



Schedule of Services

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

6 March, Martin Horlacher, "Right and Wrong"

The issue of just what is right, and what is wrong, is easily one of the perennial questions of moral philosophy, and one that has plagued ethicists and thinkers for perhaps as long as humanity has existed. However, whilst this talk will indeed ask this very question, it will also seek to engender discussion, rather than impose any one view as the definitive answer.

13 March, Rev. Geoff Usher, "Ten Characteristics of Religious Maturity," Part 2

Mature religion grows with out increasing knowledge of the world. It is willing to accept today's truth, even though this means giving up the cherished comfortable truths of yesterday. Mature religion is vitally interested in the world around it, and in improving that world. This mini-series of two services will consider what a truly mature religious position might be like.

20 March, Colin Whatmough, "Seeking a New Easter"

Where a Resurrection of thought will better serve the needs of the Western World in the 21st Century

27 March, Easter No meeting

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*If France was his father, Algeria was his mother.*

### **Extracts from "Camus and Algeria" by Claire Messud**

Last year, on July 5, 2012, Algeria celebrated fifty years of independence from France. When Albert Camus perished in a car accident near Sens on January 4, 1960, at the age of forty-six, two and a half years before the Évian Accords that ended the war, he had become a figure of contempt and scorn for both the left and the right, seen as simultaneously naive and dogmatic in his persistent hope for a moderate Algerian solution. As late as 1958, Camus wrote that his aim was to "achieve the only acceptable future: a future in which France, wholeheartedly embracing its tradition of liberty, does justice to all the communities of Algeria without discrimination in favor of one or another." **See page 8**

## Film Review 'Spotlight'

*Helen Whatmough*

'Spotlight' is a film relating the uncovering of Roman Catholic Church abuses of children supposedly in their care, initially in Boston USA.

Spotlight was the name given to a team of investigative journalists working for 'The Boston Globe'. In 2001, the new editor Marty Barron (Liev Schreiber), gave the team the task of following up on a small news item about a paedophile priest in the Boston Diocese.

They initially found cuttings in their own paper's archives relating one off stories of abuse that had not been followed up in previous decades and were able to identify possibly seven abusive priests who had been moved to other parishes after complaints from parents.

Once they started to check Church registers listing priests, their placements and even times of absence from the Diocese ( a clue to some unexplained moving around) they were sure that eighty-seven fit their criteria; by the end of their investigation they had collated two hundred and fifty names.

Their work occurred in the era (2002) when the internet was in its infancy and they needed to comb through paper files, archives and microfiche for information.

The cover up, they went on to discover, was at the highest levels in the church including the Cardinal, had gone on over decades and rocked the predominantly Catholic Boston Establishment to its foundations. It (the cover up) had been aided by members of the legal and government establishment.

This subsequently led to a world wide crisis in one of the oldest and most trusted institutions and has come to be recognized as 'undermining people's faith in organized religion'.

The film producers, in 2008, had great difficulty in attracting a screen writer (Josh Singer) and Tom McCarthy, the director, had further difficulties in attracting backers to finance the

film; even distributors were lukewarm and releases were quite limited in America during 2015.

Supposedly, there was a feeling that the film was too low key – no car chases, no romantic interest, no special effects – and would not hold the audience's interest. However, it does convey the dogged persistence of the reporting team – the door knocking, the long hours in libraries, the following up of small pieces of information, the not so veiled threats and the putting together of the larger picture that then unfolded. The Spotlight team became Pulitzer Prize winners. As well, the film has received many awards and is now nominated for various Academy Awards.

One of the most shocking segments of 'Spotlight' comes at the end of the film, preceding the credits. A caption lists hundreds of cities around the world where similar crimes of the church were subsequently uncovered. Sadly, there are twenty two entries for Australia, including Sydney and Melbourne.

There has been no negative outcry from the Roman Catholic Church about the film.

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Book review: "The Daughters of Mars" by Thomas Keneally.

Jan Tendys

One might think there couldn't be anything more to say about World War1 and especially about the ANZACS. Well, I certainly learned a lot from this book—mainly about the care (or failure to care) for wounded and gassed soldiers, and about the lives of the nurses and doctors who did their best sometimes amid shambles or bombing.

