



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre  
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(near Milsons Point Station)

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## Schedule of Services

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

**5th March, Carolyn Donnelly & Barbara O'Brien "Remembering Leonard Cohen."**

Recalling his music and his life. Communal input invited.

**12 March, No service.**

**19 March, Martin Horlacher, "What Would Confucius Do?"**

"One of the most important philosophers of the ancient world, the sayings and ideas of Confucius have had a powerful influence on the Eastern world, as well as the Western one. But how does his philosophy apply to life today?"

**26 March, Rev. Geoff Usher, "Two Travel Stories"**

Two different stories connected only by the theme of travelling, and the people one can meet on the way. What sort of impression do we leave with the people who happen to meet us as we travel life's journey?

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**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](http://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@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.*

## **It's Natural!** **A forgotten alternative for progressive spirituality.**

**Rev. Rex Hunt**

*(A much shorter version of this Paper was part of oral Panel Presentations on two separate occasions: (i) at The Progressive Christianity Network of Victoria, in Melbourne, 23 October 2016, on new directions/initiatives in progressive spirituality, and (ii) at The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought, in Canberra, 14 November 2016)*

**“The capacity of the natural world to inspire a religious response from humans has long been recognised. From the nature mysticism of the ancients to present-day expressions of wonderment at the beauty and ferocity of the natural world, it is clear that humans have always sought to understand their relationship to the cosmos” (Nigel Leaves)**

**“Its great wings outstretched, the brown pelican spirals in the thermal air. Scarcely a flicker of those magnificent wings is required for it to soar further and further aloft. Finally reaching an apogee of the spiral, it gently banks and slowly descends, only to be uplifted again in its circling flight... For me, at that moment, this pelican’s flight is a compelling symbol of the numinous powers, presences, and wonders of the natural order to which we both miraculously belong.” (Donald Crosby)**

There is a new ‘old’ kid on the progressive spirituality block. It’s called Religious Naturalism, described by some advocates as the “forgotten alternative”. (Jerome Stone) While it may be new to many it has a long pedigree, stretching from Christian medieval times through to today where it has been preserved primarily within Unitarian spirituality.<sup>1</sup> And centuries before all that when you take into consideration indigenous peoples nature-centric songlines or Dreaming stories, that celebrate the sacred earth as the Kunapiipi, ‘earth mother’.

So at the Common Dreams 4 Conference 2 in Brisbane, Australia, in September 2016, I attended and was grateful for, several presen-

tations and workshops which, for the sake of this Paper, I have grouped together under the heading ‘Religious Naturalism’:

(i) Noel Preston’s workshop which featured a showing of the DVD ‘Journey of the Universe’, honouring the work of Thomas Berry, (ii) Jana Norman’s scholarly presentation on the Ecozoic Era—highlighting a radical shift in consciousness from human devastation to human beings learning to be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner,

(iii) the more than playful ‘brush’ given nature by Diana Butler Bass when she unpacked some thoughts from her book, *Grounded. Finding God in the World*, and

(iv) Rob MacPherson’s workshop ‘Spirituality from a Unitarian Universalist Perspective’, where he offered hints that many Unitarians see ‘spiritual’ as a deep concern with that which gives us life—a movement **away** from individualism, antiauthoritarianism and exceptionalism, **to** the promises of pluralism, generosity, and the creative imagination. Rob is pastor at the Unitarian Church of South Australia in Adelaide.

Added to all this, just days after returning from the Conference I received notice of an interactive online conversation “Alternative Futures: Pathways Toward Ecological Civilization” organised by The Centre for Process and Faith at the Claremont School of Theology... which seeks to explore and inspire new ‘social imaginaries’—new narratives—that counter the dominant narratives surrounding climate change where the language seems to be all about survival of the fittest.

So taken together these immediately shape the matrix for this Paper. But to be honest it all started further back than just a couple of months... Indeed, it goes back to the mid 1960s when during my theological formation I was being taught ‘to think theologically’. So then as now I had/have three questions:

- Is religion, by definition, concerned with the supernatural?
- Is it forever wedded to the premise that the supernatural exists?
- Is religion about g-o-d and/or gods?

