



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
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Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
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June, 2011

Schedule of Services

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

June 5

Ross McLuckie

What about them?

We have had so many disasters in a short time. But what about all that area outside them?

June 12

Jan Tendys

“Reverence”

James Martineau: “Whoever can so look into my heart as to tell whether there is anything which I revere: and if there be, what thing that is, that person may read me through and through, and there is no darkness wherein I may hide myself.”

June 19

Candace Parks

“Questions You May Ask”

Who are you? And where do you come from? They're the subject of casual introductions and everyday chit chat. But in a deeper sense, these are also religious inquiries that every wisdom tradition tries to answer.

June 26

Rev. Geoff Usher

“Courage and Change”

Most people fear change. This fear is no more evident than in matters of faith and religion, and particularly in places of worship where habit, as opposed to tradition, has ruled. There is much to be thankful for in our Unitarian movement. The word “movement” is appropriate, because Unitarianism has not been a static faith. Our forebears have not been afraid of change, and if our development is to continue then we must not be afraid of change.

July 3

Janet Horton

“Is Religion the Opiate of the People?”

This phrase from Karl Marx is often quoted. But what was Marx really trying to convey? We will look at the content of this quote as well as the context - is Marx sympathetic towards religion or critical or both? (Janet is revisiting this topic as many members missed out due to long weekend etc).

July 10

Ginna Hastings

“Universalism 101”

July 17

Colin Whatmough

“Water”

July 24

Rev. Dr. Ian Ellis-Jones

“The Little Prince and the Seven Principles”.

July 31

Janine Matthews

“Spirituality of the Future”

The Elephant in the Room – Population and Food

Colin Whatmough

Points to ponder from my presentation on this topic in September 2010.

1. A huge pressure on the ecological system of the Earth has been the Population Explosion:

¼ billion – time of Jesus;
1 billion – 1788; 2 billion – 1945;
3 billion – 1973; 6.5 billion – 2010;
a frightening estimated 9 billion – 2050.

2. Exacerbating the above - we are living in a time of Peak Oil, Water and Soil as well as the effects of Climate Change.

3. Almost no advances have been made towards a greater world Equity in foods and other raw materials.

4. Despite the enormous sums invested and the impressive technical progress we have made in Agribusiness, mankind has, by and large, failed in its supreme effort to adequately feed those billions of people now living on Earth let alone the burgeoning future population.

5. Even if strict birth control could be implemented, its long term effects would not be felt for decades to come; we will as a consequence be faced with a drastically excessive feeding burden this century.

6. At the present time, if we were to ration what the globe totally carries in food in such a way that each individual receives an equal share, this would mean universal malnutrition.

7. Our tragic mistake has been a failure to recognise that nature is not acquainted with our abstract money evaluations and calculations, typifying modern capitalism that continually stimulates growth, while often using resources carelessly and wastefully.

8. The desalination of seawater and its effective use in agriculture involves problems infinitely complex.

9. If the future millions are to be fed through agriculture, a considerably broadened use of chemical fertilisers will become indispensable.

10. Vogt stated as early as 1948, in his book "Road to Survival" that if the U.S. would ever reach the unlikely position of not having

enough food there would be only one remedy ie to go out and grab the land it needed.

11. While we speak, richer nations are preparing for the impending food problem facing them – Britain, Sweden and China are buying up large tracts of arable land in Africa and Australia to provide exclusively for their future needs - will we 'sell the farm?'

12. In P.E. units ie Population Equivalents – the Earth at present with 6.5 billion people, carries in total a real feeding burden equivalent of 32 billion people – this includes domestic animals only plus humans.

13. In most countries hit by the 'Green Revolution', protein is critically short, giving rise to the Calorie Illusion where it was satisfactory to calculate food needs merely in terms of energy in the starches and sugars. We can only speak of success in our fight against hunger only if we can supply people's minimal needs of protein?

14. Apart from the controversial genetic modification of food there appear no technological miracles on the horizon.

15. Sadly, fish stocks are rapidly decreasing due to exploitation; fish are a major source of protein. See National Geographic Magazine, April 2007 – Special Report: 'Saving the Sea's Bounty'.

