climate change by 2100, such as the loss of coral reefs, severe damages from extreme weather events, and the destruction of biodiversity and ecosystems worldwide.

The challenge from the scientists comes as nuclear power is back on the table at Paris as a major climate mitigation option, appearing as a significant component of the Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) of major emitters including China, the U.S. and India.

The four scientists call for an increase in ambition in the deployment of improved light-water reactors, with the accelerated development of advanced fission technologies to accompany planned increases in solar, wind and hydro power generation.

Read more: <http://hosted.verticalresponse.com/372493/c25ebfa5d2/1603574483/62786e3be5/>

### **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 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.

Although we have an Associate Minister, Rev. Geoff Usher, we are primarily a lay-led congregation. **Perhaps you have a spiritual / ethical topic to share for our service?** We welcome any topic ideas, offers to speak or names of suitable speakers for our meetings whom we could approach. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service.*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**