



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

Editor: Jan Tendys

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Schedule of Services

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

1 March Robert Woog "Conversational ethics may be more useful than global ethics."

Ethical and moral dilemmas are arguments about good and evil but at other times they are clashes between preferred philosophical positions. I will argue that ethics must come about by each individual determining their moral history and through collaborating, co-determine the history of human kind.

Based on evidence from history and on current social trends, I am hopeful but not confident that this will turn out well.

8 March Susan Patterson "Living as an Introvert in an Extroverted World"

Our lives are shaped as profoundly by personality as by gender or race. The single most important aspect of personality is where we fall on the introvert-extrovert spectrum. One's place on this continuum influences our choice of friends and marriage mates, how we make conversation, resolve differences, and show love. It affects the careers we choose and whether or not we succeed at them - and, very possibly, the way we choose to worship and express our spirituality.

15 March Martin Horlacher "Omega Point: The Life and Teachings of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin."

A French philosopher and Jesuit priest who was also trained as a paleontologist and geologist, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin took part in several important discoveries regarding human evolution, and developed a very complex cosmology. This talk will examine his theories and life, as well as why he was originally censored by the Catholic Church during his lifetime.

22 March Rev. Geoff Usher "Perspective on Failure."

There is a lot to be learned from failure. It can open doors to new options by forcing us to consider new opportunities. It helps us to discover what works.

We learn from mistakes and setbacks, perhaps more than we learn from success. Learning early in life that we can survive setbacks and defeat makes us tougher and more resilient for the rest of our lives.

29 March Neil Inall "A Cauldron of Cuisine". Covering the questions about GM food cropping, production and marketing; also interpreting food labelling.

Superb fairywren. Photo Wikipedia



Death of Rev. Douglas Webster.

The Reverend Douglas Webster died on Sunday morning 15 February following a stroke and a heart attack. He was 87 years old.

Having trained at Unitarian College, Manchester, Douglas served in the Unitarian ministry from 1961, first at Dundee, then as part of a group ministry in the Midlands, before moving to New Zealand in 1971.

He was at the Auckland Unitarian Church for 12 years, before returning to the UK in 1983 for two years at Nottingham and Derby, then six years at Glasgow.

In 1991 he came to Australia for his final ministry at Sydney Unitarian Church, during which he met and married Vina. After his retirement in 1999, Douglas and Vina settled in Richmond.

Douglas was a founding member of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship, but eventually the long train trip to and from Kirribilli meant that he attended services increasingly rarely.

His funeral, conducted by me, will take place at Richmond on 23 February, followed by a private cremation.

We record his service to the Unitarian movement, including ANZUUA and our own Fellowship, and offer condolences to Vina and the family.

Rev. Geoff Usher

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**From the editor:**

***I have chosen a blue wren to accompany the above notice because its chirpy good humour reminds me of Douglas. My clearest memory of him was his bounding into the Gallery room for one of our earliest services saying, "Isn't this a good idea!" And he was right.***

**Jan Tendys**

## **Mark McGregor**

We lost another Unitarian stalwart last year. I had emailed Mark a few times without receiving a reply when the news came through that he had passed away.

No one was better at talking to visitors about Unitarianism than Mark. The last time he attended a service at our Fellowship, he told me that he was no longer a "seeker"; over the years of his association with Unitarianism he had found a philosophy of life that suited him. Vale Mark.

**Jan Tendys**

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The Chinese Peaks

I love the mountain peak
but I know also its rolling
foothills
half-invisible
in mist and fog.

The Seafarer gets up
long before dawn to read.
His soul
is a whale feeding
on the Holy Word.

The soul who loves the peak
also inhales the deep
breath rising
from the mountain
buried in mist.

~ Robert Bly ~

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***A Unitarian of course may have not one Holy Book, but as many as meaningful.***

## The Radical Martineau—Harriet.

Harriet Martineau (June 12, 1802-June 27, 1876), a pioneering British journalist and writer, grew up Unitarian and was for a time a Unitarian apologist. A free trade advocate, she provided influential support for economic reform in Britain. The observational methodology she developed travelling in America was a forerunner of modern sociology. In her writing on the theory of education she advocated the kind and affectionate treatment of children. She is best remembered for her contributions to the emerging woman's movement and for the example she set as a woman powerful in spheres dominated by men.