Welcome to some of my journey!

Religious naturalism has two central aspects. **One is a naturalist view of how things happen in the world**—in which the natural world is all there is, and that nothing other than natural may cause events in the world. **The other is appreciation of religion with a view that nature can be a focus of religious attention.** So let me tease out some of this worldview called religious naturalism just a little...

Naturalist views, grounded in science, provide a framework for understanding what seems real. These include a central story, the epic of evolution, that explains the origins of the cosmos and humans, with perspectives from which to consider why we do what we do. We are fully linked with our surroundings in time, space, matter/energy, and causality, and where the metaphor of 'web' is used to describe this interrelatedness.<sup>3</sup>

"As earth-creatures we do not live in straight lines; we truly do exist in a web, a network, a maze... When the relationality is mutually supportive, and not distorted, we truly can speak of 'mazing grace'." (Larry Axel)

Religious orientation includes spiritual responses, which can include feelings of appreciation, gratitude, humility, reverence, and joy at the wonder of being alive. It also includes moral responses, involving values rooted in nature—to seek justice and cooperation among social groups and balance in ecosystems. Wonder, although not the only possible response when contemplating the immense scale of matter, space, and time, is surely appropriate once we realise we belong to something so very far beyond us. Such naturalistic wonder and awe counts as deeply spiritual.

Professor of Theology Michael Hogue gathers up these characteristics and suggests, in part, that religious naturalism **"...is a humble religious path that decentralizes the human species within the infinitely broader metaphysical and aesthetic rhythms of the Universe. It is a way of knowing that reveres the wisdom of collective human experience and reason more highly than any single sacred book or tradition. It is a quest for wisdom from**

**wherever it may come: from the symbols, myths and rituals of the world's diverse religious traditions, from literature and the arts, from the intricate splendors of indigenous knowledges to the mind-bending ways of the modern sciences."** (Michael Hogue)

OoOoo

Nature and naturalism are for us today 'the main game' for any progressive spirituality despite the continuing influence of neo-orthodoxy. <sup>4</sup> If we think back over the past two centuries and recount the ways scientific knowledge has impacted our lives, what would top the list? I would suggest the recognition that nature is constitutive of who and what we are as human beings. "Whether or not we believe that there is something more", writes Jerome Stone, "nature is so significant that all our beliefs must be reformulated so as to take nature into account." (Jerome Stone)

Given a chance, the cosmogenesis (cosmic evolution) story is too compelling, too beautiful, too edifying, and too liberating to fail in captivating the imagination of a vast majority of humankind.

**"For just as the Milky Way is the universe in the form of a galaxy, and an orchid is the universe in the form of a flower, we are the universe in the form of a human. And every time we are drawn to look up into the night sky and reflect on the awesome beauty of the universe, we are actually the universe reflecting on itself."** (Thomas Berry)

The human story and the universe story are the same story. We are not encapsulated, separated, isolated beings. Whatever we are, the universe is.

**"The reality inside of us and the reality outside of us are ultimately one reality. In us the universe dreams its dreams. In us the universe struggles for a moral vision. In us the universe hopes for new possibilities. In us the universe strives for self-understanding. In us the universe seeks the meaning of existence."** (David Bumbaugh)

Names of religious naturalists to look out for? My grounding was with Americans Henry Nelson Wieman, Bernard Loomer, and Bernard Meland. Other former religious naturalists include Samuel Alexander, Mordecai Kaplan, Thomas Berry, and perhaps Gordon Kaufman. While current ones include Karl Peters, Jerome Stone, Loyal Rue, Donald Crosby, Ursula Goodenough, Michael Cavanaugh, Michael S. Hogue, Sallie McFague, David Bumbaugh, Charlene Spretnak, Joanna Macy, and the latter Lloyd Geering.

**The ‘naturalism’ represented by these authors is diverse. Generally speaking they can be grouped as:**

**(i) those who conceive of g-o-d as the creative process within the universe;**

**(ii) those who think of g-o-d as the totality of the universe considered religiously, and**

**(iii) those who see no need to use the concept or terminology of g-o-d.**

Several are Unitarian in religious formation.