16. Cash crops are depriving indigenous farmers of land for food crops.

17. Today, more than 6 billion people rely on food grown on just 11% of the global surface and only 3% offers natural fertile soil.

18. Soil degradation can transform productive zones into wastelands with tragic speed. See National Geographic September, 2008. If there is little soil to absorb rain, springs do not flow – soil and water are needed to sustain life.

19. Precious few countries are self-sufficient for food eg Canada, Russia, U.S., Australia, New Zealand and France; they need to be protected as world granaries. The richer countries would buy out their share of scarce food leaving little for poorer nations.

20. To make matters worse Global Warming is bringing about massive water shortages, especially in Asia with the rapid melting of the Himalaya Mountains' ice cap which supplies nearly one third of the world's population – 2 billion people. See National Geographic Special Report Edition, April, 2010.

21. The challenge is to initiate action towards

the moulding of a single world in full cooperation – truly global citizens – can we bring about such a ‘true revolution’?

Or have we gone past Critical Mass of Sustainability already?

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**What Makes Us Tick?**



**Hugh Mackay, psychologist, social researcher and novelist.**

Photo:Pam O'Brien - ABC

A review of belief in chapter 4 of Hugh Mackay's "What Makes us Tick? Ten desires that drive us."

***Eric Stevenson***

In this chapter, Hugh is careful to acknowledge the good which has been achieved by traditional believers, and how helpful traditional belief has been to them. At the same time he tries to analyse what it is that has prompted us human beings to look for a religious way of life which involves a belief in something more than our chance existence in a material world.

In answer to this question he cites “fear of mortality”. As well as reducing this fear of dying, he also says the rituals of traditional religion (including prayer) help to quell our tendency to wrestle with explanations for real life issues and events. This results in peace of mind, as we leave it all to “God”. Another reason he gives is our desire for something to look forward to, together with our desire to belong to something. Most of all (p76) he says it is to relieve “cosmic pain”. i.e. panic in the face of the unknowable which otherwise for some people results in “spiritual despair”. Another explanation could be the need for a future life in which the wrongs of this world are righted, but the author does not go into this one.

I suspect Hugh betrays his own position when he asks, “How can we most nobly live in the absence of any certainties?” I am not sure whether he is stating his goal in life or whether it is an explanation of why so many people who are certain about their traditional beliefs live noble lives. i.e. Their belief in

“something more” is the reason for their good deeds. He goes on to explain, despite the fact that beliefs are not able to be tested, when strongly held, they feel to the believer as powerful as knowledge.

He is almost cynical about some unbelievers by quoting G.K. Chesterton, “When people stop believing in God, they don’t believe in nothing; they believe in anything.” (Believing what they are told, accepting any explanation that seems plausible or satisfying, trusting emotional explanations rather than rational ones, etc)

Back to the true believers, he says on page 90 ff that some religious practices re-enforce beliefs which distort our perception of the world. They strengthen our tendency to “see what we are looking for...our perceptions are coloured by what we believe to be true.” He warns against “settling” on a particular set of beliefs which might blind us to other possibilities.

**I think Hugh Mackay is among those whom he hints at, that resist the common human intolerance for ambiguity. He certainly is not an advocate of fundamentalism which caters for those who claim to have found a stable reference point in life. Maybe learning to live a fulfilling life with paradox is the answer – seeking to live by a dependable reference point which is always open to challenge?**

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I Believe This

Hugh Mackay:

I believe humans can best be understood as herd animals. Most people feel comfortable in herds (families, friendship circles, work-groups) of about seven or eight, and somewhat uncomfortable outside them. But our shrinking households are no longer robust enough to satisfy our herd instinct: in fact, half of Australia’s households contain only one or two people. So now, to compensate, we enthusiastically attach ourselves to non-domestic herds—work-groups, cooking classes, book clubs, sporting associations, adult education courses. We graze with the herd in cafes and food courts; when all else fails, we herd electronically, via the Net or SMS.

