



Schedule of Services

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

4 December Guest speakers, Rev. Dr. Tom Plaizier and Mrs Bev Plaizier B.Ed., Comm. , will give some insight into the "Common Dreams Conference " which they attended in Brisbane recently.

Tom will highlight some of the books mentioned by the speakers, and Bev will comment about the Unitarian input to the programme.

It also happens to be Tom's birthday that day, so we intend to take them out to lunch afterwards. If you have not already done so, contact Jan (see back page) if you want to join us.

11 December No service owing to the Kirribilli Markets.

18 December End of year party. If you're coming, please bring a plate of party food to share and a reading, poem, song or whatever to share also (the theme may be to do with Christmas but this isn't mandatory).

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**From blog of John Menadue,  
senior public servant under both Gough Whitlam and Malcolm Fraser :**



*Rohingias, not as lucky as the Vietnamese .*

*I think Malcolm Fraser was probably, together with Ben Chifley – at least in the post-war period – the most successful prime minister in managing refugees and migration into Australia. The contribution that Malcolm Fraser made has strengthened this country. It broke the back of 'White Australia'. Including family reunion, we brought 250,000 Indo-Chinese to Australia. It was a great success story. But every migration program, every refugee program has its problems from time to time. Malcolm Fraser was aware of that. And in the department I was with him for three years. We took action to ensure that the integrity of the migration and refugee programs were ensured. That meant coming down like a ton of bricks where criminality or malpractice occurred.*

## Food for Thought An Email conversation

*Note from the editor: I have decided to keep this as an email conversation. It is inspired by Astronomist David A Weintraub's book: Religions and Extraterrestrial Life: How Will We Deal With It? Some omissions.*

From **Eric**  
To: Jan

This is the reference which I spoke about. You may care to quote from David Weintraub's book. which has some entertaining challenges to the established religions. I felt it had particular application to our Fellowship in view of the fact that we go by the name, Spirit of Life and also because of a number of our principles.

Does principle number one include the worth and dignity of an ET person? Do we need to redefine human relations in principle number two if our endeavours to establish contact with ET's are successful.? If society at large becomes interplanetary, how will this affect principle number five? Should we extend our environmental concerns for and our membership of a web of existence which includes ET land as in principle number seven?

Does Spirit of Life mean all of life including intelligent ET's, and if so is our theme song appropriate?

From: **Donald**  
To: Thomas  
Subject: RE: **Is your religion ready to meet ET?**

I'd have to say most religions are NOT prepared to meet ET. My evidence:

The Bible says the Sun revolves around the Sun ...

<https://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=11&article=1151>

<https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20071023042645AAad2dS>

This was maintained by the Catholic Church at \*least\* up to Galileo's time, which is not a good beginning to the notion that Earth is not the center of the universe and that Earthlings may not be alone. I'm not sure how Biblical literalists handle epiphanies like this, except by burying their heads in the sand.

For years, religion-oriented people argued that animals could not learn, could not communicate, could not use tools, could not think abstractly, could not do many of the things humans could - because they are animals but WE are divinely inspired. But multiple lines of research indicated that animals can learn, can communicate, can use tools, can think abstractly - there really aren't any criteria where humans are all alone. Towards the end of a spectrum, yes. But alone? No. Again, our preconceptions were all about how WE are utterly unique, and it's a bad way to start thinking about the possibility of life elsewhere. For the longest time, Science wasn't a lot better .. when I took animal behaviour classes at University in the mid-60's, they were still telling us not to anthropomorphize.

<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/anthropomorphize?s=t>

I thought they were wrong then and now (2016) I know they're wrong - but unless I wanted my class mark to go down in flames, had to regurgitate the party line.

For that matter, recent research has shown that life is extremely (!! )eager, persistent, and able to evolve under some of the most difficult circumstances. This would make life itself not so miraculous but the very determined processes leading to life seem to be pretty special. At least, IMHO, they are. That would also imply that if other worlds are at all amenable to the evolution of life, it is almost sure to happen. The uncertainty is more about finding a planet in the Goldilocks zone, not the appearance and evolution of life itself.