The big questions are not avoided: militarism, pacifism, class discrimination, gender discrimination, what constitutes courage etc. One of two Australian sisters becomes engaged to a Quaker who is prepared to act as a medical officer but refuses when ordered to fight. Her sister is jolted when her soldier friend tells her the men shoot their wounded coppers hanging on the wire in No Man's Land if they cannot be retrieved. Big questions are best understood, as here, in the details of lives and deaths.

Criticize from Within

David Blankenhorn
(writing in American Interest)

The intellectual habits of polarization include binary (Manichaeic) thinking, absolutizing one's preferred values, viewing uncertainty as a weakness, privileging deductive thinking, assuming that one's opponents are motivated by bad faith, and hesitating to agree on basic facts and the meaning of evidence.

What are the antidotes to these familiar habits? We can recognize the mindset of the polarizer, but how does the depolarizer understand conflict and try to make sense of the world? Here is an attempt to answer these questions, by way of proposing the seven habits of highly depolarizing people.

1. Criticize from within.

In other words, criticize the other—whether person, group, or society—on the basis of something you have in common. The political philosopher Michael Walzer describes this approach as “internal criticism.” He writes: “We criticize our society just as we criticize our friends, on the assumption that the terms of the critique, the moral references, are common.” * As Walzer and many others have observed, besides being depolarizing, criticizing from within is typically much more effective than criticizing from outside.

This idea of recognizing something that is shared with the other—even in moments of fierce conflict—is beautifully reflected in Lincoln's use of the term “better angels” in his first Inaugural address, on the eve of the Civil War. William Seward, who would serve as Secretary of State under Lincoln, had suggested that the new President conclude by calling in hope upon the “the guardian angel of the nation.” Lincoln changed it to “the better angels of our nature.” In Seward's version, what was needed would come from outside us. In Lincoln's version, it would come from within us, something “better” in the “nature” of both Northerners and Southerners.

* Walzer, The Company of Critics (Basic Books, 1988), p. 230. See also pp. 143–51 for Walzer's description of Albert Camus as a practitioner of criticism from within. While it's true, of course, that social criticism is not in the same category of phenomena as political depolarization, Walzer's insights about the former appear to be remarkably relevant to the latter. For example, Walzer writes (p. 151):

“The standard view of critical distance rests on a homely analogy: we are more ready to find fault with other people than with ourselves. If we are to be properly critical, then, we must turn our own people into “the others.” We must look at them as if they were total strangers; or we must make ourselves into strangers to them. The trouble with the analogy is that such easy fault-finding is never very effective. It can be brutal enough, but it doesn't touch the conscience of the people to whom it is addressed. The task of the social critic is precisely to touch the conscience. Hence heretics, prophets, insurgent intellectuals, rebels—Camus's kind of rebels—are insiders all: they know the texts and the tender places of their own culture. ***Criticism is a more intimate activity than the standard view allows***” [emphasis added].

For recent social science research that supports the utility of “criticizing within,” see Matthew Feinberg and Robb Willer, “From Gulf to Bridge: When Do Moral Arguments Facilitate Political Influence?”, Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin (October 7, 2015).

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The above is part of an article “The Seven Habits of Highly Depolarizing People”, which appeared in American Interest.

Author David Blankenhorn acknowledges Stephen R. Covey's outstanding book, “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” and also the seven virtues of classical Christianity: faith, hope, charity, prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance.

**Read more:**  
<http://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/02/17/the-seven-habits-of-highly-depolarizing-people/>

## **The world's forests will collapse if we don't learn to say 'no'**

***Bill Laurance***

**(Distinguished Research Professor and Australian Laureate, James Cook University.)**

An alarming new study has shown that the world's forests are not only disappearing rapidly, but that areas of "core forest" — remote interior areas critical for disturbance-sensitive wildlife and ecological processes — are vanishing even faster.

Core forests are disappearing because a tsunami of new roads, dams, power lines, pipelines and other infrastructure is rapidly slicing into the world's last wild places, opening them up like a flayed fish to deforestation, fragmentation, poaching and other destructive activities.

Most vulnerable of all are forests in the tropics. These forests sustain the planet's most biologically rich and environmentally important habitats.

The collapse of the world's forests isn't going to stop until we start to say "no" to environmentally destructive projects.