Being herd animals, we feel most confident and secure when we have strong and visionary leaders. Weak or cynical leaders, or those who seem more interested in their own power than our well-being, make us uneasy, disengaged and powerless. Leadership vacuums tend to be filled either by demagogues or by our own unbridled self-interest.

I believe human nature is a complex blend of rational and non-rational impulses that can rarely be explained by logic. Our brains are awash with hormones (more like glands than computers); we do things we say we'll never do; we sometimes disapprove of our own actions but go ahead anyway. Our moral codes are subjective and flexible: even the Golden Rule, which many of us claim to embrace is distorted, in practice, into something like "treat other people the way you think they'd probably treat you" - a virtual contradiction of the original idea.

I've discovered that everyone's story is interesting: if you find someone boring, that just means you haven't got to know them well enough. I've also come to realise that everyone's story is tinged with sadness; happiness visits most of us but fleetingly and that's okay, (whoever said happiness was the only authentic emotion?)

(The above is part of a chapter written by Hugh Mackay in "I Believe This" edited by John Marsden).

Contributed by Peter Berry.

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## **Mystery and Mysticism in Music**

**Hugh Mackay:** 'I do love liturgical music,' he says. 'Though, having been raised in that rather primitive fundamentalist context, of course, I didn't have much exposure to sophisticated sacred music.'

He says this is an expression of the mystery and mysticism at the heart of life which is the primary concern of religion: 'That's what I go to religion for. I mean, I go for a sense of, not exactly making sense of life's mysteries, but celebrating the mysteries, contemplating why we're here. I mean it's a mysterious business.'

**EUREKA STREET.com.au**

## **We are living in the Anthropocene**

Students in school are still taught that we are living in the Holocene, an era that began roughly 12,000 years ago at the end of the last Ice Age. But teaching students that we are living in the Anthropocene, the Age of Men, could be of great help. Rather than representing yet another sign of human hubris, this name change would stress the enormity of humanity's responsibility as stewards of the Earth. It would highlight the immense power of our intellect and our creativity, and the opportunities they offer for shaping the future.

Christian Schwägerl, the author of "Menschenzeit". ("The Age of Man")



Photo: Geoff Haines-Stiles

Columns of sunlight reflect up from mirrors to a central tower at the world's first commercial power station to use this design, near Seville, Spain.

From "**Earth: The Operators' Manual**" - a PBS documentary.

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"Better to light a candle than curse the darkness."

Chinese proverb.

Amnesty International:

50 years of upholding Human Rights.



Julia Gillard and state Labor leader Daniel Andrews. Photo: Justin McManus

Quorum lacking for gay vote.

A divisive debate that would have condemned Julia Gillard's stance on gay marriage was yesterday derailed at Labor's state conference due to a low turnout.

But debate on the motion - which placed the Victorian ALP and its parliamentary leader, Daniel Andrews, firmly at odds with the Prime Minister - was shut down and the conference was forced to end abruptly because there were not enough people in the room to form a quorum to vote on it.

Ms Gillard has repeatedly said she does not support changing the federal Marriage Act to give equality to gay couples.

In a recent interview with *The Sunday Age*, Mr Andrews said the current system was "unfair" - a view that hit home, he said, when one of his staffers was forced to travel to the US to marry her female partner because she could not do so in Australia.

"It is my genuine belief that more people are coming to the realisation that the current arrangements are not fair, and they should be changed," Mr Andrews said.

Senior figures from Labor's Left faction were outraged when the debate had to be abandoned, with some accusing members of the Right of deliberately leaving the room so that the quorum - which requires at least 152 delegates - could not be met. Only 147 were present for the count.

(Above is part of an article by Farrah-Tomazin, *The Age* May 22, 2011)

The question may come up again at the December Conference.