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumstellar\\_habitable\\_zone](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circumstellar_habitable_zone)

Meanwhile .. humans in this world, pre-Christ and in parts of the world that never heard of

the Middle East (much of America, pre-contact?) didn't have a chance to be Christian, so you don't have to go to alien worlds for that to happen. But for that matter, who is to say that Christ didn't appear first on some other planet first and WE are the afterthoughts? As far as Islam goes .. can terrestrial Muslims accept that the prophetically revealed religion of Muhammad is intended only for humans on earth and that other worlds would have their own prophets? No, of course they couldn't, theirs is the one true revealed religion, don't you know? But just maybe, Mecca is actually several light years away, on some other planet. Now, wouldn't that rot their socks?

And as this Tom Lehrer song indicates, we don't find equivalence between people even within our own species ...

<https://app.box.com/s/f3uix4lq40e39w0711v1arh2ix3mj06p>

so how are we ever going to handle dealing with extraterrestrials .. who may well think that \*we\* are inferior?

Happily, as an agnostic, I have no trouble at all with all these concepts where life may exist elsewhere - it doesn't impact my worldview in any way. John, you may well be right about Buddhism.

From: **Thomas**  
To: various people  
Subject: **Is your religion ready to meet ET?**

No conflict with atheism or deism and most other religions could adapt by making minor changes in their interpretations of their scriptures. Some, however, won't choose to adapt, like continuing to believe the world is flat.

Christianity, for example, could hold that multiple saviors did equivalent things on each planet as it reached an appropriate level of civilization. Eden could have been anywhere and the arc could have been a spaceship.

<http://theconversation.com/is-your-religion->

ready-to-meet-et-32541?  
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### **Is your religion ready to meet ET?**

How will humankind react after astronomers hand over rock-solid scientific evidence for the existence of life beyond the Earth? No more speculating. No more wondering. The moment scientists announce this discovery, everything will change. Not least of all, our philosophies and religions will need to incorporate the new information.

#### **Searching for signs of life**

Astronomers have now identified thousands of planets in orbit around other stars. At the current rate of discovery, millions more will be found this century.

Having already found the physical planets, astronomers are now searching for our biological neighbors. Over the next fifty years, they will begin the tantalizing, detailed study of millions of planets, looking for evidence of the presence of life on or below the surfaces or in the atmospheres of those planets. And it's very likely that astronomers will find it. Despite the fact that more than one-third of Americans surveyed believe that aliens have already visited Earth, the first evidence of life beyond our planet probably won't be radio signals, little green men or flying saucers. Instead, a 21st century Galileo, using an enormous, 50-meter-diameter telescope, will collect light from the atmospheres of distant planets, looking for the signatures of biologically significant molecules.

Astronomers filter that light from far away through spectrometers – high-tech prisms that tease the light apart into its many distinct wavelengths. They're looking for the telltale fingerprints of molecules that would not exist in abundance in these atmospheres in the absence of living things. The spectroscopic data will tell whether a planet's environment has been altered in ways that point to biologi-

gical processes at work.

## **What is our place in the universe?**

Woman image via [www.shutterstock.com](http://www.shutterstock.com)

If we aren't alone, who are we?

With the discovery in a distant planet's light spectrum of a chemical that could only be produced by living creatures, humankind will have the opportunity to read a new page in the book of knowledge. We will no longer be speculating about whether other beings exist in the universe. We will know that we not alone.

An affirmative answer to the question "Does life exist anywhere else in the universe beyond Earth?" would raise immediate and profoundly important cosmotheological questions about our place in the universe. If extraterrestrial others exist, then my religion and my religious beliefs and practices might not be universal. If my religion is not universally applicable to all extraterrestrial others, perhaps my religion need not be offered to, let alone forced on, all terrestrial others. Ultimately, we might learn some important lessons applicable here at home just from considering the possibility of life beyond our planet.

In my book, I investigated the sacred writings of the world's most widely practiced religions, asking what each religion has to say about the uniqueness or non-uniqueness of life on Earth, and how, or if, a particular religion would work on other planets in distant parts of the universe.