### **Damn the dams**

Those who criticise new infrastructure projects are often accused of opposing direly needed economic development, or — if they hail from industrial nations — of being hypocrites.

But when one begins to look in detail at the proposed projects, an intriguing pattern appears: Many are either poorly justified or will have far greater costs than benefits.

For example, in a recent essay in the journal Science, Amazon expert Philip Fearnside argues that many of the 330-odd hydroelectric dams planned or under construction in the Amazon will be more trouble than they're worth.

Many of these dams will have huge environmental impacts, argues Fearnside, and will dramatically increase forest loss in remote regions.

This happens both because the Amazon is quite flat, requiring large areas of forest to be flooded, and because dams and their power lines require road networks that open up the forest to other human impacts. For instance, the 12 dams planned for Brazil's Tapajós River are expected to increase Amazon deforestation by almost 1 million hectares.

Furthermore, Fearnside argues, much of the electricity the Amazon dams produce will be used for smelting aluminium, which provides relatively little local employment.

Fearnside asserts that mega-dams planned for the Congo Basin and Mekong River will also cause big problems, with limited or questionable benefits.

### **Roads to ruin**

The explosive expansion of roads into the world's last wild places is an even more serious problem. Indeed, Eneas Salati, one of Brazil's most respected scientists, once quipped that "the best thing you could do for the Amazon is to blow up all the roads".

Current projections suggest that by 2050, we'll have nearly 25 million kilometres of additional paved roads — enough to encircle the Earth more than 600 times.

I have led three major studies of planned road expansion, for the entire planet and for the Brazilian Amazon and sub-Saharan Africa. All three show that many planned roads would have massive impacts on biodiversity and vital ecosystem services while providing only sparse socioeconomic benefits.

In Africa, for example, our analyses reveal that 33 planned "development corridors" would total over 53,000 kilometers in length while crisscrossing the continent and cutting into many remote, wild areas. Of these, we ranked only six as "promising" whereas the remainder were "inadvisable" or "marginal".



Herd of cattle in Amazon.  
Photo Rhett A. Butler, Mongabay

### Progress at any price?

There is a very active coalition of pro-growth advocates — including corporate lobbyists, climate-change deniers, and die-hard proponents of “economic growth” — that immediately decry any effort to oppose new developments.

Added to this are those who argue reasonably for economic development to combat poverty and disparity in developing nations. Such advocates often assert that an added bonus of development is greater sustainability, because impoverished people can be highly destructive environmentally. The denuded nation of Haiti is one such example.

Yet the on-the-ground reality is often far more complex. For instance, the heavy exploitation and export of natural resources, such as minerals, fossil fuels or timber, can cause nations to suffer “Dutch Disease” — an economic syndrome characterised by rising currency values, economic inflation and the weakening of other economic sectors, such as tourism, education and manufacturing.

Dutch Disease tends to increase economic disparity, because the poor are impacted most heavily by rising food and living costs. Further, the national economy becomes more vulnerable to economic shocks from fluctuating natural-resource prices or depletion. The Solomon Islands — which relies heavily on timber exports that are collapsing from overexploitation — is a poster-child for Dutch Disease.

On top of this is the toxic odour of corruption

that pervades many big infrastructure projects. One would need an abacus just to keep track of the allegations.

To cite just two recent examples: in Malaysia, an independent investigation has concluded that nearly US\$4 billion was misappropriated from a state-owned fund set up to attract international property, infrastructure and energy investments. And in Brazil, the granting of contracts for major Amazon dams has been drowning in allegations of corruption.

If we’re going to have any wild places left for our children and grandchildren, we simply can’t say “yes” to every proposed development project.

For those that will have serious environmental and social consequences, we need to start saying “no” a lot more often.

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Remember how we once fought the cutting down our forests for woodchips?

Now we laud the use of “biomass, which is usually defined as a renewable energy source. Derived from organic matter such as wood, crop waste, or garbage, it makes up 50% of all U.S. renewable energy. Ninety percent of all existing biomass power plants



use wood residue and there are currently 115 power plants in development that will burn biomass

to generate electricity in US.

See:

<http://blogs.ei.columbia.edu/2011/08/18/is-biomass-really-renewable/>

According to the US Energy Information Administration using biomass for energy can have positive and negative impacts on the environment. It provides an alternative to using fossil fuels like coal, petroleum, or natural gas. Burning fossil fuels and burning biomass releases carbon dioxide (CO2), a greenhouse gas, but when the plants that are the source of biomass are grown, a nearly

a nearly equivalent amount of CO₂ is captured through photosynthesis.

Burning wood

Using wood, and charcoal made from wood, for heating and cooking can replace fossil fuels and may result in lower CO₂ emissions overall. Wood may be harvested from forests or woodlots that have to be thinned, or it may come from urban trees that fall down or that have to be cut down. Wood smoke contains harmful pollutants like carbon monoxide and particulate matter. Burning wood in an open fireplace for heating is an inefficient way to produce heat, and it can also produce air pollution. Modern wood burning stoves and fireplace inserts are designed to reduce the amount of particulates emitted by the appliance. Wood and charcoal are major cooking and heating fuels in poor countries, and the wood may be harvested faster than trees can grow. This results in deforestation. Planting fast-growing trees for fuel and using fuel-efficient cooking stoves can help slow deforestation and improve the environment.

Read more:

http://www.eia.gov/Energyexplained/?page=biomass_environment

Additional Comments, by Jan Tendys

Of course if whole trees are cut down to make biomass that is usually a bad thing for the environment & if it happened on a large scale it would affect the argument that biomass is carbon neutral because the growing trees replace the wood that is harvested.

In some places the only wood that is taken is as branches that have dropped to the ground i.e. not stripped from living trees. However, one has to ask what use did that fallen wood serve in the forest? Not just homes for fungi and other wood-degrading plants, but often as homes for forest-living animals.

There is also the question of what happens to the claim of carbon neutrality if a forest, even one suitably biomass-harvested, is later cleared for whatever human reasons make that convenient? Or if the forest dies by natural causes as some US forests afflicted by the

pine beetle have (a pest that is worsening as the habitat warms) or as a result of wildfire?

Some forests in the US, where whole trees have been taken, have been decimated to provide woodchips to allow the UK to claim it is reaching its renewable targets.

Another Conversation article points out:

“Demand is largely driven by European countries wanting to meet targets set out in the EU’s **Renewable Energy Directive**. Half of the pellets exported from the US were used to generate electricity in Britain’s massive Drax power station, which is slowly converting from coal to biomass in order to reduce carbon emissions and claim valuable “Renewable Obligation certificates” for green electricity. So can it really be sustainable to transport wood halfway round the world to burn in a power station?

Many environmentalists don’t think so. A consortium of NGOs recently argued that the EU should exclude wood from its renewable energy targets. They claim the industry is felling large areas of hardwood wetland forests across the south-eastern US, causing a loss of biodiversity and a net increase in carbon emissions. Even when the forest regrows it does not store as much carbon in biomass and soils as the original – and it’s certainly not as good for wildlife.”

by David Styles, Lecturer in Carbon Footprinting, Bangor University

<https://theconversation.com/british-power-stations-are-burning-wood-from-us-forests-to-meet-renewables-targets-54969> **British power stations are burning wood from US forests – to meet renewables targets**

It’s a complex argument as the wood that is burned is critical. Also replacement growth, as distinct from normal growth, may use up more CO₂.

The biomass question is just one of many (some much more serious) that throw doubts on ambitions to achieve 100% renewable energy in anything like the time needed. JT

Book Review : “Country Women and the Colour Bar” by Jennifer Jones

Cassie Thornley.

Stan Grant's passionate autobiography “Talking To My Country” is just the latest in a plethora of books by or focused on Aboriginal Australians. The range of subjects is wide from Stan's account of growing up 'other' in the dominant white society, Bill Gammage's brilliant study “The Largest Estate on Earth” on the way the Fire Stick economy of Indigenous people helped form, and largely controlled, the ecology of the continent, and Libby Connors' “Warrior”, the biography of Dundalli an Aboriginal man who, during the 1840s, became leader of his people and fought to retain control of the Brisbane valley area: to quote John Birmingham author and columnist "Connors lays down the hard truth. Not all our warriors were Anzacs. Not all our wars were just." These books are supported by many novels by Aboriginal authors on a variety of themes.

As Stan points out, both Aboriginal and 'Anglo' Australians grow up imbibing ideas of white supremacy and the various 'reasons' why Aboriginal people are inherently inferior; these attitudes are endemic at school, from our peers, society in general and often at home. Those of us who become 'liberal' and adopt firm beliefs in equality of all people etc. think that those pervasive assumptions with which we grew up are therefore overthrown, as we happily welcome Aboriginal and other 'different' folk as our friends and into our family. Unfortunately often these later acquired beliefs are superficial, after all we have travelled or lived in a country town and seen the way Aboriginals live, therefore many of those old beliefs aren't all that wrong, are they? Early prejudices linger in our psyche, often unconscious. Confronting our old deeply held concepts and attitudes is difficult work so often overlooked or regarded as unnecessary in view of our current public stance.

I've been considering this problem recently while reading Prof. Jennifer Jones new book “Country women and the colour bar - 'Grassroots activism and the Country

Women's Association". During the 1950 - 1970s the NSW CWA decided to set up branches for Aboriginal women. The movement was led and promoted by a number of influential women with long affiliation to the CWA. These new branches, in both country and coastal areas, were supported by long established CWA branches in nearby towns.

The author outlines both the difficulties and successes of these projects and considers what the outcomes were, for all members involved. She has done extensive research into CWA archives, with many quotes from either textual or oral sources, her description of the CWA member's interactions not only with the local Aboriginal Branch but also (in Griffith) with incoming migrant women is very indicative of the era.

Jones does not go deeply into the reasons why Aboriginal people lived in marginalised situations, she assumes some degree of general knowledge of this by the reader.

Her reportage is direct, balanced and objective, picking up the variety of attitudes within the CWA as well as the mixed response from Aboriginals. She writes well resulting an informative and enjoyable 'read'. In her final chapter she efficiently weighs up the effects of the endeavour on both parties involved, and its later evolution into the Reconciliation movement. Apart from CWA and Aboriginal women the other party with a big stake in the situation were various Government agencies. Here she reports the now familiar scenario of bureaucratic meanness and incompetence failing to carry out even the limited and biased Gov. policy of "Assimilation" which was promoted at the time.

We are currently looking to a probable referendum on the inclusion in our Constitution of acknowledgement of the long ownership of our Continent by Aboriginal people, prior to the arrival of white settlers and Aboriginal dispossession. Informative books on Aboriginal/Anglo interactions and history provide a necessary background for thinking on this important issue.

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**Continued from page 1.**

November 7 of this year \* marks Camus' centenary. The artist and essayist—the author of *L'Étranger* (1942) and *L'Homme révolté* (1951)—has consistently held the reading public's admiration and imagination. But his attitudes on the Algerian question—excoriated by his contemporaries on all sides, and subsequently by critics as diverse as Conor Cruise O'Brien and Edward Said—remain controversial.

The recent publication, for the first time in English, of Camus' "Algerian Chronicles", edited and introduced by Alice Kaplan and beautifully translated by Arthur Goldhammer, affords Camus the belated opportunity to make his own case to the Anglophone public. This book, in slightly different form, proved his final public word on the Algerian question when it was originally published in June 1958. Ending two and a half years of public silence that followed his failed call for a civilian truce in Algiers in January 1956—a silence that became, according to Kaplan, "a metonymy for cowardice" but that my relatives would have recognized as agony—"Algerian Chronicles" was published in France in 1958 to "widespread critical silence."

The lack of interest that greeted the book can be attributed in part to its publication fast upon the heels of Henri Alleg's "The Question", the vivid and disturbing autobiographical account of the author's torture in the Barberousse prison in Algiers, an immediate best seller subsequently suppressed by the French authorities. This book, and the debates that arose from it, greatly affected French public opinion on the war; and it was, thereafter, impossible to ignore the facts about the French military's use of torture.....

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Camus' traditional idealization of France as perhaps flawed in its actions but fundamentally noble in its intent did not waver, even in the face of the Algerian uprising. .... "you couldn't exclude the possibility of erasing the sin of colonization with sincere repentance and extensive reparations." (French journalist Jean Daniel speaking of Camus' "Catholic atheist" thinking.)

**Read the whole New York" Review of Books article:**

<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2013/11/07/camus-and-algeria-moral-question/>

\* 2013

**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 a member of Spirit of Life, 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 / 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**