UUs in Haiti

Leaders from UUSC, (Unitarian Universalist Service committee) the UUA, and our two UU theological schools arrived in Port-au-Prince yesterday to join 10 seminarians (including three who had just graduated the week before). We missed having UUA President Peter Morales with us but he was felled by illness at the last moment. Our destination was Hinche, a town about three hours' drive from the capital where UUSC's partner, the Papaye Peasant Movement (MPP), has its headquarters. MPP was founded in 1973 with 17 members and today boasts more than 100,000 throughout Haiti. **Its fundamental mission is to support sustainable agriculture in rural Haiti — reforestation, potable water, eco-friendly building materials, etc. The seminarians were here to partner with MPP in construction of a new “eco-village” that embodies these values and technologies.** UUSC has utilized funds donated by Unitarian Universalists following the earthquake of January 2010 to support this work, which serves many displaced by the catastrophe. This visit inaugurated what President Morales and I hope will be a long-term commitment to ensure that every person preparing for our ministry be engaged for a period of time in the developing world.

Haiti evokes two common responses: empathy and cynicism. To truly encounter the enormity of the tragedy here, and not just the recent one, is both to risk a broken heart (which can itself be discouraging to efforts to rebuild) or a sense that Haiti is beyond repair. But to meet Chavannes Jean-Baptiste, MPP's charismatic founder and president; to meet members of MPP and their families who insist that a better life is within reach; and to work with them to realize their dreams (even, in my case, in the simple and — for me — uncharacteristic task of passing stones from field to house construction site) is to be dissuaded from such pessimism. **The seminarians are learning many lessons here, but among them is the paramount one that leadership means resisting the seductive temptations of both empathy and cynicism.**

(The above is part of a Facebook posting by **UUSC President Rev. Dr. Bill Schulz**)

Lives made Precarious

At the employment centre:

“At reception, a guy who’s dripping with sweat is protesting. ‘I know I haven’t made an appointment, but I’d just like to ask you to erase my telephone number from my file. I’m worried that an employer will give up if he tries to phone and there’s no answer.’

‘Why?’ asks the receptionist – today, it’s a slim young blonde.

‘It’s stopped working.’

‘What stopped working?’

‘My phone.’

‘Why’s it stopped working?’

‘They’ve cut me off for financial reasons.’

‘But you can’t turn up here just like that. You need to make an appointment.’

‘Okay, let’s keep calm. I’ll start again: I’d like to make an appointment, please, Miss.’

The young blonde woman appears sincerely annoyed. ‘I’m so sorry, Sir. We no longer make appointments face to face. It’s not our fault, it’s the new regulations, we have to apply them. Try to see it from our point of view. Appointments have to be made by phone these days.’

‘But my phone doesn’t work.’

‘There are telephones for you to use at the far end of the agency, but I must warn you: you need to phone just one number, 39-49, which gets you through to a central office they’ve just set up. It’s always being bombarded by customers. You can be waiting for ages.’

‘Ages?’

‘Sometimes, for several hours.’”

The above dialogue comes from “The Night Cleaner” by Florence Aubenas, a

French journalist who went incognito to see for herself what life was like for the low-skilled unemployed during the global recession. The Guardian’s Madeleine Bunting describes the book:

It tells its tale in gritty detail. The churn of employment agencies with their cheerful euphemisms – they even talk of solidarity – and endless training courses for jobs that the agencies and the trainees know don’t exist. It’s a charade in which applicants have to think up ways to convince prospective employers of their motivation for the most menial of cleaning jobs. “Needing work” is not considered satisfactory. CVs, even for temporary cleaning jobs, have to “stand out” from the crowd. The lesson that Aubenas, a successful Paris-based journalist, is taught again and again is that she is one of hundreds, even thousands, chasing every opportunity: she is surplus.

“Permanent” jobs are like gold dust in such low-paid, low-skill agency work. For a woman in her late 40s with no qualifications, as Aubenas claimed to be, she discovered there weren’t even jobs in any traditional sense, there was work sliced into small portions – a couple of hours here, an hour there.

To cobble together a wage of €700 a month required several different jobs often long journeys apart. Bus timetables didn’t accommodate early morning or late evening cleaning shifts, so she had to rely on lifts and borrowed cars. The precarious timetable could collapse at any moment: “I suddenly became aware of how fragile my way of life is and feel that I’m at the mercy of everything and everybody,” she writes, as the stress was evidently getting to her – despite knowing that her make-believe life as a cleaner was finite.

