



## Schedule of Services

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

**3 March**            **Rev. Geoffrey R. Usher**            **“Meaning Beyond Ourselves”.**

How often have we heard someone say: “I am not religious, but I am spiritual”? How many of us would be comfortable saying it about ourselves?

Many people who do say it mean that they have a sense that there is something beyond themselves; a sense that there is a spiritual dimension to life; a sense that there is a deeper meaning to life than the purely materialistic level.

**10 March**            **Rev. Geoffrey R. Usher**            **“Little Things, Big Things”.**

Little things we often think of as having a high value in themselves - a diamond ring, a gold coin, a rare postage stamp - only carry the value that human communities have placed on them.

**17 March**            **Morandir Armson**            **"The Pagan Trail: A Look at a Contemporary Pilgrimage".**

“In recent years, something of a "Pagan Trail" has developed in the United Kingdom, equating to the "Hippy Trail" in South-East Asia, India and North Africa. This tourist trail has enriched various hostel owners and tour guides, filled shops with New Age paraphernalia and led to a veritable cottage industry of guides with wide Pagan knowledge. However, can this "Pagan Trail" really be seen as a form of pilgrimage?

This presentation will examine contemporary Pagan tourism in Wiltshire and Somerset and seek the answer to the question; does the Pagan Trail represent a genuine attempt at creating a Pagan pilgrimage route?”

**24 March**            **Colin Whatmough**            **“Political Letter Writing”.**

Letter writing - a means of expressing one’s ideas, research and opinions and dealing with political frustration/cynicism.

**31 March**            **Rev. Eric Stevenson**            **“Doing our own Easter”.**

Their belief in the spirit world, their propensity for altered states of consciousness, and the transforming effect personal contact with him continued to have on their lives drove them to make sense of his execution. It took about two years before their theories were formulated, and two generations before they began to be written down. Without those three things what can we make of it 2000 years later?

## Christian Ecology

<http://www.christianecology.org/>

In 1967, historian Lynn White published a now famous piece entitled "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis."

White, himself a Christian, concluded that many of our environmental problems could be traced to the Christian notion that God gave this earth to humans for their use and specifically directed humans to exercise dominion over the earth and all of its life forms. While it is questionable that this is what White intended, the effect of the piece has been to serve as an indictment of Christianity as the source of our environmental problems, and to render laughable the idea that Christianity might have anything to contribute to our environmental crisis. As essayist Wendell Berry has observed, "the culpability of Christianity in the destruction of the natural world and uselessness of Christianity in any effort to correct that destruction are now established cliches of the conservation movement."

Largely as a reaction and response to White's piece, Christian thinkers have over the last half century formulated a response to White's indictment. The response has taken three distinct paths. One path, which can be called the Stewardship Model, concludes that God did indeed give humans dominion, but only on the condition that we act as wise stewards, exercising our dominion with prudence and care. This is the model that is preferred within evangelical and fundamentalist circles, to the extent that this wing of Christianity chooses to address the environmental issue.

Within mainstream and liberal Christianity are two more models, eco-feminism and creation spirituality. Eco-feminism observes that domination over women and over the earth spring from the same masculine, patriarchal institutions, and that salvation for the earth, women, and ultimately men, will flow from modifying those institutions. Creation spirituality attempts to help us recover the nature mysticism of some medieval Christians such as Meister Eckhart, Julian of Norwich, Mechtilde of Madeburg, Hildegard of Bingen, and Francis of Assisi.

The Fund for Christian Ecology, Inc. is

an Idaho Non-Profit Corporation established in 1998 to facilitate a discussion of all historic and emerging strands of thought within Christianity related to God's creation, humanity's role within it, and the Earth's current environmental crisis. The submission of original papers related to these themes are solicited for possible posting to this site and for possible publication in the Fund's Journal of Christian Ecology, a pending project of the Fund. Submissions may be sent to [christianecology@pobox.com](mailto:christianecology@pobox.com).

### ~~~~~ **The Littlest Possum**

Leadbeater's Possum is Victoria's State Faunal emblem and is an endangered species with both State and National Recovery Programs in place. Endemic to Victoria, they exist nowhere else but the Central Highlands forests, Yellingbo Nature Conservation Reserve and alpine areas between Lake Mountain & Mt. Baw Baw.



Population estimates prior to the 2009 bushfires were around 2,000-2,500 individuals, post-fire estimates are <1,000. Approximately 40-50% of their prime habitat was lost in the fires.

Friends of Leadbeater's Possum Inc. was established in 2004 to give a voice to these amazing but elusive forest animals. Leadbeater's Possum habitat has many impacts ranging from timber harvesting (including salvage logging) to bushfire and bushfire prevention methods like fuel breaks and fuel reduction burning.

We hope to be able to help Leadbeater's survive in the wild by encouraging conservation efforts, research programs and effective conservation strategies and policies. <http://leadbeaters.org.au/>

## Blood Sacrifice

Ancient religions have personalised the powers of nature which appeared to control the mysterious forces that create and preserve life. They therefore sought to appease these powers or gods by giving back some of that life to them. In many cultures blood was considered to constitute the very essence of life, the highest form of which was human. This naturally led to the idea that the gods would be most pleased if some of that life was surrendered to them in the form of human sacrifices.

The Aztecs in Mexico believed that their gods also somehow sacrificed themselves in order to create life for their faithful followers. This belief gave rise to a psychological displacement in which devotees felt indebted to their gods to the extent of choosing a victim to represent them. They would then worship the victim and eventually surgically remove his or her heart as an offering. This indebtedness became even more acute when reinforced by feelings of guilt. In such cases self sacrifice was also considered a virtue.

I have recently been privileged to view the Church of Our Lady of Remedies of the Great Pyramid Talechi-Tualtepetel in Cholula near Mexico City. Totally exhausted from my climb to the entrance of this beautifully gilded Christian shrine, I was overcome by a feeling of disgust and shame despite its ornate artistry and skilled craftsmanship. My climb to the entrance was due to the fact that it had been built on top of an Aztec pyramid. The church had been obviously erected as a triumphal statement about the supremacy of Christianity over the Aztec religion. It was built from the very bricks of the precious archaeological structure. The Spanish invaders obviously had a better blood sacrifice than the Aztecs!!!

To be fair I was also filled with abhorrence at the Aztec and Mayan practice of sacrificing beautiful maidens and casting their mutilated bodies down the very steps of the pyramids which I was boasting to have climbed. All this to make the god's happy!! But the colossal audacity of a foreign Christian power to impose a superior religion upon this admittedly brutal form of sacrifice began to dawn upon me.

The method of shedding the blood of their victim was not quite so bizarre. They taught however that without the shedding of blood is no remission. That this was necessary for salvation in the mind of their God was just as brutal!! As an admirer of Jesus of Nazareth, I totally reject any primitive insistence that the shedding of blood has anything to do with the will of an imagined deity. He died the death of a non-violent revolutionary who believed in the power of love. And if there is a god, he or she would not be happy about the shedding of his blood by Pontius Pilate.



It is reported that some time before 1594 when the Franciscans staked out their claim on the pyramid for the site of their chapel, they dedicated it by erecting a cross and "blessing" it. A bolt of lightning struck the cross and the blessing had to be repeated. When I read this I entered a time warp in sympathy with the Aztecs and cheered with them when I saw what my gods were saying about the intrusion of these foreign missionaries. But the new religion of blood sacrifice prevailed and I was forced back to the present reality that I must learn how best to build upon the religious mistakes (and successes) of past generations.

***Eric Stevenson***

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# Humanist Values

The International Humanist and Ethical Union is the world union of Humanist organizations <http://www.iheu.org/glossary/term/248>

## ***From the IHEU website:***

In 1952, at the first World Humanist Congress, the founding fathers of IHEU agreed a statement of the fundamental principles of modern Humanism. They called it "The Amsterdam Declaration". That declaration was a child of its time: set in the world of great power politics and the Cold War.

The 50th anniversary World Humanist Congress in 2002, again meeting in the Netherlands, unanimously passed a resolution updating that declaration: "The Amsterdam Declaration 2002". Following the Congress, this updated declaration was adopted unanimously by the IHEU General Assembly, and thus became the official defining statement of World Humanism.

## **Amsterdam Declaration 2002**

Humanism is the outcome of a long tradition of free thought that has inspired many of the world's great thinkers and creative artists and gave rise to science itself.

The fundamentals of modern Humanism are as follows:

**1. Humanism is ethical.** It affirms the worth, dignity and autonomy of the individual and the right of every human being to the greatest possible freedom compatible with the rights of others. Humanists have a duty of care to all of humanity including future generations. Humanists believe that morality is an intrinsic part of human nature based on understanding and a concern for others, needing no external sanction.

**2. Humanism is rational.** It seeks to use science creatively, not destructively. Humanists believe that the solutions to the world's problems lie in human thought and action rather than divine intervention. Humanism advocates the application of the methods of science and free inquiry to the problems of human welfare. But Humanists also believe that the application of science and technology must be tempered by human values. Science gives us the means but human values

must propose the ends.

**3. Humanism supports democracy and human rights.** Humanism aims at the fullest possible development of every human being. It holds that democracy and human development are matters of right. The principles of democracy and human rights can be applied to many human relationships and are not restricted to methods of government.

**4. Humanism insists that personal liberty must be combined with social responsibility.** Humanism ventures to build a world on the idea of the free person responsible to society, and recognises our dependence on and responsibility for the natural world. Humanism is undogmatic, imposing no creed upon its adherents. It is thus committed to education free from indoctrination.

**5 Humanism is a response to the widespread demand for an alternative to dogmatic religion.** The world's major religions claim to be based on revelations fixed for all time, and many seek to impose their world-views on all of humanity. Humanism recognises that reliable knowledge of the world and ourselves arises through a continuing process of observation, evaluation and revision.

**6. Humanism values artistic creativity and imagination** and recognises the transforming power of art. Humanism affirms the importance of literature, music, and the visual and performing arts for personal development and fulfilment.

**7. Humanism is a lifeway aiming at the maximum possible fulfilment through the cultivation of ethical and creative living** and offers an ethical and rational means of addressing the challenges of our times. Humanism can be a way of life for everyone everywhere.

Our primary task is to make human beings aware in the simplest terms of what Humanism can mean to them and what it commits them to. By utilising free inquiry, the power of science and creative imagination for the furtherance of peace and in the service of compassion, we have confidence that we have



the means to solve the problems that confront us all. We call upon all who share this conviction to associate themselves with us in this endeavour.

IHEU Congress 2002.

(Added by the IHEU website: human rights: Universal rights to which every person is entitled because they are justified by a moral standard that stands above the laws of any individual nation; best enunciated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by UN General Assembly resolution 217 A (III) of 10 December 1948)

***Although Unitarian Humanists do not necessarily follow the above IHEU Declaration, it is safe to say their thinking would be “along those lines”. Jan Tendys***

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## **US Foreign Policy, Survival and Stark Realities.**

***Colin Whatmough***

Points to ponder from my presentation on this topic in May, 2012.

1. The topic springs from one of the U/U Principles: “the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all”.
2. The selection of issues that should rank highly on the agenda of concerns for human welfare and rights is a subjective matter.
3. Choices that bear directly on the prospects of decent survival are nuclear war, environmental catastrophe/ climate change and the fact that the government of the world’s leading power - the US - is acting in ways that increase the likelihood of these catastrophes.
4. The US “system” is coming to have some of the characteristics of failed states i.e. their inability or unwillingness to protect their citizens from violence; their tendency to regard themselves as beyond the reach of domestic or international law and hence free to carry out aggression and violence.

5. Most Americans live in a climate of “democratic deficit”. They have spent most of their work life employed by private corporations and bureaucracies that are top-down autocratic by nature where democratic dissent can lead to compromised opportunities.

6. The choice facing the world is “stark, dreadful and inescapable”- shall we put an end to the human race with nuclear weapons or shall mankind renounce war?

7. But the world has not renounced war - quite the contrary. The world’s hegemonic power - the US - gives itself the right to wage war at will, under a doctrine of “anticipatory self-defence”, with unstated bounds. International law, treaties and rules of world order are sternly imposed on others but dismissed as irrelevant for themselves in a long standing practice - Reagan, Bush II

8. A most fundamental moral truism is the principle of universality - we must apply to ourselves the same standards we do to others. It is a remarkable comment on Western intellectual culture that this principle is often ignored.

9. The single standard approach “all for our own interests and nothing for other people” is still so deeply entrenched that it is beyond awareness.

10. Take ‘terror’, the leading topic of the day. Here is a straightforward single standard - their terror against us and our clients is the ultimate evil - while our terror against them does not exist or is entirely appropriate if it does e.g. Afghanistan & Iraq invasions.

11. The single standard also extends to weapons and other means of destruction. The US military expenditures approximate those of the rest of the world combined. Arms sales by some 38 North American companies account for more than 60% of the world’s total. For the world’s dominant power, the means of destruction have few limits e.g. nuclear weapons. Are nuclear weapons built so as never to use them?

12. The risk of nuclear destruction highlighted by both Russell and Einstein is not just an abstraction. We have already come perilously

Close to the brink of nuclear war in 1962 - the Cuban missile crisis.

13. The pursuit of total security by one state, including the “right” to wage war at will and to “remove the nuclear brakes” leads to the insecurity of others who are likely to react. The Clinton doctrine meant that the US was entitled to resort to unilateral use of military power to ensure uninhibited access to key markets, energy supplies and strategic resources - primarily oil - including the threat of first strike with nuclear weapons against non-nuclear states! (Clinton planners called it Stratcom).

14. The US can crush can crush someone anywhere in the world on 30 minutes notice – with no need for an nearby airbase. Not surprisingly these actions have elicited concern, criticism and reactions. Russia responded by sharply increasing its own capacity. The US “Missile Defence” recognised on all sides as a first strike weapon is a severe danger to China which is expanding its offensive capacities to preserve its deterrent eg more powerful nuclear missiles capable of reaching the US. North Korea also.

15. We are reminded that in 1986 Mikhail Gorbachov called for the total elimination of nuclear weapons - a wonderful proposal that foundered on Reagan’s militarism of space programs - called Star Wars.

16. The probability of “Apocalypse Soon” cannot be realistically estimated but it is surely too high to be contemplated lightly. The chances of an accidental nuclear attack might be increasing. Another concern is that nuclear weapons may sooner or later fall into the hands of terrorist groups.

17. The only threat remotely comparable to the use of nuclear weapons is the serious danger of environmental catastrophe re climate change mainly through greenhouse gas emissions. Yet the US, the major CO2 gas emitter stood almost alone - Australia with them - in rejecting the original Kyoto protocols - they are still dragging the chain on reducing emissions. Without the US cooperation real progress on emissions is questionable.

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***Readers may also be interested in this extract of an interview between a STRATCOM commander and a group interested in arms control. JT***

The whole of this June 2006 interview can be read at [http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006\\_06/CartwrightInterview](http://www.armscontrol.org/act/2006_06/CartwrightInterview)

The website of the Arms Control Association is <http://www.armscontrol.org/>

### **Strategic Decisions: An Interview With STRATCOM Commander General James E. Cartwright conducted by (US) Arms Control Association**

**Cartwright:**....the Russians for all intents and purposes have complied with the Moscow Treaty. You are starting to see the emergence of other countries with either the acknowledged capability or the acknowledged intent to field nuclear weapons. Today, they are characterized by nowhere near the delivery platforms or numbers, if they have nuclear weapons, of Russia. Certainly, the accuracy, range, and all the other attributes associated [with those systems] are not as good probably as, say, the Russians were at the peak of their time. Then, there are those who just have aspirations and are working aggressively to get delivery platforms. So, there is a range of activity out there.

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The bigger issue associated with tactical weapons is the issue of their size, volume, weight, et cetera. It is hard to steal a ballistic missile. It might be easier to get at something that is tactical. [One concern] is that, in exercising, protecting, and demonstrating what your [tactical nuclear] capabilities are in order to be transparent, do you expose those things, and is that giving an opportunity to terrorists to get in and out? We believe with great certainty that ours are well controlled. We worry about newcomers and about all of the [former] Soviet Union. Where did all this stuff go? Do we have good control of it?

**Continued p. 8.**

## Women in Afghanistan

The following is an extract from the article "Australia can show Afghanistan the way to women's rights" by **Malalai Shinwari** who is currently working as a legal advisor to the Ministry of Economy and Director of Afghanistan Integrated Capacity development Organization. From The Drum, ABC.



**The Afghanistan Independent Human Rights Commission recorded 4,010 cases of violence against women from 21 March to 21 October 2012 throughout Afghanistan compared to 2,299 cases it recorded for the entire solar year in 2011 (from 21 March 2010 to 21 March 2011).**

What this represents is most likely an increase in violence against women in Afghanistan, as well as an increase in the reporting of such violence, as women find their voice, and find compatriots willing to represent them.

The absence of protection for women is perhaps their key obstacle to true participation in society. If women don't feel secure, they will not venture out into the public space to participate in the creation of a new Afghanistan.

But it is also about more than physical security. Women must feel, and be, included in society. I know this from personal experience. Because of the war, I was forced to relocate from Kabul, where I studied, to an area with little to no amenities and no education opportunities.

The removal of hope, for a brighter future, for a peaceful present, can break people down. In these conditions, there is no motivation to fight for individual rights. In these regions, there is no hope in the eyes of the women facing an unknown future.

Women need to know they are not alone, and the best way this can be done is by seeing international support, and to see themselves being represented by women of their own nation.

The hard work of Afghans in parliament and civil society, and the international community, is slowly creating an Afghanistan where women can feel free to claim some of

their most basic rights; freedom from violence, freedom to access education, freedom to walk the streets unaccompanied.

Now that women have fought for these basic rights, they deserve a seat at the table, and a voice in the conversation. Australia, with its seat on the UN Security Council, absolutely must make a priority of ensuring that women are represented in Afghan institutions as they make the transition to a more complete form of self-rule.

Afghan women are the symbols of progress and democracy in the region. We must ensure that the country does not slip back into the Taliban-created dark age of terrorism and extremism that women experienced 15 years ago.

Australia has a female Prime Minister, and a female Governor-General. It stands as a beacon of what a nation can achieve in gaining rights and representation for women. As such, Australia has a responsibility on the global stage to push for women's rights.

The story of women's progress is one not often told outside of Afghanistan, but it is vital in giving context to how Australia must treat its exit from my country. Today we have 69 women sitting in the Afghan parliament, over 3 million girls going to school who were deprived of all education under the Taliban, and hundreds of women journalists and activists working in media outlets and across civil society. This is progress. Keeping these gains is essential to any discussion of a future Afghanistan.

The issue of survival is critical to the story of Afghan woman, and it is a complicated issue. We are gaining rights, but still face violence every day. We are gaining a voice, but many of us remain silenced in our homes. When international forces leave, the Taliban will try to take us back to the days before I could speak publicly.

If I am not able to continue my struggle for women's rights, if we are intimidated into silence, constantly threatened by insecurity and political deals that will jeopardise our progress, then for what reason have Australian forces fought and died for nearly 10 years?

***We hope to have another contribution on this subject in a later Esprit. JT***

The Russian perception of the world is that they are surrounded by countries that look like they are starting to proliferate and have the potential to have tactical weapons. They may not have the transparency with [countries] that are relatively close to them as we [do].

**Arms Control Today interviewer: So, your perception is that Russia's posture is a response to some other country's current or potential nuclear arsenal rather than, say, U.S. conventional superiority?**

**Cartwright:** It has to play into the calculus. I think it really has to play into their calculus. From the standpoint of our calculus, we have a strategy to assure allies that we will be there for them if they are attacked. In that assurance, we are trying to develop more precise weapons and more credible weapons. I'm talking more about the conventional side of the equation here. [We want] capabilities that are responsive and that really can assure [our allies]. Assurance is a very difficult thing for those countries in today's environment, where short- and medium-range ballistic missiles can be rolled out, fired, and hidden in very short order and their flight time is very quick. Look at the Middle East, for instance; the time of flight and the time of reaction is very, very quick now. It is starting to creep way inside of those comfort zones that we had in the Cold War about having time to have alternatives. This new class of weapons, particularly short- and medium-range, that is being developed really puts stress on normal protocols to make sure that you got options and transparency.

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**Different Perceptions**

***Commander Cartwright is making the assumption that the weaponry ambitions of various countries around the world are not simply a response to the power and hegemony of the US but relate to their own particular situations - hence his mention of missiles in the Middle East. I think this is fair enough. It is noteworthy that Cartwright's perception is that US motivation relates in part to the need of its allies for defence. Presumably he has Israel in mind as one such ally. Who else? Australia?***

**Jan Tendys**

The Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has sections on various relevant topics at <http://www.dfat.gov.au/security/>

**Would you care to join Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship? Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter. Full membership \$50 concession \$20 .** If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org) . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or Ginna Hastings for an application form at the Sunday service.

***If you have a news item or written article you believe would be of interest to the congregation, we invite you to submit it for Esprit.*** It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Esprit editor by the 15th of each month: [jtendys@bigpond.com](mailto:jtendys@bigpond.com) or hand to Jan Tendys at the Sunday service.

***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. *Please see Caz Donnelly at the Sunday service*

**Fellowship contact 0466 940 461**