Now... scholarly criticism and abstractions can *inspire* us. But as I have indicated elsewhere, the shaping of progressive religious thought needs both the voice of the critic—to keep any community free from sloppy sentimentality—as well as the concern of the creative artist—to strike a chord and resonate within. Ideally the two should function ‘in stereo’—simultaneous but different. To substantially change how we feel we may need to participate in *storytelling* as well as some sort of spiritual practice. The weaving of story (what we tell) and ritual (what we enact) are ways we make sense of our world.

Traditional church religion has used liturgical practices—with all their supernatural connotations and general shaping from confession to pardon reflecting a presupposition of human guilt—through the employment of music, theatre, incense, architecture and other ritual elements that generate feelings of connection and wonder. But a radical reshaping of such liturgy/ritual is required.

There is no reason why a ritual/liturgical link cannot be forged between naturalism and such feelings of wonder and awe. It’s finding the appropriate language along with designing rituals and practices that enriches these feelings with expressions of naturalistic beliefs. **5**

- The musicians and lyricists among us must collaborate on new, more explicitly naturalistic songs and hymns—as Shirley Erena Murray, John Storey, and William L. Wallace attempt to do. A well-known traditional hymn suggests we are ‘pilgrims through this barren land’, but such words are demeaning of earth. Earth would surely respond: “If you read the landscape you will discover I am not ‘barren’ land [terra nullius] but an exciting ecosystem to be embraced and celebrated.” (Norman Habel)



Keeping on the landscape theme... Indigenous dreaming, for instance, is a tradition of story and ceremony, not a tradition of appeasement or offerings... the landscape itself is imbued with the sacred. (David Tacey) **6** A land-dreaming people.**7** Sure, there are those theologians who dismiss all this as just being faddish, insisting that any genuinely Australian theology “must consist of more than just scattering kangaroos and gum trees across the page.” Likewise Australian sociologists “also know very well that over ninety per cent of Australians live in big cities near the coast, and rarely visit the desert, rainforest or countryside.” (Elizabeth Smith) Yet I, along with others, claim being landscape-aware is being real to ordinary experience—the only grounds of a living tradition.

People tend always to read, think, and understand from their particular place on the planet. But it goes further. The natural seasons not only have symbolic value they also affect us physiologically. Seasonal changes in temperature, sunlight, precipitation,

barometric pressure, and lunar cycles all have demonstrable effects on our moods and physical functioning. 8

- A challenge to artists and potters is to create art works and artefacts that examine the beauty and spiritual meaning that can come from an appreciation of the natural world. In the past I have been known to invite a potter to ‘throw a pot’ during a liturgy celebrating Spring! As one early American ‘liberal’ said: “Protestantism has been chary of the arts and suspicious of the artist.” (Von Ogden Vogt)

- Creative story-telling trains us to anticipate many possible futures, making us good problem-solvers. Story-telling helped us survive the rigours of natural selection, as it trained us to imagine the consequences of different possible scenarios for our actions. The prophetic voice of storyteller Thomas Berry:

**“...as we look up at the starry sky at night, and as, in the morning, we see the landscape revealed as the sun dawns over the earth—these experiences reveal a physical world but also a more profound world that cannot be bought with money, cannot be manufactured with technology, cannot be listed on the stock market, cannot be made in the chemical laboratory, cannot be reproduced with all our genetic engineering, cannot be sent by e-mail. These experiences require only that we follow the deepest feelings of the human soul.” (Thomas Berry)**

Poets of the calibre of Robert Weston and his beautiful “Out of the Stars...”, Eric Williams “The strength of the Earth is the stones...” and any of the poems of Pulitzer Prize-winning poet Mary Oliver, especially her “The Summer Day”:

**Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean—  
the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand...**

All need to be introduced into our rituals and

liturgies. Sticking with only readings and reflections from the Bible is too narrow a canon.

- Children’s Sunday Clubs, where they still exist, should teach ethics and respect and humility before the mysteries of life without resorting to stale and incredible biblical tales—as Cheryl Binkley and Jane McKeel have done with Jesus and his Kingdom of Equals. Or even better... if commentary such as Elizabeth Johnson’s on Jesus of Nazareth was included in sermons and liturgies, the ‘human/historical’ Jesus as sage would be more believable:

**“Born of a woman... and the Hebrew gene pool, Jesus of Nazareth was a creature of earth, a complex unit of minerals and fluids, an item in the carbon, oxygen, and nitrogen cycles, a moment in the biological evolution of this planet. Like all human beings, he carried within himself the signature of the supernovas and the geology and life history of the Earth. The atoms comprising his body once belonged to other creatures. The genetic structure of his cells made him part of the whole community of life that descended from common ancestors in the ancient seas.” (Elizabeth Johnson)**

- Social concern, for example the natural cycle of growth, destruction, and renewal, can also be focused ritually. Back in the late 1960s such a ritual, called by the mundane name of ‘tea-drinking’, became part of several study groups on ecology/ Composting. The session began with the members drinking [billy] tea quietly and ceremonially while sitting on cushions.

**“Then the group moved on to an actual discussion in which practical techniques [concerning composting] and questions were aired. Finally, at the end of the meeting each person reverently sprinkled used tea leaves on the compost pile and took away a cup of half-finished compost and two worms. These items were seed for the compost pile that class members would later begin at home.” (Karl Peters)**

Commenting on this ritual Karl Peters wrote:

**“In such a ceremony the rational understanding of natural, ecological renewal is combined with ritual actions that may help establish new behaviour patterns in human beings”.**

Again, in the mid 1980s, Columban Father Vincent Busch developed a Stations of the Forest using the ‘stations’ format to lament the death of the Philippine rainforests. Various versions of it were used by Catholic agencies over the next decade. A revised production was updated in 2009 by the Columbans in the UK, incorporating additional global issues related to rainforest destruction such as the extractive industries and climate change. Five years ago, in 2011, an Australian version was edited..9

Now for a short commercial... In my most recent book, When Progressives Gather Together: Liturgy, Lectionary, Landscape... And Other Explorations, 10 I offer commentary and liturgical examples grounded in both a religious naturalism and a celebration of life. One such example comes out of a reshaping of the ‘Words of Committal’ from a Funeral Liturgy...

**The spirit of (NNN) shall not know the blight of mortality:  
for it shall live on in the lives made real  
by its presence, and its gracious influence.**

**Those atoms and molecules which constituted  
his/her physical frame...  
Every one of them originated in the burst of  
heat and light  
which created our galaxy millions of  
light years ago.**

**They persisted in bodies both animate and inanimate  
that came into being on planet Earth,  
and they reached their fulfilment in the  
generous life-form  
and personality of this strong,  
courageous, self conscious human being, we called (N).**

**So reverently, lovingly, trustingly,  
we commit his/her body to the elements,  
which is welcoming to us at the time**

**of our death.  
Ashes to ashes/Earth to earth, star dust to  
star dust.**

**In the cycle of life and death  
the earth is replenished  
and life is eternally renewed.**

Another is from a ‘Celebration of Baptism’ liturgy where ‘earth’ is added to the traditional ‘water’ and ‘oil’...

**Child of the Earth**

**Poets are also sensitive to events such as this.**

**At the beginning of his poem Robert Weston writes:**

*‘Out of the stars in their flight, out of  
the dust of eternity,  
here have we come,  
Stardust and sunlight, mingling  
Through time and through  
space...’*

**Each time we gather in sacred or ordinary  
places  
we are reminded that Aboriginal people  
have cared for this land since time  
immemorial,  
loving it as their mother.**

**Others have also come to this land from  
many places on earth  
and this place has now become home to  
all.**

**Respecting the relationship between  
humankind and the earth insight of  
Aboriginal people,  
(N), we place your feet in this soil/  
clay.  
If child, held up, then feet placed/’planted’  
in the soil  
If adult, invited to step into the soil tray**

**You are a child of the Earth.  
You have inherited the responsibility of  
caring for this earth.  
Cherish it for all creation.**

**May the sun and the stars delight  
and touch your heart with fire  
and so may you find passion to be  
both caring and creative.**

Both these liturgies have been shaped by language that is more relationship-building than “doctrinal specificity and ecclesial distinctiveness”, **11** and with the ‘southern hemisphere’ liturgical challenge in mind. As such they seek to overcome the dissonance between metaphor and experience.

OoOoo

No matter how beautiful some may consider it, a supernatural worldview, and the practices that reinforce it, anaesthetizes us to things we need to do if we are to create sustainability for our planet, our children, and their children. “Stripped of a divine plan,” suggests Gretta Vosper,

**“we are challenged to be active participants who can mould the world around us rather than simply passive recipients who engage, now and again, in acts of devotion with the hope of altering the course of events.” (Gretta Vosper)**

So, where to start personally? Well... Start **12** by taking a three year old child, (maybe your grandson or grand-daughter) for a walk along some wet-lands track. Do not plan to be in a hurry. Every twig. Every coloured stone. Every duck. Every small grasshopper or lizard to cross your path will be an occasion for closer ‘looking’ and excitement. Such is the enchantment of a three year old for the natural world.



Start with your own life. With the fifty trillion cells of your body that are converting energy to make protein right now so you can read/hear these words. Or... with the awareness that the body you are carrying around now won’t be the body you’ll be carrying around seven years from now. It will have completely rebuilt itself from the inside out.

Allow yourself to be shaped by this creativity. This wonder. Webs of culture, life, and cosmos, “resulting in unending successions of ever-evolving levels of living forms”. (Karl Peters) Each day “lifts its head from the dew-strung grasses and offers new hope, new

possibilities, extra chances”. (Gretta Vosper) Because every moment is pregnant with possibility. The miracle of each moment awaits our sensual wonder. Hosannah! Not in the highest, but right here. Right now. This. Horizontal transcendence. Nature embedded in humanity. Humanity embedded in nature.

There is no good reason to believe that taking nature to heart leaves a person with any fewer spiritual benefits than taking to heart the teachings of supernaturalist traditions.**13** The religious rituals of the future will celebrate the wonder of the universe and the mystery of life. “They will,” suggests New Zealander Lloyd Geering, “revolve around the natural processes that have brought life into being and continue to sustain it.”

And then later Geering offers this reminder:

**“It is salutary to remember that the great annual Christian festivals [Christmas and Easter]... all originated as festivals celebrating the changing seasons of nature... As humankind recovers full appreciation of how much our earthly life depends upon the conditions and processes of the Earth itself, it will re-create the appropriate nature festivals to celebrate it.” (Lloyd Geering)**

The sacred is *not* a separate ‘supernatural’ sphere of life. Neither is it to be found separate from the pursuits of truth, justice, beauty and selfhood. It is more like the caffeine in the **12** coffee than like a strawberry on top of the pavlova.....

***Get yourself a cuppa and  
stick with us!***



So what does religious *experience* look and feel like from the standpoint of religious naturalism? Again Michael Hogue is helpful:

**“Religious experience for the religious naturalist provoke questions about the meanings and values that ultimately orient life—they are interrogative rather than declarative. They are events, encounters, insights, relationships, undergoings, and overcomings that throw life into suspense, stripping away the pretence of the givenness of things, compelling one, even if just for a moment, to face the contingency of what is taken to be necessary, the vulnerability of what is taken to be invulnerable, and the perishability of what is assumed to be permanent. Experiences such as these throw life into a new frame; they rend the veil of the ordinary. They interrupt and can sometimes transform one’s life.” (Michael Hogue)**

My opening ‘pelican’ story—a very common occurrence on the NSW Central Coast where I now live—was told by philosopher and Unitarian religious naturalist, Donald Crosby. A similar experience of the ordinary is recounted by Brazilian Marcelo Gleiser. He had just finished attending a conference in Durham UK and decided to take a walk around the city—with its magnificent castle and well-preserved eleventh-century Gothic cathedral—a true medieval jewel. He writes:

**“A public footpath meanders along the river. I approach it through a narrow alleyway just beneath the castle. A huge sycamore bowed ceremoniously over the dark green water. I paused to appreciate the view, infused with a deep sense of peace. A cloud of mayflies wobbled just above the current, joyfully celebrating their twenty-four-hour existence. Suddenly out of the depths, a salmon leaped some three feet into the air, swallowed one of them, and dived back with a noisy splash. The fish must have been at least six pounds, maybe more. I just stood there, motionless, mouth agape.**

**“If there are such things as signs, this was one. Nature had just sent me a message; at least that’s how I saw it, which is what**

**matters. Few moments in my life had been more meaningful. A cozy warmth spread across my chest, as I experienced a kind of revelatory awakening. I had just witnessed the simple beauty of the unexpected. ‘You need to get out into the wilderness more often. You’re missing the magic,’ said a voice in my head. This time, I was listening.”**

Whether all this is called ‘religion’ or ‘spirituality’ or ‘secular mysticism’ I am not really too fussed. In the debate between ‘being religious’ or ‘being spiritual’ if pushed I would claim to be ‘both’. More of a concern for me is that progressive religious thought respond to the challenges framed by ecological scientists. And such a response might be a kind of cosmic recipe for the functioning of all things.

- A recipe for dancing with and living in harmony with, our world and the various environments that help shape us;
- A call to live humanly and humanely;
- An invitation to hope. Not hope for any time other than this time. But hope for the fullest and the best that human beings together in concert can achieve.

One important question remains: what of so-called God-talk? If g-o-d, using that devotional word as *pattern of creativity*—meaning the emergence of new possibilities and the selecting of some of these to continue—or event, or even the Darwinian two-step<sup>14</sup> ... if g-o-d is to be known at all, g-o-d must be known in the only realm accessible to us. g-o-d will be identified either with a part of the concrete actual world, such as ‘creativity’, or with the totality of that world. Gordon Kaufman’s words still ring true for me:

**“I have proposed serendipitous creativity as a metaphor more appropriate for thinking of God today... The idea of creativity—the idea of coming into being through time of the previously nonexistent, the new, the novel—continues to have considerable plausibility today; indeed, it is bound up with the very belief that our cosmos is an evolutionary one in which new orders of reality come into being in the course of exceedingly complex temporal developments.” (Gordon Kaufman)**



An alternate liturgical language suggestion is to use sacred instead of g-o-d. While I am sympathetic to such, and indeed often use the term in my own liturgies, I am still not prepared to let go of the term g-o-d altogether. I now tend to write it 'g-o-d' instead of 'God' to move it away from any personalistic or anthropocentric thinking.

Let me be clear: religious naturalism will not save the church. However, it is the urgent hope of many that religious naturalism, the 'forgotten alternative', will prevail as the most universal and influential religious orientation on the planet. Listening again to the wisdom of Loyal Rue...

**“Religious naturalists will be known for their reverence and awe before Nature, their love for Nature and natural forms, their sympathy for all living things, their guilt for enlarging the ecological footprints, their pride in reducing them, their sense of gratitude directed towards the matrix of life, their contempt for those who abstract themselves from natural values, and their solidarity with those who link their self-esteem to sustainable living.”**

And then this claim, made all the more powerful because it was the title of his important book, Religion Is Not About God...

**“[Religion] is about us. It is about manipulating our brains so that we might think, feel, and act in ways that are good for us, both individually and collectively. Religious traditions work like the bow of a violin, playing upon the strings of human nature to produce harmonious relations between individuals and their social and physical environments. Religions have always been about this business of adaptation, and they will always remain so.” (Loyal Rue)**

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1 Marginalised by old-line Church Christianity as a heretical institution, the first Unitarian church in Australia was established in Sydney in 1850—just a whisker over 60 years after British colonialisation. The Melbourne Unitarian Church was founded two years later, in 1852. While the church in Adelaide was

established in 1855 by English settlers.

2 Theme of the Conference was 'Progressive Spirituality: New Directions'

3 Some have challenged this understanding because the image of a web is too meagre and simple for the reality. A web is flat and finished 'and has the mortal frailty of the individual spider'. And although elastic it has insufficient depth.

4 Emil Brunner wrote: "Because man has been made in the image of God, therefore he may and should make the earth subject to himself, and should have dominion over all other creatures... Man is only capable of realising his divine destiny when he rises above Nature". (Quoted in Geering. The Greening of Christianity, 43.)

5 "Underneath the surface of the various layers of Christianity s lurk the remnants of religion that focused on nature. For example... we still name the days of the week after the ancient Germanic gods—Sunday for the sun-god, Monday for the moon-god, Wednesday for Woden, and Saturday for Saturn. These relics remain in spite of the efforts of priests to eliminate everything that smacked of superstitious paganism" (Lloyd Geering).

6 For Aboriginal people religious identity is more a question of geography than theology

7 David Malouf. *A Spirit of Play*. Quoted in Leaves.

8 McEmrys. 'Living Liturgy', 7

9 Produced by Columban JPIC Office, Britain with Australian additions by the Columban Mission Institute, Centre for Peace, Ecology and Justice, Strathfield, NSW  
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10 2016. Morning Star Publishing

11 Cowdell, S. 'Baptism in Australia', 156.

**12** When an edited version of this paper was part of an oral presentation, those attending were invited to look at the moon on their exiting the hall... That night (14 November 2016) it was the closest full moon to earth so far in the 21st century. It would not be this close again until 23 November 2034

**13** Lloyd Geering also writes: "...the dichotomy of natural/supernatural has now become obsolete. So far as I can ascertain we owe the use of the term supernatural to Aquinas as he tried to reconcile Christian thought with the re-discovered thought of Aristotle. In any case we now find ourselves in a world where nature reigns supreme. There is no supernatural sphere". (Personal correspondence, 25/8/2016)

**14** Darwinian two-step consists of a set of processes that brings about new variations and a second set that selects some of these as more viable than others. (*Karl Peters*)

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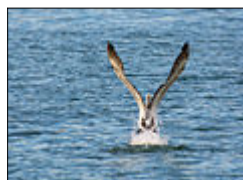
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***As Esprit editor I must take responsibility for the format of this article, including having the footnotes at the end - irritating I know, but the best I could do with present set up. Apologies to Rex hunt. JT***

## About the Author

Rev Rex A. E. Hunt is a religious naturalist, progressive liturgist, and social ecologist. A retired minister of the Uniting Church in Australia, his last placement was at the progressive Church of St James, Canberra, ACT, having previously served in parish settings in Victoria, Tasmania, and New South Wales, spanning more than 45 years.

In the middle of all this he was appointed Director of Communications with the National Assembly of the Uniting Church, serving for nine years. And he has done a short stint as Acting Director, School of Continuing Education at the NSW Synod's Centre for Ministry, in North Parramatta.

Along the way he was Founder and National co-ordinator of The Network of Biblical Storytellers Australia/New Zealand (1990-96), was the Founding Director of The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought, Canberra (2002-09), and authored or edited seven books on progressive Christianity.

As part of his commitment to the progressive religion movements in Australia and New Zealand he was Chair of the Planning Team of Common Dreams Conference of Religious Progressives, Australia/South Pacific for eight years (2006-2013). An Associate of the Westar Institute, he was for three years (2005-08) a member of its Literacy & Liturgy Seminar. In 2004 he was made a Paul Harris Fellow by Rotary International through the Rotary Club of Canberra Woden.

An author/editor of seven books on progressive christianity, he and spouse Dylis live on the Central Coast of New South Wales (Australia). They have two married adult children: Brendan and Rowena, three grandchildren: Elsie, Romeo, and Lenna, and a 'grand-dog' called 'Alfie'.

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**JT,** Rex also tells us :

"I was a long-distance member of the Church of the Larger Fellowship Unitarian Universalist from 1968 to 1984. George Marshall was the minister. And my Exit Thesis from Theological College in 1971 included an analysis of the famous UU theologian, Henry Nelson Wieman

Iron bark, Wikipedia



(along with John Dewey and Alfred North Whitehead). So I have roots in UU for many years." 4/2/2017

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:-)

*Reminder:*

**AGM**

*will be*

*Sunday, 2nd April.*

*Please*

*Be there.*

:-)