Harriet was born into a Unitarian family in Norwich, England. Her father, Thomas Martineau, was a prosperous textile manufacturer. Her mother, Elizabeth, while caring for her eight children's physical needs, was not demonstrative. Harriet, the sixth child, felt her mother's coolness and negative comments greatly. Harriet lavished attention and affection on her two younger siblings, James and Ellen. [James Martineau](#) later became a noted Unitarian minister and theologian.

Later in life, in 1849, shortly after her mother died, Martineau came to terms with her own difficult childhood experience by writing a manual for the affectionate upbringing of children, [Household Education](#). In this she rejected the idea of original sin as a "fatal notion." "Teach a child that his nature is evil," she wrote, "and you will make him evil." Although her educational theory was indebted to the work of the philosophers Locke and Rousseau, she added to their ideas emphasis on the importance of parental love in the development of a child's positive self-image.

Progressive deafness became evident in adolescence. In early adulthood she was persuaded to use an ear trumpet. Toward the end of her life she concluded that her deaf-

ness was "about the best thing that ever happened to me," as it was both "the grandest impulse to self-mastery" and an opportunity to help others similarly afflicted.

Harriet and her sisters were educated at home by older siblings and tutors; only the boys went to university. On a lengthy visit to relatives in Bristol when she was sixteen, Harriet fell under the spell of the Unitarian minister and educator, Lant Carpenter. She returned home more self-confident than when she had left, partly as a result of her new religious self-possession, but largely because her aunt had supplied some of the maternal affection withheld by her own mother.

**From Carpenter and from her brother James (who also studied with Carpenter), Martineau imbibed the necessarian doctrine of Joseph Priestley. According to this doctrine, every effect has a cause rooted in the laws of the universe, which neither divine nor human will can change. She found this belief comforting and stabilizing, giving her "strength under sorrow, perplexity, sickness, and toil" for the rest of her life.**

Martineau began writing for the Unitarian periodical, [Monthly Repository](#), in 1822. In her second article, "Female Education," following the path of [Mary Wollstonecraft](#), with whom she may already have been familiar, Martineau argued that apparent differences in intellect between men and women were the product of educational discrimination. Martineau eventually became the most frequent contributor to the [Monthly Repository](#), the volume of her contributions peaking 1829-32.

In 1830 the British and Foreign Unitarian Association held a contest for essays in three categories, proving Unitarian ideas superior to those of Catholics, Jews and Moslems. Martineau entered and won all three prizes. **These were, however, her last writings explicitly supporting Unitarianism. Her religious ideas began to shift immediately afterwards. Although she retained a nominal Unitarian connection and attended chapel regularly, she later judged that by 1831 she "had already ceased to be an Unitarian in the technical sense."**

**She soon began to identify the worship of God with the service of man. She took as her motto for life, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might." (Ecclesiastes 14:10).**

After the failure of the Martineau manufacturing business in 1829, Harriet had been forced to fall back upon needlework to make a living. The reception of the Unitarian prize essays encouraged her resolution to try supporting herself by writing.

In 1831 Martineau conceived the idea of writing a series of stories called Illustrations of Political Economy, based upon the utilitarian principles of Joseph Priestley and Jeremy Bentham—"the greatest happiness of the greatest number"—and the free trade economics of Adam Smith. She hoped to enable ordinary people to understand such things as tariffs, taxes and the national budget. She had to trek door-to-door to find a publisher, but when the series was published during 1832-33, the two dozen volumes sold in phenomenal numbers. This success gave her a national reputation, and enough money to allow her both to set up a household in London and to fund a two-year tour of the United States.

Because of her reputation as a Unitarian apologist, Martineau was welcomed by American Unitarians, including [William Ellery Channing](#), [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#), Catharine Maria Sedgwick, and Charles and Eliza Follen. In 1835, while attending an anti-slavery meeting in Boston as an observer, Martineau was invited to make a statement in favour of abolition. Although she had been opposed to slavery prior to her visit to America, she hesitated to comply because, as she later wrote, "I foresaw that almost every house in Boston, except those of the abolitionists, would be shut against me; that my relation to the country would be completely changed, as I should suddenly be transformed from being a guest and an observer to being considered a missionary or a spy."

But she felt she had to speak the truth. In her statement Martineau denounced slavery as "inconsistent with the law of God." After the meeting, as she had predicted, her entry into

American society was sharply circumscribed. The Follens, abolitionists themselves, accompanied her on her tour of the western states.

Martineau had approached her American trip in the manner of a sociologist. She was determined to evaluate and criticize what she saw, using only American terms of reference, and not British standards of behaviour. She travelled widely, covering 10,000 miles, making the acquaintance of people of all classes. She based two books, Society in America, 1837, and Retrospect of Western Travel, 1838, upon these experiences.

**Although she was generally impressed by American democracy, in Society in America Martineau expressed disappointment in the free enterprise system for the tendency to allow some, pursuing "a sordid love of gain," to trample the rights of others. She thought that democracy could only be preserved, in the long run, by the abolition of private property. And she considered that, given America's expressed values, the position of woman ought to have been far better than it actually was, that the condition of American women differed from that of slaves only in that they were treated with more indulgence. "Is it to be understood that the principles of the Declaration of Independence bear no relation to half of the human race? If so, what is the ground of the limitation?"**

From 1839-44 the pain from an ovarian cyst kept her an invalid. She used opiates to deaden the pain, but nothing stopped her writing. During this period she wrote a novel, a series of children's books, and a popular manual, Life in the Sick-Room, in which she drew upon her own current experience to counsel others both how to bear up under illness and how to behave when visiting the ill.

In the early 1840s mesmerism (or hypnotism, a non-standard medical practice based upon the theory of animal magnetism) was attracting considerable attention in Britain. As much out of scientific curiosity as desperation, Martineau allowed herself to be mesmerized. To

her delight, she found that her pain vanished. She came out of seclusion and, typically, immediately advocated mesmerism for medical purposes.

Now happily free of pain, Martineau moved to Ambleside in the Lake District. There she built a house, "The Knoll", near the Wordsworths and the Matthew Arnolds. It was her home for the rest of her life. In a letter to her sister Emily from Ambleside, Charlotte Bronte expressed admiration of Martineau, for "the manner in which she combines the highest mental culture with the nicest discharge of feminine duties."

**In 1846 Martineau embarked with friends on an eight-month tour of the Near East, where she studied ancient Egyptian religion and visited places mentioned in the Bible in Palestine. This trip convinced her that religion had not been revealed all at once but had evolved. She had already dropped most Christian doctrines but had clung to belief in an afterlife. Now she let that go as well. When she returned to England she rushed into print with Eastern Life Present and Past. As a travel book it was well received, though most readers considered her religious views atheistic. Brother James's vitriolic review made permanent their separation which had been growing over the years; they never spoke to one another again. British Unitarians, on the whole, continued to claim her in spite of the embarrassment associated with the author of Eastern Life. Toward the end of her life Martineau wrote, "I hope and believe my old co-religionists understand and admit that I disdain their theology in toto, and that by no twisting of language or darkening of its meanings can I be made out to have any thing whatever in common with them about religious matters."**

Martineau's illness returned in 1854, rendering her an invalid for the rest of her life. She was determined, nevertheless, to pursue a journalistic career which she had begun two years before when she had become a leader writer for the London Daily News. Over the next fourteen years she wrote more than 1600 items for the Daily News, "Doing pretty well for a dying person." Martineau took a number of controversial stands in print. Notably, she opposed

the notorious Contagious Diseases Act, which allowed the police to treat any woman unaccompanied by a man as a prostitute and which granted accused women no rights of defence or appeal. In spearheading the fight against this act, she provided early leadership in a campaign that brought a large number of women into the public discussion of politics, thereby helping to launch the modern British women's movement. Her writings on slavery have been credited with swaying English public opinion in favour of the North in the American Civil war. A strong-minded and outspoken woman, she offended many people. Even so, her journalism made hers a well-respected name in her time.

Although she lived for another decade, the progress of her illness forced Martineau to retire from writing in 1866. Even in retirement she wrote letters for publication and lent her name to numerous causes. During her last years she continued to serve as her nation's conscience and as an icon of Britain's emerging feminist cause.

From the biography of Harriet Martineau written by [Maryell Cleary](#) and [Peter Hughes](#) in the Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography, an on-line resource of the Unitarian Universalist History & Heritage Society. Full bibliography at: <http://uudb.org/articles/harrietmartineau.html>

### **Harriet's Feminism, from "The Birth of the Modern" by Paul Johnson.**

Martineau's theme, which ran consistently throughout her life, was that women had to get themselves properly educated and then become visible, active, ubiquitous and constructive across the whole range of public activities. One of her fundamental criticisms of American society revolved around the political non-existence of women there, which she insisted contradicted its democratic principles. But she hated feminist theory, scorned "rights' campaigns, and deplored any kind of feminist activity that deepened the already tragic divisions between men and women. Her theme was, let us get real women into actual, important jobs, and forget about abstractions. But it is significant that she considered marriage an important job—at any rate for some (she remained unmarried). She set her face like a flint against unmarried couples. (This was in the contest of reliable birth control not being available. **JT**)

## Elizabeth Gaskell and Unitarianism

*Dr Max Lawson*

It may well not be politically correct to begin a talk on Elizabeth Gaskell by giving details of her husband's life, but it seems appropriate here. William Gaskell (1805-1884) was an extraordinary Unitarian minister whose only church was the prestigious Cross St. Chapel in Manchester, where he ministered for 56 years, and for 33 of these years, he was ably assisted by his wife, Elizabeth (1810-1865).

Gaskell's church was fashionable (Manchester was the first industrial city of the world then) and Unitarians were disproportionately represented as "the Captains of Industry." Like the Quakers (for example the Cadburys, Foys and Rowntree families of chocolate and confectionery fame were all wealthy Quakers), similarly there were wealthy Unitarian textile manufacturers, bankers, brewers and the like.

This meant that the Gaskells moved in all the levels of society. William Gaskell's very generous ministerial salary came with strings attached – he was expected to take a high profile in civic affairs. Accordingly, for example, he was chairman of the Manchester Library committee for 30 years and served in innumerable committees and helped organize relief during the cotton famine of 1861-1863. He and his wife knew of much misery in Manchester, just as their fellow Unitarian Florence Nightingale did while working with prostitutes, victims of cholera, and others with severe illnesses at Manchester Hospital before going to the Crimea.

At first it seems unconvincing that the central characters of Elizabeth's novel, North and South, were characters who lived in the drawing rooms of Manchester's industrial elite, were textile manufactures in particular, as well as being visitors of the homes of the destitute unemployed. However, the Gaskells did exactly that themselves.

William encouraged his wife to write a novel as an antidote to the depression she felt at the death of her only son, a baby, who died of scarlet fever. (The Gaskells had four surviving daughters – and one of her novels is called Wives and Daughters).

William helped his wife's literary activities

in every way – proof-reading, checking all the historical facts etc., all of which was very much appreciated by Charles Dickens in whose magazine Household Words Gaskell's novels were first serialized. Dickens (who had attended a Unitarian chapel for 10 years) was a friend of the Gaskells, as were many other eminent Victorians committed to social reform. Coincidentally William Gaskell was a godfather of Beatrix Potter, though her family was not reformers.

This social reform movement included a championing of women's rights and the role of women, particularly in marriage itself.

The Gaskell's thirty years of marriage is a case in point of an extraordinary nature of the egalitarian approach to marriage. Unitarian attitudes were far different from "The Angel in the House" (to use the title of Coventry Patmore's popular poem) wherein women had separate spheres outside the realm of men.

Elizabeth was active in her husband's ministry – all the minister's wife's usual duties as well as running "a ragged school in the home", and meeting the weekly dead-lines demanded by Dickens for his magazine. (Naturally she was also blessed with home help!)

Another example of the Gaskell's being on the same wave length in their extraordinary marriage is that just as William in his sermons emphasized the role of individuals in society, this theme dominated Elizabeth's novels to which we now turn, in particular North and South, written in 1855.

Although Elizabeth confessed that "I am not Unitarianly orthodox" (how far "out" can you get!) and does not mention Unitarianism by name in her novels, these novels do reflect Unitarian concerns of the day – social justice, compassion for the suffering, and social and political action as well as "trust in Divine Providence," this Christian theme shared by most Unitarians at the time.

For many Christians, however, Unitarians were beyond redemption – for example, a Methodist hymn appealed to "Triune God" imploring him to "expel the Unitarian fiend and chase his doctrines back to Hell!".

Because Unitarians were very liberal Christians, they were able to by-pass all the agonies of religious doubt expressed by many Victorian era writers such as Tennyson

and Ruskin, the latter being “unable to sleep because of those dreadful hammers” of geology which repudiated the world being formed in 4004 B.C.

For Gaskell, true to her Unitarian background, believed there is a Heaven and Hell but they are on earth – and we must strive to build Heaven and ameliorate at least, the cotton fluff of Hell.

North and South is an unremittingly serious novel and as Terence Wright has said, a novel full of pain, “of stress and disturbance, of pangs of conscience...”

Gaskell herself in a letter describes William Hale “as weak and vacillating” and never fully realising the consequences of his beliefs on his family. As a personal aside, I remember a Portuguese student told me of her recoil from the radical politics of her father, because of the effects on his family of her father’s protestations. Although prosperous, her father was a critic of the Salazar regime, and often in prison and sometimes tortured, but the worse punishment in her opinion, was that sons of dissidents were drafted as front line troops fighting to maintain Portuguese colonies – and her brother was the only survivor of his group and was leading an aimless life, and she herself had to enter teacher’s college under an assumed name.

Beliefs have consequences and we must think carefully about imposing our beliefs on others. As a good Unitarian, Gaskell constantly emphasizes tolerance and understanding the viewpoint of others. One of the great strengths of North and South is how clearly Gaskell can see the position of the Masters of Capital as well as that of the workingman and unemployed poor. The danger is as Gaskell implies, that being able to see both sides of a question still demands action, not paralysis.

So not being bedevilled by the science versus religion questions of the Victorian era, (after all Science asks HOW questions and Theology asks WHY questions) and also not being ground down by questions of doctrines or been concerned with such controversies as shook the Church of England to its foundations at that time, Unitarians were able to concentrate on social reform and alleviating suffering, as well as emphasising the development of moral character (if sin exists we are punished by our sins not for our sins) and

work towards God’s kingdom on earth.

Even for today North and South raises issues about the evils of the uneven distribution of wealth for labour done. It also causes us to think from the point of view of the employer, and the employee and the unemployed and how we face this in our moral decision making in our daily lives. Whereas so many people dodge the issue of working towards a better world for all, in a good Unitarian fashion (today as well as when she wrote it) North and South keeps our eyes clearly on this moral dilemma constantly in our lives. Sadly, the issues haven’t really changed in 150 years. Fortunately Unitarianism still gives a good compass with which to deal with them.

Elizabeth Gaskell is not only a good novelist but also a good Unitarian. The themes of her novels are timeless.

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Two Sexes? Simplistic.

As a clinical geneticist, Paul James is accustomed to discussing some of the most delicate issues with his patients. But in early 2010, he found himself having a particularly awkward conversation about sex.

A 46-year-old pregnant woman had visited his clinic at the Royal Melbourne Hospital in Australia to hear the results of an amniocentesis test to screen her baby’s chromosomes for abnormalities. The baby was fine — but follow-up tests had revealed something astonishing about the mother. Her body was built of cells from two individuals, probably from twin embryos that had merged in her own mother’s womb. And there was more. One set of cells carried two X chromosomes, the complement that typically makes a person female; the other had an X and a Y. Half-way through her fifth decade and pregnant with her third child, the woman learned for the first time that a large part of her body was chromosomally male. “That’s kind of science-fiction material for someone who just came in for an amniocentesis,” says James.

Sex can be much more complicated than it at first seems. According to the simple scenario, the presence or absence of a Y chromosome is what counts: with it, you are male, and without it, you are female. But doctors have long known that some people

straddle the boundary — their sex chromosomes say one thing, but their gonads (ovaries or testes) or sexual anatomy say another. Parents of children with these kinds of conditions — known as intersex conditions, or differences or disorders of sex development (DSDs) — often face difficult decisions about whether to bring up their child as a boy or a girl. Some researchers now say that as many as 1 person in 100 has some form of DSD2.

The above is the introduction to an article “Sex Redefined” by Claire Ainsworth in Nature magazine. <http://www.nature.com/news/sex-redefined-1.16943>

You Reading This, Be Ready

Starting here, what do you want to remember?
How sunlight creeps along a shining floor?
What scent of old wood hovers, what softened
sound from outside fills the air?

Will you ever bring a better gift for the world
than the breathing respect that you carry
wherever you go right now? Are you waiting
for time to show you some better thoughts?

When you turn around, starting here, lift this
new glimpse that you found; carry into evening
all that you want from this day. This interval you spent
reading or hearing this, keep it for life -

What can anyone give you greater than now,
starting here, right in this room, when you turn around?

~ William Stafford ~

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.sydneyunitarians.org . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or Ginna Hastings 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@bigpond.com 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 topic to share?** 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