



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship  
PO Box 1356, Lane Cove NSW 1595  
Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre  
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli  
(near Milsons Point Station)  
Tel: (02) 9428 2244

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

Volume 6, Issue 4

May, 2010

## Schedule of Services

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

<b>2 May ,</b>	Ginna Hastings:	<b>"The Gospel according to Elnor Shimfissle"</b>
<b>9 May,</b>	Candace Parks:	<b>" All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten".</b>
Author Robert Fulghum was a Unitarian minister for 22 years in the Seattle area. This is a sample of his Uncommon Thoughts on Common Things or what he refers to as his "stuff".		
<b>16 May,</b>	Geoff Matthews:	<b>"Are the projected population figures for Australia sustainable?"</b>
For this very topical subject, Geoff will provide different points of view from leaders with an interest in it, and then the fellowship will have the opportunity to discuss their views in an open forum.		
<b>23 May,</b>	Dr. Julian Droogan <b>Guest Speaker</b>	<b>'Working for nothing?'</b>
How true is it that Buddhists strive towards nothingness and self-extinguishing in their quest for enlightenment? Is it fair, in this case, to call Buddhism an atheistic or even nihilistic philosophy? In this discussion we will look at the classic Buddhist concept of Nirvana and no-self, and compare it with the mystical experiences of the Hindus, Gnostics and a mysterious text from the Nag Hammadi library.		
<b>30 May,</b>	Colin Whatmough	<b>"Three Ages of Christianity"</b>
The Age of Faith, the Age of Belief (from Constantine, about 387 AD, to the present) and the new era, the Age of Spirit.		
<b>6 June,</b>	Jan Tendys	<b>"The Doctrine of Original Sin—any relevance for today?"</b>
<b>13 June,</b>	Ross McLuckie	
<b>20 June ,</b>	Laurence Gormley	
<b>27 June,</b>	Janet Horton	<b>"The meaning of Meaning"</b>

# The Australian Religious Response to Climate Change

Jan Tendys

A new organisation on the Australian religious scene is "The Australian Religious Response to Climate Change".

ARRCC describe themselves this way: "a multifaith network committed to taking action on climate change. The religions of Australia have a shared sense of moral purpose on climate change. Each of our diverse traditions has a common concern for our world and a deep reverence for life. We strongly acknowledge the interdependent relationship between our welfare and that of the planet, and between social justice and ecological integrity. We recognise the threat posed to these by human-induced climate change. While celebrating the uniqueness of our different traditions, we stand together in working for a ecologically and socially sustainable future".

ARRCC's Mission is given as: "to galvanise faith-based responses to climate change in Australia, empowering faith communities to be beacons of faith-based environmental sustainability. We educate faith communities on issues relating to climate change. We equip them to lead by example, through taking practical actions such as reducing their energy consumption and switching to renewable energy. And we support them in advocating for public policies that will provide a sustainable future". <http://www.arrcc.org.au/>

Noting that the Catholic Church is heavily represented among the membership, one presumes that the ARRCC will not be making any uncomfortable links between the huge growth of our planet's population over the last 50 years and the problem of climate change. That there is such a link would seem indisputable since even the poorest people have some kind of ecological footprint – we all contribute to greenhouse gases. Obviously, the wealthiest contribute most.

Are Unitarians in a good position to spearhead a more realistic religious response to climate change?



# Book Reviews Needed

Jan Tendys

Read any good books lately? If so please write a review for Esprit (long or short). I'll lead the way:

## Tom Keneally : "An Angel in Australia" 2002

This novel has been described by other reviewers as "plot-driven". Personally, I am not adverse to a good helping of plot in a novel, but I would suggest the real interest in this book, if you pay careful attention, lies in character development and states of mind. It is about a priest in the Roman Catholic Church of forties Australia.

Father Darragh is very much an idealist and a messer. Is it possible for a priest to be too much an idealist? Certainly, it doesn't help for him to be a genius at making a mess of things in his interactions with parishioners whom he sees as needing his help.

He gradually comes to have some insight into his predicament, particularly as he struggles with the novel's strange and chilling villain.

The author intended to be a priest at one point in his life but anyone who expected "An Angel in Australia" to be about theology and loss of faith will be disappointed.

The time is at the height of Australia's fears of a Japanese invasion, a period which has received scant attention from Australia's literati. The ambivalence of Australian / American relations at the servicemen and civilians level is well depicted.

Father Darragh's idealistic messing is both humorous and alarming, but a good counterpoint to the lack of interest his superiors show to the marginal among their flock.



## Spirit of Life, 2nd verse

Spirit of Love, come unto me.  
Deep in my soul all the mystery of creation.  
Teach me to care, Peace let there be.  
Lead me to truth showing forth the paths of wisdom.

Roots hold me close; wings set me free;  
Spirit of Love, come to me, come to me.

## Altruism goes back further on the evolutionary tree than thought.

Adapted from the website of "EarthTimes" <http://www.earthtimes.org/>

In a remarkable display of altruism, West African forest chimpanzees take pity on orphan baby chimps and adopt them, according to a team of German researchers. In recent years, extended altruism towards unrelated group members has been proposed to be a unique characteristic of human societies. Support for this proposal came from experimental studies with captive chimpanzees.

But a team of researchers with the Department of Primatology at the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig now reports 18 cases of adoption of orphaned youngsters by group members in Tai forest chimpanzees. Half of these orphans were adopted by males and remarkably only one of these proved to be the father.

Such adoptions by adults can last for years and imply extensive care towards the orphans.

These observations reveal that, under the appropriate socio-ecological conditions, chimpanzees care for unrelated group members and that altruism is more extensive in wild populations than was suggested by captive studies.

"Adoption of orphans by adult males represented an important investment in the youngsters, as, minimally, males were seen to share food with them as well as wait for them and support them during social conflicts," the scientists wrote .....

"Fredy, the third ranking male of the East Group, adopted Victor, the son of Vanessa, who died from anthrax in late December 2008, and shared his nest with him every night, carried him on his back for all long travels, and shared the Coula nuts he opened from December 2008 to July 2009," the German scientists wrote.

"For example, on February 17, Fredy cracked 196 Coula nuts for two hours and shared pieces of 79 per cent of them. This gives a measure of the altruistic investment made in an unrelated infant," they added.

"These adoptions by adult males of orphans that are often not their own offspring plainly show that, contrary to earlier sweeping conclusions, chimpanzees are sensitive to the welfare of unrelated group members," the researchers concluded.

*Gives some hope for that big brained primate Homo sapiens*

~~~~~  
**Celebrating 50 years of pioneering research** (mainly on the Gombe chimps) and sharing an inspiring vision for our future, world-renowned primatologist and conservationist **Dr. Jane Goodall** renews her faith in nature and humanity during the "Gombe 50" anniversary.

### **From a recent interview:**

What advice would you offer aspiring conservationists in 2010?

**Dr. Goodall:** I would say 'not to give up and to get involved.' We need to step up to the challenge now.

A real focus of my life these past years has been the development of Jane Goodall's Roots & Shoots, the Institute's global environmental and humanitarian program for young people from preschool to college. We now have Roots & Shoots groups in more than in 120 countries \* and nearly 150,000 members.

'Roots make a firm foundation; shoots seem tiny but to reach to the sun can break through brick walls (the problems we face).' Working with individual young people is the program's commitment to all of us being able to make a difference, and Roots & Shoots has been so successful because the young people involved choose the projects and work together to develop solutions. They share problems, they share hopes, they share working through mistakes and together implement change. And Roots & Shoots is being shared by a generation of young people across the planet.

And there are all kinds of wonderful conservation groups across the globe.

*\*Including Australia*

Jane's new book, [\*Hope for Animals and Their World\*](#),

# **“Between the Monster and the Saint”**

**By Richard Holloway.**

**Mary Warnock**

It is the human condition to be divided. As a species, we are capable of appalling cruelty: we deliberately degrade people, turning them into mere things, objects of our own greed, lust and hunger for domination. But we are also capable of sympathy, forgiveness, pity and gratitude. In his latest book, Richard Holloway brilliantly illuminates the divided spirit of man, drawing not only on his own wisdom, but on the insights of numerous writers and philosophers, as well as the words of the King James Bible. This is an essentially existentialist exercise, designed to make us see and feel what it is to be human.

**In this adventure of self-understanding, myth plays a crucial role. And Holloway's book can be read as an essay on the nature of myth. A myth, he writes, is 'a narrative that carries existential truth'. It is the work of human imagination, providing continuing insight, offering a structure that can be interpreted time and again.**

The ambiguity of the concept of myth lies in its relation to belief. Belief itself is an equivocal concept. JRR Tolkien referred to his invention of The Lord of the Rings as the creation of a 'true myth' - and to accept the need we have for myth as well as science is to allow a more complex notion of truth than mere correspondence to empirical facts. We all know that works of fiction, imaginative constructions, can be true, in that they can open our eyes to the truth about life. Whether we believe the literal truth of the story becomes irrelevant. So it is with the great religious myth of the Fall and Redemption, the peccata mundi that constitute the human predicament, but by which there is hope, however flickering, that we may not be overwhelmed.

Holloway is in no doubt that Christianity, like other great religions, is a construction of human imagination, designed to cast light on the human condition. Perhaps following his own personal transition from professional member of the church (he was Bishop of Ed-

inburgh) to retirement, he draws a distinction between 'strong' and 'weak' religious belief. **Strong religion is dogmatic, literal and demanding of its adherents. It cannot maintain itself without condemnation of all other forms of belief. It is the kind of religion denounced by the fierce neo-atheism that is currently in fashion. Weak religion, on the other hand, is adaptive. It can take on and embrace innovations whether scientific, historical or social, and live comfortably with the idea of 'true myth'. It embraces the idea of a God not as a source of commands and punishments, but as suffering in the suffering of humanity.**

From this religion it is a step to where Holloway seems to now find himself, with 'after-religion'. Here, religion is not denounced, but understood, and even loved, as part of a long, fruitful imaginative tradition. For the 'after-religious', religion 'is a great work of art' on which they have no inclination to turn their back, though they would hesitate to call themselves believers. The line between these two groups is hazy and it is a great merit of Holloway's book to identify both.

Holloway is not the first to realise that the human condition is one of internal division. In The Republic, Plato told the story of Leonidas who, passing a pile of corpses, was determined not to look at them, but failed in his resolution and cried angrily to his eyes: 'There you are, curse you. A lovely sight! Have a good look.' His anger shows that his divided soul is capable of shame. I believe, as Aristotle did, that shame is at the root of morality. If a child is not taught to feel that he has done something to be ashamed of, he will lack the very concept of the moral.

Richard Holloway identifies two extremes in human nature - the brutal and the saintly. His saints are very few. They are holy fools - Dostoevsky's Prince Myshkin, Jesus of Nazareth, described by Nietzsche as an idiot. Such figures do perhaps offer the hope that we need not all succumb to dogmatism or violent brutality, even if refusing to do so leads to our own death. But I believe that there is greater cause for hope in the lives of quite ordinary people. These are the people who have learnt that things tend to go badly. **But they may also learn that things improve if they overcome the temptation to**

**arrogance, greed and indifference.** The Christian myth is one within which temptation plays a crucial role. Education can teach children that they are subject to temptation, but that they have it in them, being human, to overcome it, if they really want to. They can learn, as Holloway suggests we should, to sympathise and to pity. All of us can begin to do this, not just the saints, and herein lies the hope of redemption.

The Observer, Sunday 31 August 2008

~~~~~  
**HELL EXPLAINED BY  
CHEMISTRY STUDENT**

The following is an actual question given on University of Washington chemistry mid term.

The answer by one student was so 'profound' that the professor shared it with colleagues, via the Internet, which is, of course, why we now have the pleasure of enjoying it as well :

Bonus Question: Is Hell exothermic (gives off heat) or endothermic (absorbs heat)?

Most of the students wrote proofs of their beliefs using Boyle's Law (gas cools when it expands and heats when it is compressed) or some variant.

One student, however, wrote the following:

First, we need to know how the mass of Hell is changing in time. So we need to know the rate at which souls are moving into Hell and the rate at which they are leaving. I think that we can safely assume that once a soul gets to Hell, it will not leave. Therefore, no souls are leaving. As for how many souls are entering Hell, let's look at the different religions that exist in the world today.

Most of these religions state that if you are not a member of their religion, you will go to Hell. Since there is more than one of these religions and since people do not belong to more than one religion, we can project that all souls go to Hell. With birth and death rates as they are, we can expect the number of souls in Hell to increase exponentially. Now, we look at the rate of change of the volume in Hell because Boyle's Law states that in order for the temperature and pressure in Hell to stay the same, the volume of Hell has to expand proportionately as souls are added.

This gives two possibilities:

1. If Hell is expanding at a slower rate than the rate at which souls enter Hell, then the temperature and pressure in Hell will increase until all Hell breaks loose.

2. If Hell is expanding at a rate faster than the increase of souls in Hell, then the temperature and pressure will drop until Hell freezes over..

So which is it?

If we accept the postulate given to me by Teresa during my Freshman year that, 'It will be a cold day in Hell before I sleep with you,' and take into account the fact that I slept with her last night, then number two must be true, and thus I am sure that Hell is exothermic and has already frozen over. The corollary of this theory is that since Hell has frozen over, it follows that it is not accepting any more souls and is therefore, extinct.....leaving only Heaven, thereby proving the existence of a divine being which explains why, last night, Teresa kept shouting 'Oh my God.'

THIS STUDENT RECEIVED AN A+.

**Contributed by Candace Parks.**  
~~~~~

**Marcus J. Borg**

is Canon Theologian at Trinity Episcopal Cathedral in Portland, Oregon. Internationally known in both academic and church circles as a biblical and Jesus scholar, he was Hundere Chair of Religion and Culture in the Philosophy Department at Oregon State University until his retirement in 2007.

He says on his website:

"I am a committed Christian and a complete agnostic about the afterlife. I use "agnostic" in its precise sense: one who does not know. Moreover, I know that I cannot resolve "not knowing" by "believing" – whatever we believe about an afterlife has nothing to do with whether there is one or what it is like.

There is more to say. I think that conventional Christianity's emphasis on the afterlife for many centuries is one of its negative features."

He believes we "die into God".

See <http://www.marcusjborg.com/>

# Marcus Borg and Liberal Christianity

Colin Whatmough

## Notes for address given on 21 March 2010 - for contemplation and discussion.

1. The central religious question in modern Western culture is -

“Is there a More?” Is God real?

What accounts for the decline in the importance of God in much of Western culture? Only 9% of Australians regularly attend churches.

2. In a religious world view there is a “More”. In addition to the visible world of our ordinary experience and as disclosed by science, there is a “More” - a non material extra dimension of reality - named as God, Spirit, the sacred, Yahwah, the Tao, Brahman, Allah etc

3. In a nonreligious world there is no “More”. Because this is the dominant world view in modern Western culture, it is often called the modern worldview.

4. For many Christians, God is viewed as a supernatural being “out there” who created a universe from which God is normally absent. This is a serious distortion of the meaning of the word “God”.

5. Of course, nobody can demonstrate objectively or prove the reality of God. However, throughout history and across cultures people have had experiences that seem to them to be experiences of the sacred.

6. Some contemporary physicists have said that the most fundamental processes of the universe occur outside of space and time. They are now contemplating the phenomena of multiple universes!

This statement stretches the modern world view which affirms only the space time world of matter and energy.

But, of course, such statements do not prove the reality of God.

Religion, and maybe post modern science alike, point to a stupendous “More”.

7. In the history of Christianity, there are two

primary ways of thinking about God and the God-world relationship ie ‘supernatural’ theism and ‘panentheism’.

These two concepts of God run side by side throughout the history of Abrahamic religions - Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

8. Supernatural Theism - imagines God as a person-like being.

God is ‘up in heaven’, ‘out there’ beyond the universe.

Supernatural theists affirm that God continues to intervene to this day, especially in response to prayer.

9. Panentheism (pan: everything; en: in; theism: God) imagines God as ‘the encompassing Spirit’ in whom everything that is - is.

The universe is not separate from God, but in God.

Its clearest compact expression is attributed to Paul in the Book of Acts (17:28) where God is the one in whom “we live and move and have our being”. God is not “out there”, but “right here”.

10. Rather than speaking of divine intervention, panentheism speaks of divine intention and divine interaction - a presence beneath and within our everyday lives.

11. Panentheism sees the notion of divine intervention as having an insuperable difficulty - if God sometimes intervenes, how does one account for non interventions? To suppose that God intervenes implies that God does so for some, but not for others.

12. Many Christians throughout its history have advocated Panentheist concepts. Meister Eckhart (1260-1327), a Dominican priest, taught that the soul is a spark of God to be nourished.

The Spiritual Franciscans taught that the Spirit could be found in nature. The theologian Paul Tillich in the 1930’s - 1940’s urged his readers to discover that spirit which calls people into life and acknowledge it as a manifestation of the divine - God was the infinite centre of life.

Bishop John Spong built on the ideas of Tillich by advocating that God is the inescapable depth and centre of all that is - the very Ground of Being itself.

## UP

You wake up filled with dread.  
There seems no reason for it.  
Morning light sifts through the window,  
there is birdsong,  
you can't get out of bed.

It's something about the crumpled sheets  
hanging over the edge like jungle  
foliage, the terry slippers gaping  
their dark pink mouths for your feet,  
the unseen breakfast--some of it  
in the refrigerator you do not dare  
to open--you do not dare to eat.

What prevents you? The future. The future  
tense,  
immense as outer space.  
You could get lost there.

No. Nothing so simple. The past, its destiny  
and drowned events pressing you down,  
like sea water, like gelatine  
filling your lungs instead of air.

Forget that and let's get up.  
Try moving your arm.  
Try moving your head.  
Pretend the house is on fire  
and you must run or burn.  
No, that one's useless.  
It's never worked before.

Where is it coming from, this echo,  
this huge No that surrounds you,  
silent as the folds of the yellow  
curtains, mute as the cheerful

Mexican bowl with its cargo  
of mummified flowers?  
(You chose the colours of the sun,  
not the dried neutrals of shadow.  
God knows you've tried.)

Now here's a good one:  
You're lying on your deathbed.  
You have one hour to live.  
Who is it, exactly, you have needed  
all these years to forgive?

~ Margaret Atwood ~

(Morning in the Burned House)

## Straight Talk From Fox

Listen says fox it is music to run  
over the hills to lick  
dew from the leaves to nose along  
the edges of the ponds to smell the fat  
ducks in their bright feathers but  
far out, safe in their rafts of  
sleep. It is like  
music to visit the orchard, to find  
the vole sucking the sweet of the apple, or  
the  
rabbit with his fast-beating heart. Death itself  
is a music. Nobody has ever come close to  
writing it down, awake or in a dream. It can-  
not  
be told. It is flesh and bones  
changing shape and with good cause, mercy  
is a little child beside such an invention. It is  
music to wander the black back roads  
outside of town no one awake or wondering  
if anything miraculous is ever going to  
happen, totally dumb to the fact of every  
moment's miracle. Don't think I haven't  
peeked into windows. I see you in all your  
seasons  
making love, arguing, talking about God  
as if he were an idea instead of the grass,  
instead of the stars, the rabbit caught  
in one good teeth-whacking hit and brought  
home to the den. What I am, and I know it, is  
responsible, joyful, thankful. I would not  
give my life for a thousand of yours.

~ Mary Oliver ~

(Red Bird)

~~~~~

## Love Letters

Every day, priests minutely examine the Law  
And endlessly chant complicated sutras.  
Before doing that, though, they should learn  
How to read the love letters sent by the wind  
and rain, the snow and moon.

~ Ikkyu ~

(Ikkyu and the Crazy Cloud Anthology, trans.  
by Sonya Arutzen)

# Jottings from the Pews

Helen Whatmough

Sunday lunch after last weeks meeting was very successful; we will try a once a month lunch - each third Sunday.

Barbara Gray is progressing well after a fall which caused a broken knee cap.

~~~~~

## Mark Twain on Angels

They are always on deck when there is a miracle to the fore -- so as to get up in the picture, perhaps. Angels are as fond of that as a fire company; look at the old masters.- A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court

*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 publication.*

### Notice

**DEADLINE** for copy for the next issue of Esprit is  
LAST SUNDAY OF THE MONTH

Please be sure Jan has your WRITTEN items by this date. Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to [jtendys@optusnet.com.au](mailto:jtendys@optusnet.com.au)

Hardcopy (or electronic media) submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:

Spirit of Life  
PO Box 1356  
LANE COVE NSW 1595  
Please note:

### **Do you have a topic of a spiritual 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.

**Just let Candace know what you would like to speak about and when you are available and we will fit you into the schedule.**

Also, please feel free to give us your feedback on any of the services. This is the best way to ensure the services address the needs of the congregation.

### **Would you care to join us?**

**Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter**

If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-