### **Extrasolar sinners?**

Let's examine a seemingly simple yet exceedingly complex theological question: could extraterrestrials be Christians? If Jesus died in order to redeem humanity from the state of sin into which humans are born, does the death and resurrection of Jesus, on Earth, also redeem other sentient beings from a similar state of sin? If so, why are the extraterrestrials sinful? Is sin built into the very fabric of the space and time of the universe? Or can life exist in parts of the universe without being in a state of sin and therefore without the need of redemption and

thus without the need for Christianity? Many different solutions to these puzzles involving Christian theology have been put forward. None of them yet satisfy all Christians.

### **Mormon worlds**

Mormon scripture clearly teaches that other inhabited worlds exist and that "the inhabitants thereof are begotten sons and daughters unto God" (Doctrines and Covenants 76:24). The Earth, however, is a favored world in Mormonism, because Jesus, as understood by Mormons, lived and was resurrected only on Earth. In addition, Mormon so-called intelligences can only achieve their own spiritual goals during their lives on Earth, not during lifetimes on other worlds. Thus, for Mormons, the Earth might not be the physical center of the universe but it is the most favored place in the universe. Such a view implies that all other worlds are, somehow, lesser worlds than Earth.

### **Bahá'í without bias**

Members of the Bahá'í Faith have a view of the universe that has no bias for or against the Earth as a special place or for against humans as a special sentient species. The principles of the Bahá'í Faith – unifying society, abandoning prejudice, equalizing opportunities for all people, eliminating poverty – are about humans on Earth. The Bahá'í faithful would expect any creatures anywhere in the universe to worship the same God as do humans, but to do so according to their own, world-specific ways.

### **Light years from Mecca**

The pillars of the faith for Muslims require the faithful to pray five times every day while facing Mecca. Because determining the direction of Mecca correctly could be extremely difficult on a quickly spinning planet millions of light years from Earth, practicing the same faith on another world might not make any sense. Yet the words of the Qu'ran tell us that "Whatever beings there are in the heavens and the earth do prostrate themselves to Allah" (13:15). Can terrestrial Muslims accept that the prophetically revealed religion of Muhammad is intended only for humans on earth and that other worlds would have their own prophets?

## **Astronomers as paradigm-shatterers**

Philosophers and scientists have forced world-views to adapt in the past.

At certain moments throughout history, astronomers' discoveries have exerted an outsized influence on human culture. Ancient Greek astronomers unflattened the Earth – though many then chose to forget this knowledge. Renaissance scholars Copernicus and Galileo put the Earth in motion around the Sun and moved humans away from the center of the universe. In the 20th century, Edwin Hubble eliminated the very idea that the universe has any center at all. He demonstrated that what the universe has is a beginning in time and that, bizarrely, the universe, the very fabric of three-dimensional space, is expanding. Clearly, when astronomers offer the world bold new ideas, they don't mess around. Another such paradigm-shattering new idea may be in the light arriving at our telescopes now.

No matter which (a)theistic background informs your theology, you may have to wrestle with the data astronomers will be bringing to houses of worship in the very near future. You will need to ask: Is my God the God of the entire universe? Is my religion a terrestrial or a universal religion? As people work to reconcile the discovery of extrasolar life with their theological and philosophical worldviews, adapting to the news of life beyond Earth will be discomfiting and perhaps even disruptive.

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Candace Parks in Vermont, USA sends us this post from Robin Chesnut-Tangerman, "the rep from our little town in the VT House of Reps. A progressive endorsed by Bernie."

I am proud to add my name to this post, but even more to the commitment of living up to our Vermont motto: Freedom and Unity.

POST-ELECTION STATEMENT FROM
SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE SHAP SMITH
AND LEGISLATIVE LEADERS

18 November 2016

We have a lot to be proud of as Vermonters.

We pride ourselves on being a community that

embraces diversity. One that protects the environment which sustains us. A community that strives to uphold justice for every person, regardless of the color of their skin, their gender identity or expression, whom they love, whom or what they worship, or whether they were born here or elsewhere.

We are proud of our decades-long history standing against hate and intolerance. We led the Nation as the first state to abolish slavery and again as the first state to declare through our Legislature that all people deserve the right to marry, regardless of whom they love. In the wake of this divisive election, we must hold up the accomplishments of our past while resolutely opposing any attempt to roll back the rights and liberties that so many have fought so hard to achieve.

Many Vermonters and Americans are concerned that this past election rewarded and normalized behavior objectifying women, denigrating racial and religious minorities, and disparaging those with disabilities. They are worried that civil liberties protected by the Vermont and United States Constitutions may be under threat. Let us be clear that this election has not changed our Vermont values, and we will continue to reject misogyny, racism, and bigotry. Discrimination and violence have no place in our State. "Freedom and Unity" is more than our State motto, it is a charge that we embrace without reserve.

We cannot let this divisive election weaken our commitment to this charge. Each of us must stand with our neighbors by refusing to accept any action fueled by intolerance or discrimination, and call out any injustice so that we can join together as a community to denounce it. We must all be active citizens in the fight against oppression. Our cities, towns, and communities, like our hearts, must remain open to all who are seeking shelter from hate.

There is no doubt that the decisions of our incoming President and the next Congress may impact federal support for Vermonters from all walks of life, and we are committed to working diligently with every resource we have, and with all partners nationally and locally to lead our State through the challenges

we may face.

As a state we will stand together to reject any efforts that seek to erode the rights, civil liberties, and Constitutional protections that embody the fabric of our democracy. We refuse to move backward and instead will stand as a beacon of progress for this country in the months and years ahead.

We have a lot to be proud of as Vermonters, and we refuse to let that change.

(Signed) Speaker of the House Shap Smith + many more Vermonters representatives.

(Most readers of Esprit will know Candace is a past president of our Fellowship).
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### Belief bubbles not easily burst

***Extracts from the Guardian 16/11/2016***

The 2016 election took place under the spectre of a bubble. Not the subprime mortgage lending bubble that shaped the 2008 election, but the “filter bubble”. Tens of millions of American voters gets their news on Facebook, where highly personalized news feeds dish up a steady stream of content that reinforces users’ pre-existing beliefs.

**Facebook users are increasingly sheltered from opposing viewpoints – and reliable news sources – and the viciously polarized state of our national politics appears to be one of the results.**

Criticism of the filter bubble, which gained steam after the UK’s surprising Brexit vote, has reached a new level of urgency in the wake of Donald Trump’s upset victory, despite Mark Zuckerberg’s denial it had any influence.

To test the effects of political polarization on Facebook we asked ten US voters – five conservative and five liberal – to agree to take a scroll on the other side during the final month of the campaign.

We created two Facebook accounts from scratch. “Rusty Smith”, our right-wing avatar, liked a variety of conservative news sources,

organizations, and personalities, from the Wall Street Journal and The Hoover Institution to Breitbart News and Bill O’Reilly. “Natasha Smith”, our left-wing persona, preferred The New York Times, Mother Jones, Democracy Now and Think Progress. Rusty liked Tim Tebow and the NRA. Natasha liked Colin Kaepernick and 350.org.

**Our liberals were given log-ins to the conservative feed, and vice versa, and we asked our participants to limit their news consumption as much as possible to the feed for the 48 hours following the third debate, the reopening of the Hillary Clinton email investigation, and the election.**

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Andra Constantin, a conservative project manager from Westchester County, New York, was frustrated by “this whole big brainwashing push to save the world from the horrible climate change”.

Both Constantin and Green agreed that a conservative Facebook feed in the run up to the election had more diversity of opinions than a liberal one, largely because Republicans were divided on supporting Trump while liberals were generally united behind Clinton.

“I didn’t see the issues being discussed,” Constantin said of the liberal feed. “Even though we can be hateful and nasty, at both ends of the conservative side we’re talking about the issues a bit more.”

When Green returned to his regular liberal feed after the third debate, he felt completely out of the loop with his cohort’s topics of conversation. “I logged in and I was like – bad hombres, nasty women, what is everyone talking about?”

**For several of our participants, reading the alternative Facebook feed was not just surprising, but hurtful.**

“It’s hard for me to read some of it,” said Pines, who is black. “It’s just a racist kind of thing, and I don’t think it’s cleverly disguised.” Pines was particularly pained by the way in which Obama was portrayed by the right-

sources, which he described as “code” and “dog whistles”.

.....

But it wasn't only the liberals who found the experience painful.

“I'm seeing a lot more hate from the liberal side,” said Constantin. “It's all about how much of a horrible, fascist, racist, misogynist Trump is.”

On her own feed, Constantin found herself winnowing down her friends in order to avoid arguments.

“I did unfollow a lot of friends because I didn't want to feel enticed to correct what they were saying and get in a fight,” she said.

“Honestly, I hated it,” said Janalee Tobias, a longtime conservative activist and member of Mormons for Trump from South Jordan, Utah. “I'm seeing a psychiatrist trying to get over the shock and the hate from the left,” she joked. “I thought this would be easier for me to handle, because I'm considered pretty open minded.”

For some of our participants, checking out the other bubble only confirmed their commitment to staying inside their own.

“I learned that [people on the right] are way more vicious and lack a certain maturity that I would expect of adults,” said Moungo, after the election. “This just absolutely confirmed it ... They are irredeemable monsters.”

“Seeing the liberal feed pulled me further to the right,” said Loos. “Without getting the counterpoint, I was drawn more and more to the conservative side. Instead of luring me in, it pushed me away.”

But some of our participants found greater understanding from the experiment.

Lee said she was impressed by the “cleverness” of right-wing messaging, which uses “words like working class and jobs and economic stability. That promise is so great that it overshadows everything else, and I could see that, if that's the only thing that I

saw, I could understand. I could be swayed.”

Asked whether that understanding had resulted in her having more empathy for Trump voters, Lee said: “I don't know if I'm there yet, but I'm working on it. I come from a place where I want to build a movement coming from love and compassion, so I'm working on it.”

One of our participants, Todd Macfarlane, said his time on the liberal Facebook page influenced his final decision. A rancher and attorney from Kanosh, Utah, Macfarlane is a registered Republican who was considering supporting the GOP nominee, but ultimately chose not to vote for any presidential candidate.

“The needle moved,” he said after his first exposure to the liberal feed. “I was kind of more undecided as I looked at it ... I was persuaded to think he's a really bad choice.”

Macfarlane didn't encounter any liberal news sources that convinced him to support Clinton, but his time on the feed helped him realize that a Trump presidency could be dangerous.

“It had to do with his overall temperament and decorum and demeanor,” he said. “It just reinforced for me the concern about what he might do with that much power.”

It wasn't just his vote that changed, for Macfarlane. Since participating in the experiment, he said, “I'm a lot more interested in engaging with people who are open minded and are willing to talk about the whole picture.”

Constantin, who currently relies on Facebook for 100% of her news, said that she has concluded that the platform “seems to filter out credible news articles on both ends and feed sensationalist far left/far right things”.

**From the editor: Re last comment, maybe I'm in denial but that hasn't been my experience.**

**Read more:** [https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/16/facebook-bias-bubble-us-election-conservative-liberal-news-feed?CMP=share\\_btn\\_tw](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2016/nov/16/facebook-bias-bubble-us-election-conservative-liberal-news-feed?CMP=share_btn_tw)

**Here are the lyrics to the National Anthem with re-written words by the Solidarity Choir:**

1. Australians all let us rejoice that we're not refugees  
Escaping violence, rape and war across our girding seas  
We said you'd have a welcome here in 1954  
But changed our mind in '92, compassionate no more.

It's getting really hard to sing Advance Australia Fair

2. Beneath our radiant Southern Cross we'll lock you up for sure  
If you exercise your legal right to knock upon our door.  
If in a boat you've crossed the sea we've got no plains to share  
Just Manus Island or Nauru and bitter black despair.

It's getting really hard to sing Advance Australia Fair

## **Solidarity Choir**

Since 1987 we have been collecting some of the world's most uplifting songs of freedom, giving them sophisticated arrangements, and singing them with joy, defiance, grief, consolation, humour and love. We have sung at more than 600 community events: public meetings, protests, conferences, concerts, and street marches. We have performed at folk festivals large and small, sung ourselves hoarse on picket lines, and done the occasional gig for visiting world leaders. We'd welcome your involvement!

Phone: 8096-7648  
Mobile: 0400-285-974  
Email: [solidaritychoir@gmail.com](mailto:solidaritychoir@gmail.com)

<http://solidaritychoir.com.au>

### **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 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*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**