There was never enough time allowed for the cleaning work, so it invariably spilled over. “Trial periods” weren’t paid. These were some of the many ways in which the minimum wage was routinely circumvented. Conflict among colleagues under such pressure was frequent. The humiliation of being hauled up for minor inadequacies – not sweeping under a table, a hair in the sink – was constant.

But perhaps the most disturbing incident was when Aubenas was cleaning an office as the employees left; a couple stayed

behind to make out. They were only a few feet from where Aubenas was vacuuming but they behaved as if she was an inanimate object, an extension of her vacuum. She had become invisible. “

The above is part of the review “Hectored, humiliated, bullied: how women bear the brunt of flexible labour” The Guardian, May 1, 2011. Many of us living comfortable lives would like to believe the miserable employment practices of recession France couldn’t happen in Australia, but one of the salutary realisations that comes from reading this book is that the lives made precarious by neoliberalism and recession do tend to go unnoticed by those more comfortably placed. Most cleaners, for example, work early in the morning or at night, out of sight.

Jan Tendys

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**James Martineau**

James Martineau (April 21, 1805-January 11, 1900) was a Unitarian minister and educator, and a widely influential theologian and philosopher. As lecturer and Principal at Manchester New College, he was for many years responsible for training ministerial students. As a leading intellectual of 19th century England, he was an admired friend of poets and philosophers who testified to their debt to his thought and work. He wrestled with questions concerning the Bible, sources of authority, the meaning of Christ, the validity of non-Christian religions and the roles of reason and conscience. He helped to shape both Unitarian and general religious thought.



**Read the whole of his biography here:**  
<http://www25-temp.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/jamesmartineau.html>  
"The Dictionary of Unitarian and Universalist Biography"

## James Martineau Quotes

Every man's highest, nameless though it be, is his 'living God'.

The pinafore of the child will be more than a match for the frock of the bishop and the surplice of the priest.

All that is noble in the world's past history, and especially the minds of the great and the good, are never lost

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Fido's new Job— Conservation Work

A dog's sense of smell is close to a million times more powerful than a human's, so they're constantly tuned into cues far beyond our sensory realm. We've long taken advantage of these canine olfactory powers for police assistance, search-and-rescue jobs, and locating long-lost socks under the bed. And now wildlife biologists are learning how to put those wet noses to work.

Concerned about the effects of traditional research methods like trapping or sedation, scientists are exploring non-invasive alternatives. Scat samples, for example, provide a wealth of information about wild animals.

Working dogs can be trained to seek the faeces of specific animals and can differentiate easily between the scents of closely related species, even in the ocean. Marine biologists use Conservation Canines to detect orca poop from more than a mile away.

(Check out this video of Tucker, orca-tracker extraordinaire, on the job
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gkOe-HrCjig>)

The dogs' skills help researchers understand where animals are living, how they're moving, what they're eating, and other factors that are important to understanding long-term changes in wildlife populations.

--Zoë J. Sheldon, Sierra Club (US)

Innocence is priceless.

One Sunday morning, the pastor noticed little Alex standing in the foyer of the church staring up at a large plaque. It was covered with names and small flags mounted on either side of it.

The six-year old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the pastor walked up, stood beside the little boy, and said quietly, 'Good morning, Alex.'

'Good morning, Pastor,' he replied, still focused on the plaque. 'Pastor, what is this?'

The pastor said, 'Well son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service.'

Soberly, they just stood together, staring at the large plaque. Finally, little Alex's voice, barely audible and trembling with fear asked, 'Which service, the 8:45 or the 11:00?'

Contributed by Candace Parks

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.

Please note that Esprit is assembled usually in the last week of the month so longer items should be handed in or sent by the second last Sunday of the month. Items for the Schedule of Services (talk titles etc) should be in by the Friday of the last week. Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to jtendys@bigpond.com
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:
If space is limited, submissions may be subject to editing.

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 9428-2244, consult our website www.sydneyunitarians.com or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service. Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee.