



Schedule of Services

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

3 November Peter Berry "The Life and Philosophy of Henry David Thoreau."

Henry David Thoreau (1817 – 1862) was a leading exponent of the theological school known as transcendentalism, important in the development of Unitarianism. He was also an author, poet, philosopher, abolitionist, naturalist, tax resister, development critic, surveyor and historian.

10 November Morandir Armson "Healing the Soul."

At the present time, "soul-healing therapy" is very popular. It is difficult to determine what these therapists are selling, as very few of them provide a reasonable definition of what they mean by "soul". However it is clear that many of us feel deep wounds in the core of our being. We feel somehow 'fractured' in our experience of our selves. So working on healing ourselves at a fundamental, deep level, so we can experience ourselves as a whole being seems to have merit. This talk will examine the idea of "soul-healing therapy" and provide some answers as to its utility.

17 November Rev. Geoff Usher "The Best Daily Dozen."

There's not enough hugging going on in this world. Physical contact is important, to communicate feelings of warmth, friendship, support, acceptance.

24 November Laurence Gormley "The Gift of Ordinairness."

A paen to the small things in everyday life. It's important sometimes to forget the "big things", the important things, and revere the day to day events.

1 December Martin Horlacher "Fiction and Faith: Three Perspectives on Jesus."

One of the most powerful mediums in the world is the art of fiction, and, over the years, fictional works about the life and teachings of Jesus Christ have been many and varied. This talk will examine three such fictional depictions from popular culture - namely, those versions as put forward in print and on screen by Mel Gibson, Jose Saramago and Nikos Kazantzakis / Martin Scorsese - and their interpretations of and impact upon one of the best-known stories in history.

15 December Members' contributions (readings, poems, musical items, etc)

Party food following !

A Christmas tradition: Rev. Geoff Usher will be doing his public reading of Charles Dicken's "A Christmas Carol" on Friday 6 December, 2013, at 12 noon in Pitt Street Uniting Church, 264 Pitt Street, Sydney. Admission is free; there will be a collection for the "Christmas Bowl" charity.

Centre for Progressive Religious Thought Freedom to Explore

Rev. Eric Stevenson

“In the year 2000 a number of people in a Uniting Church congregation in Sydney formed a group which came together with the common need to share their stories involving their current life crises. The group, to which I belong, has grown into an association which bears the above name and which in my opinion, has a great potential for a synergistic relationship with our Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship”. Eric Stevenson.

The main motivation for the members coming together was that they had found their experience of traditional church had not been able to provide them with a satisfactory support/belief system in their trouble. e.g. death of a partner by suicide, divorce and re-partnering, a son convicted of a criminal offence, pontification and rejection by authority figures in their former churches regarding “the way of salvation”. In the beginning the group was joined by members from charismatic and Roman Catholic backgrounds. An early member came from a referral by a Jewish marriage counsellor who saw the need of her client for such a group. We moved into the home of one of the church members and began to meet weekly.

In 2004 the group arranged a regional gathering of interested persons from all over Sydney. This was done with a view to linking with an organisation being hosted by the Uniting Church at St James in Canberra. Rev Professor Lloyd Geering was the guest speaker at this gathering and he launched the group into its presently constituted formation as the Sydney chapter of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought.

The group grew and moved to a larger house of one of the members. “The Basement” at 22 Badajoz Road Ryde was opened on December 16, 2006. As numbers increased, a second discussion group had been formed in May, 2005. With the re-constitution of the group came the challenge to state our aims

and objectives. We borrowed from the wording of the CPRT(Canberra) constitution and released our present statement:

The Aim of the Centre is to be a forum where ideas about progressive religion and spirituality can be explored in a safe and non-judgemental place by those who have not been actively involved in organised religion or who have found it unsatisfactory.

**The objectives of the Centre are to:
Build a network of support for those who seek to discover and live by a progressive faith, sharing ideas and pursuing questions and answers.**

Create an open and welcoming community that respects the spirituality of all participants, and encourages authentic interfaith engagement.

Promote progressive religious thought as an agent of change and renewal in faith communities and society.

Link with other groups and centres of progressive religious thought.

Those affiliated with the group through the internet and through our continuing discussion groups and monthly newsletter have increased. Of the approximately 250 names registered on our contact list there are people from a range of differing religious and cultural backgrounds. CPRT(Sydney) has now developed into a group which is less crisis oriented and more anticipatory and proactive— pushing the boundaries of traditional religion in order to cope with ALL of life. The central way of living out the vision of our aims and objectives is to offer support to individuals and groups who are in pursuit of life’s meaning beyond the limits of formal religion, affirming that it is not only permitted, but expected of our members that they be free to question and explore the foregoing.

In January 2010 the Planning Committee called for suggestions regarding a change of name to match our endeavours in a wider geographical area. As a result, the word Sydney was dropped and replaced with the more descriptive sub- title, “Freedom to Explore”.

The discussion group members are the dynamic core of the organisation. Together

with corresponding members via our Newsletter they bring an approach to theological thinking from the grass roots. This has supplemented our learning from contributions of the leading progressive theologians, philosophers and scientists of our time. It has been achieved by studying their writings, by sponsoring regional conferences of our own and by co-operating with a wider network of progressive religious groups for such gatherings.

Invited guests have included Lloyd Geering, Michael Morwood, Greg Jenks, Laurie Welbourne, Val Webb, Gretta Vosper, Noel Preston, Alan Saunders, Jan Tendys, Ian Mavor, Rex Hunt, Ian Burston, Margaret Mayman, Dom Crossan together with other scholars participating in the Common Dreams series in Sydney, Melbourne and Canberra. These have included Jack Spong, Brandon Scott, Marcus Borg and Bruce Sanguin (the two latter at the third Common Dreams Conference in Canberra in September this year.

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**The Discussion Groups** share a meal on the Tuesday at 12.30 and on the Wednesday at 7.00 pm in the Basement, 22 Badajoz Road, Ryde, entrance via right hand side pathway. Directions: - Take the 506 bus from Circular Quay to Macquarie Centre and East Ryde and alight at the first stop in Badajoz Road. On Tuesdays only it is possible to take the same bus route in the opposite direction from Macquarie Place Railway Station to the second last stop in Badajoz Road. Please contact Eric Stevenson on (02) 9888 5361 or 0405 758 116 for more details.

**Visitors welcome!**

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The following articles have been taken from the October 2013 newsletter of CPRT—Freedom to Explore.

Do you believe it is possible for persons to be reincarnated?

This question was asked of Jack Spong who replied in his weekly Newsletter last month "Prior to writing my book on Eternal Life (Eternal Life: A New Vision-Beyond Religion,

Beyond Theism, Beyond Heaven and Hell), I made an intensive study of reincarnation. I came out of that study completely agnostic about that question. It seems to me that reincarnation plays the same role in Eastern religious thought that heaven and hell play in Western religious thought. I feel its primary function is to control life here and now. Instead of reward and punishment being meted out in some place after life like heaven and hell, it is meted out in the next incarnation. Sinful people come back as lower caste people or sometimes even as animals. I am not interested in playing the game of judgment. I found no evidence that supports the idea of reincarnation and most of the evidence cited is anecdotal and, to my mind, bogus. It is more a human hope than a human reality. So put me down in the negative column or at least the unconvinced column. I would rather try to master the meaning of the life I have than to speculate about some future or past reincarnation."

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### **A Founding Member's Perspective on COMMON DREAMS 4 in 2016**

Our friend Greg Jenks has been a member of the planning team for the first three CD gatherings in Sydney in 2007, Melbourne in 2010 and Canberra in 2013. He has written to his Queensland group about CD4 in Brisbane and on how Common Dreams intersects with Progressive Christianity. He writes,

"Some of us - myself included - tend to approach CD as progressive Christians (or maybe Christian progressives, I suspect the latter in my case), but others in this movement are very clear that they have no interest in the present and future forms of Christianity. They may be progressive Jews, progressive Muslims, progressive Humanists, or just post-Christian progressives. This is true, as I understand it, for many Sea of Faith members as well as for the members of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought in Sydney.

"However that may be, Common Dreams is not about saving/renewing Christianity or any of its present denominational expressions.

Those are perfectly valid goals for people to pursue, but they are not the agenda of the Common Dreams movement.

"I welcome the development of both denominational and ecumenical progressive Christian movements....I hope we can form an alliance between these emerging progressive Christian organisations/networks, and other progressive religious organisations (such as Sea of Faith) so we can jointly sponsor the CD4 event in Brisbane. Of course, I also hope we can do that in a way that honours and welcomes the contributions of religious progressives who are not in any sense "Christian."

"As for Common Dreams, my understanding is that it is intended to be an interfaith and ecumenical project to promote, protect and expand the role of reasonable and tolerant religion in the public space. As such, I have an investment in the success of Common Dreams as a Christian progressive and also as a citizen. The significance of "Common Dreams" as a name for this movement is its potential to invite us beyond differences derived from culture, ethnicity and religion, and into a shared space where we have common dreams for a better future.

"The name was adopted when we began planning for the first CD event in Sydney just a couple of weeks after the Cronulla race riots. Those origins need not define or constrain our future directions, but they may help to explain how we got to where we are now. We can doubtless do better at engaging religious progressives from traditions other than Christianity, and we can certainly do better in engaging with the common dreams of younger Australians. I hope we can keep both these objectives in clear view as we plan for the 2016 CD4 event...."

Peace and hope,

Greg Jenks

## Progressive interfaith

In June a Dr Franklin Woo of California wrote to Jack Spong in appreciation for Jack's inspiring writing. While the inter-faith movement generally remains uncritical of the various religions, Dr. Woo opens the door to what might be described as Progressive Inter-Faith. The letter which Jack has published out of gratitude in his Weekly Newsletter gives a rare insight into a progressive convergence between Eastern religions and progressive Christianity. CPRT newsletter Ed.

Dr. Woo writes: "I have been following your work for many years... I found your book [A New Christianity for a New World](#) most helpful, as if tailor made to fit my needs. Before retirement, I had essentially two roles: one of chaplain and lecturer in religion at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (1965-1976) and director of the Chinese Program, National Churches of Christ in the USA (1976-1993). Experiences in these two roles have sealed my definition as a bi-cultural person with dual belongings in value systems of both Chinese traditions and Christianity...

"In Hong Kong and Asia, I learned so much about Chinese and East Asian traditions, especially from students, colleagues and other faculty members. I was very much attracted to the best in the Confucian tradition, especially "Neo-Confucianism," after classical Confucianism had interacted for centuries with native Daoism and Indic Buddhism to become a more inclusive system that embodies nature and the cosmos. While in New York, I attended monthly Neo-Confucian seminars at Columbia University, where professors from colleges and universities of the Atlantic seaboard did rigorous exegesis of ancient texts, the envy of Christian scholars.

"In retirement I still worship regularly with my wife in a local Presbyterian congregation for the sake of discipline and community, although all of my work has been in ecumenical contexts. I have found Christian worship, however, to be essentially boring banality. Its confession and absolution are too facile, not to mention that my sins are much more sophisticated than what the superficiality of the

confession texts state. Maybe this is all as you mentioned in your book, “familiarity breeds contempt.” I actually resonated well with your quote of Bonhoeffer in the Preface, especially “Before God and with God we live without God.”

“Your liberating of Christianity from theism has enabled faith for me to converge more directly with so much in the Chinese and East Asian traditions. My first encounter with ridding the supernatural from Christianity was from David Ray Griffin’s book: Re-enchantment without Supernaturalism: A Process Philosophy of Religion (Cornell University Press, 2001). His rigorous and specific critique really did it for me. “Your intellectual honesty (a la John A. T. Robinson) resonates well with the best in Neo-Confucian fundamentalism, which is the fundamental commitment to the human discourse. Your beginning with the dawn of humanity’s consciousness and the struggle for survival reminded me of Robert N. Bellah’s Religion in Human Evolution: From the Paleolithic to the Axial Age (Harvard 2011), an interreligious work which took Bellah 15 years to write after retirement. The 746 pages appear to be his reading notes to himself.

“Your stating that the description of religious experience can never encompass the entirety of that experience resonates well with the Daoist claim that all articulations of experience, if absolutized, can be “an idolatry of words.”

**“Your Christianity of expansion into larger and larger realms of exclusivity resonates with the best of the Confucian paradigm of each person being a center of relationship from family, to community, to society, to nation, to world, to the cosmos (ping tian xia) “all under heaven.”**

**“Your integrating good and evil is likened to the Daoist yin-yang, where everything in life is seen as interconnected. There is no facile isolating of that which is “evil,” since every person is a combination of many facets of personhood. There is little dichotomy in Daoism; life and death are one.**

“Your idea of giving away self and love resonates well with Buddhist non-attachment to things, to loved ones, to life, even one’s own. It

is the art of letting go in both Christian and Buddhist kenosis, though the latter has made it a vocation. Your emphasis on the imperative of community is also central to Confucianism where to be human requires at least two; no-one is an atomistic individual.

“In retirement I have been trying to stay intellectually alive by reviewing books for an academic journal, “China Review International”, Center for Chinese Studies, University of Hawaii. To date they have published close to 70 of my reviews since 1995. Thank you for answering one of my most fundamental questions by demythologizing the notion of a theist parent/fixer, alleviating us of all responsibility.” June 2013

From CPRT : Please Note: - The views expressed in our Newsletters are not necessarily the views of CPRT, its members and contributors.

With the aim of providing the opportunity of learning what other people are saying we include articles covering a wide range of topics so everyone can make their own mind up about them.

## Ending Climate Inaction

So here we are again. The scientists are more certain than ever that climate change is happening. The skeptics and alarmists are as loud as ever, dividing us and distracting the world from any sensible discussion about climate change. And federal and international policy making is ground to a halt.

So how can we get unstuck, and break this cycle of inaction?

### **Getting Unstuck**

One reason we’re so stuck is that most of the climate solutions being proposed are beyond the capabilities and vision of national political leadership.

We’re talking about the wholesale transformation of the world’s economy and energy systems through negotiated carbon prices, new tax regimes, international cap-and-trade agreements, and a worldwide shift towards new technologies. Such sweeping measures — which face stiff opposition from certain industries and would

require political will and cooperation not seen for decades — are, sadly, very likely to fail right now. Let's face it: Politicians in Washington can't even pass a routine budget bill, and the United Nations can't pass a resolution condemning Syria for gassing its own civilians. If national and international leaders can't take care of basic matters of state, then what hope do we have that they can address a complex global problem, requiring unprecedented cooperation and decades of concerted effort?

And hoping for a quick turnaround isn't likely to work. Frankly, we cannot afford to waste more time in a state of denial, saying that maybe this time our national leaders will wake up and take the problem seriously. We need to look for leadership and solutions elsewhere.

More importantly, we need to match our climate solutions to situations where leadership is still effective. We need to find targeted, strategic opportunities to reduce emissions, matching solutions to effective leadership.

But just where are those targeted opportunities?

### **Finding Planet Levers**

In the search for effective climate solutions, we need to look for what I call "planet levers": Places where relatively focused efforts, targeted the right way, can translate into big outcomes. Just like a real lever, the trick is to apply the right amount of force in just the right place, with little opposition.

It's pretty simple: Almost everybody uses (or wants to use) fossil fuels, but many fewer people clear tropical forests, grow a particular crop or manufacture exotic chemicals.

In the search for planet levers to address climate change, we should look for ways to significantly cut emissions that don't require grand policy solutions, such as carbon taxes or global cap-and-trade schemes, or the approval of the U.S. Congress or the United Nations. We need practical solutions to substantially cut emissions that work with a handful of nimble actors — including a few key nations, states, cities and companies — to get started.

Toward that end, focusing on energy effi-

ciency, advanced energy research and deploying much more renewable energy, especially through cities and states, makes a lot of sense right now. **No one can seriously be opposed to energy efficiency measures. Likewise, investing in long-term energy technology gains is likely to pay off handsomely. And deploying more renewables makes sense in many situations — at least as a part of the overall energy mix. Plus most cities, and at least some states, still have functioning governments that can make long-term decisions about their energy futures.** For the moment, that's where I think many of the best levers to address climate change in the U.S. are going to be. And many NGOs and foundations that focus on climate change are shifting their strategies accordingly.

Focusing on cities presents a particularly good set of levers to address climate change. Cities represent a nexus point of critical infrastructure — for electricity, communications, heating and cooling, and transportation — that are already in desperate need of improvement, and shifting them toward low-carbon "climate smart" technologies is a natural progression. Done right, most of these investments would improve the health, economic vitality, efficiency and livability of cities. Most important, most cities largely avoid the partisan gridlock of our national (and some state) governments, making them an excellent place for making progress.

We also need to look beyond the energy sector for climate solutions. Yes, roughly 60 to 65 percent of the world's greenhouse gas emissions stem from burning fossil fuels. But that means the other 35 to 40 percent of our greenhouse gas emissions come from other activities, which presents enormous opportunities for alternative climate actions. For the most part, these opportunities have been overlooked.

**Most of non-energy emissions stem from land use** (especially deforestation in the tropics), agricultural practices (especially the release of methane from cattle production and rice fields, and the release of nitrous oxide from heavily fertilized fields), emissions from landfills and wastewater, and some

exotic industrial and chemical processes. Another potentially important greenhouse warming agent (and an immediate health concern) is “black carbon,” or soot, which comes mainly from burning dirty biomass fuels in developing countries.

**Recent studies show that deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon dropped by roughly 75 percent in the last five years. ... This was a planet lever that worked.**

One of the most interesting things about these non-energy emissions is that they tend to be tightly focused within particular sectors of the global economy, often linked to just a handful of countries, industries and commodities. Unlike energy emissions, these emissions are produced by relatively small parts of society. It’s pretty simple: Almost everybody uses (or wants to use) fossil fuels, but many fewer people clear tropical forests, grow a particular crop or manufacture exotic chemicals. And changes by just a few corporations, nonprofits and countries can make a huge difference in these emissions.

**With that in mind, consider the following planet levers to address climate change:**

**Tropical Deforestation.** Tropical deforestation releases roughly 10 to 17 percent of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, depending on which study you read. That’s roughly comparable to the entire global transportation sector — including every car, truck, bus, plane and ship in the world — which emits roughly 15 percent.

Between 2000 and 2010 nearly half of all deforestation emissions were likely coming from just two countries: Brazil and Indonesia. And within those two countries, most of their deforestation emissions were linked to only four commodities — beef and soybeans in Brazil, and palm oil and timber in Indonesia. That’s amazing: Deforestation emissions from only two countries and four commodities are comparable to a major share of the world’s transportation emissions!

And that means it’s possible to do something about these emissions relatively quickly. In fact, Brazil has dramatically cut its deforestation rates, and associated greenhouse gas

emissions, in the past few years. Recent studies show that deforestation rates in the Brazilian Amazon dropped by roughly 75 percent in the past five years, thanks to industry efforts to curb deforestation and grow crops elsewhere, widespread consumer pressure to produce deforestation-free agricultural products, and better enforcement of existing forest laws. This was a planet lever that worked. Now more attention needs to be focused on deforestation in Indonesia, and global palm oil and timber markets.

**Agricultural Emissions.** Methane emissions from agriculture are also tightly connected to just a few commodities and a few key regions. According to the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization, roughly 75 percent of agricultural methane emissions come from livestock, and about 20 percent from rice fields. And roughly half of all of the rice emissions come from China and India alone. This presents tremendous opportunities to reduce emissions through targeted changes in agricultural policy and practice, and present great opportunities for China and India to lower their emissions while still growing their economy.

Likewise, nitrous oxide emissions from agriculture mainly occur in a few crops and a few concentrated regions. Current research suggests that the lion’s share of these emissions come from just a few countries (mostly China, India, the U.S. and parts of Western Europe) and from just a few large commodity crops (including corn, wheat, rice and a few others). Changes in fertilizer practices in a few crops and a few countries could make a huge difference, not only to climate change, but also to water quality, air quality and human health. Cooperative efforts focused on a few targeted commodities and countries (especially China, India and the U.S.) could make great progress here.

“Minor” Greenhouse Agents. Similarly, several other, lesser known greenhouse warming agents, including hydrofluorocarbons, chlorofluorocarbons, SF<sub>6</sub> and black carbon, are mostly produced in concentrated sectors of the economy, often in just a few locations. (For example, HFCs are considered “super greenhouse gases,” and are used in refrigeration)

eration and cooling systems, and some other industrial applications.) All of these “minor” greenhouse agents represent strategic opportunities to tackle climate change right now, with targeted efforts in a few countries and a few industries. In fact, the White House has been quietly working with China, India and the European Union on reducing emissions of several of these gases, including HFCs. While these gases are relatively small contributors to climate change, phasing them out is achievable in the near term.

### **Not Easy, But Possible**

Climate solutions based on these planet levers could dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions with pragmatic, targeted actions that move beyond old debates and the current political paralysis. None of them requires the U.S. Congress or all 193 members of the U.N. to make a decision. They don't require a wholesale transformation of the entire global economy. They won't encounter the full-fledged resistance of the fossil fuel industry. Instead, they focus on three or four regions at a time, with perhaps a handful of industries working in cooperation with nonprofit groups and local governments, to make tremendous progress on targeted emissions reduction. And most of these solutions would pay tremendous economic and health benefits that go far beyond their impact on climate change.....

.....Of course, this doesn't mean that efforts to change national and international carbon and energy policy — whether through a cap-and-trade scheme, a carbon tax or massive investments in renewable energy — is a total waste of time. Not at all. It just means that these policy levers are largely stuck at the moment, and we need to start making progress in lowering emissions, wherever and whenever we can, right now. Ultimately, we will still need big changes in national and international energy policy and technology, and I wholeheartedly support efforts to accomplish that. But, in the meantime, we need to diversify our approach, get more strategic and put something in the win column.

***The above is part of an article “Breaking the Cycle of Climate Inaction” by Dr Jonathan Foley (twitter: @GlobalEcoGuy) Director, Institute on the Environment, University of Minnesota. (Emphases by Esprit editor) These views are Dr Foley’s own, and do not reflect those of the University of Minnesota or any other organization. To read more go to <http://ensia.com/voices/breaking-the-cycle-of-climate-inaction/>***

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

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

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**