



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
(near Milsons Point Station)

Fellowship contact 0466 940 461

Website: www.sydneyunitarians.org

Editor: Jan Tendys

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Schedule of Services

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

**May 5 Martin Horlacher "Atheists, Theists, Foxholes
and Fundamentalisms."**

The place of faith, religion and secularism in today's world is a difficult topic, and a very hot one. Are all spiritual and religious people essentially deluded? Or are there really, as some would say, no atheists in foxholes? And is agnosticism a tenable position? This talk will ask all of these questions, and, to the greatest extent possible, answer them.

May 12 Helen Whatmough Mothers' Day

May 19 Morandir Armson "Teaching Ethics Classes"

'The NSW Public Instruction Act of 1880 states that children are to receive one lesson per week of 'Special Religious Education'. But what happens to children who are not religious? Or indeed, to children who practice a religion which is not catered to by SRE teachers? The answer is the Primary Ethics program. This presentation will feature a personal view of the Primary Ethics program, by a volunteer ethics teacher, who teaches in the largest, and one of the most ethnically diverse primary school in NSW'.

**May 26th Eric Stevenson, Colin Whatmough "Understanding — no matter what, from
where or from whom."**

An interview.

June 2nd Rev. Dr. Ian Ellis-Jones Shinto for Non-Japanese

Shinto is the authentic, native religion of Japan with its roots stretching back to 500 BCE. Today, there is a lot of interest in the West in this spiritual path which has no dogma, no concept of sin, no sacred books as such, and no mandatory precepts. Shinto in its respect and reverence for 'Great Nature', and its acknowledgment of the interconnectedness of all things, has great relevance to the Japanese as well as non-Japanese---and Shinto and Unitarianism have more than a bit in common.

Note from the editor:

I have a couple of lengthy contributions waiting to be published. Patience.

Poetry seems to be popular with Esprit readers so I would welcome some more "old favourites", and of course if you have written any poems yourself that's extra special. "Green" articles are popular too—but how about some home-grown ones from members?

JT

Letter Writing

Jan Tendys

We probably cannot congratulate ourselves in having been partly instrumental in getting the tax situation reversed for donations to ethics teaching because the news came almost immediately after our last Esprit was issued. However, it may not have worked out that way and the exercise was no doubt useful for us.

Although I agree with Colin Whatmough that a well researched, personal letter through the post is probably the best way of attracting pollie attention—their assistants would make sure of that—sometimes a brief email is the best we can do. It adds to the sheer weight of numbers. Number are also a factor in letters to newspaper editors; your letter is not useless because it does not get published. If the letter editor gets a lot of letters on the same topic, she or he is more likely to actually publish a letter on that topic or to tell the articles editor that the natives are restless with regard to euthanasia, RU386, gambling or whatever you wrote about.

Environment Minister Tony Burke is close to deciding whether oil and gas exploration can go ahead in the waters of Kangaroo Island, South Australia, so I shot off an email to him. If I am writing to an ALP pollie I always mention that I am a member of the ALP because the party is trying to encourage grassroots members, so I hope that the assistants will bring my email to the attention of our great ones. Here's my "quickie" to Mr. Burke:

Dear Tony Burke,

I am a member of the Rockdale Branch of the ALP.

Just wanted to say to you that I have very fond memories of Kangaroo Island circa 1980 and am hoping to go back there. I remember in particular the masses of beautiful starfish in the crystal waters. Also the sea lions.

It makes me very apprehensive to think of oil or gas extraction anywhere

near there.

(If writing, include your full name + postal address.)

Of course one could speak volumes about how Mother Earth doesn't want any more fossil fuels anyway, but I left it to others to cover that angle.

Here's his email if you would like to express your thoughts, but check that the decision has not already been made by the time you read this.

tony.burke.mp@environment.gov.au
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## **A Thoughtful View from a Unitarian Universalist (US)**

From the website of the UU Fellowship of Stanislaus County <http://www.stanuu.org/beliefs.html#heart>

"There are Presbyterians who vote Democratic and Presbyterians who vote Republican. No one calls them 'The church that doesn't vote for anything'. There are Lutherans who eat lima beans and Lutherans who do not. No one calls them 'The church that doesn't eat anything'. There are UUs who believe that God exists, UUs who believe that God does not exist, and UUs who believe that the nature of God is beyond human comprehension. This upsets people and they call us 'The church that doesn't believe in anything.' " (Church member, Ted Pack)

### **Alternative view of the Principles and Purposes:**

[Disclaimer: Ted Pack wrote this. He is a lay webmaster, not a minister. It is not a statement of belief by the UUF of SC.]

The Unitarians formally organized in the United States in 1825. As the name implies, they didn't believe in the Holy Trinity. The Universalists formally organized in 1793. As the name implies, they didn't believe in salvation by grace for just a few people; they believed in Universal salvation. Time passed. About 1841 Theodore Parker, a Unitarian

minister, gave a famous sermon. He said that the things Jesus of Nazareth taught (Love one another, don't cast the first stone, words of hatred that come out of your mouth defile you more than any forbidden food you put into it . . .) made sense, even if Jesus wasn't the only begotten Son of God. This caused a stir in theological circles. Christianity is based on prophets and its savior. We, by contrast, are a non-prophet organization.

More time passed. We got more liberal. In 1961 the Unitarians merged with the Universalists to form the Unitarian-Universalist Association. The Unitarians got first billing because there were more of them, even though the Universalists were older.

At one point after the merge, the membership application for the UUA read "No statement of creed or belief, including this one, shall be a condition for membership." As a result, we got the reputation of being "The church that doesn't believe in anything." We believe in a lot of things, but we are not unanimous about them, the way the Catholics are about the Apostolic Creed. On any given issue we may be split 50-50, 90-10, or 35-35-25-05.

In the early 1980's, tired of being known as the church that didn't believe in anything, the UUA appointed a committee to come up with a statement of beliefs. They created the list of Principles and Purposes (These were given above this section **JT**), plus the list of sources. If you read carefully, you can tell it was written in the early 1980's, by a committee

**Some of our specific beliefs and practices, in no particular order:**

***We take "the worth and dignity of every person" seriously.*** It means people of all shapes, sizes, colors, and ages; rich or homeless, straight, gay, or lesbian. It means a man who stammers because he has an IQ of 140 trapped in an 80-year old body that suffered a stroke, and a woman whose legs don't work. The gay or lesbian part usually upsets conservative people. (I was once in a workshop where the 80-year old spoke, haltingly. Every other person in the room listened patiently, not trying to finish his sentences for him. The workshop leader, realizing they were living that principle, and in awe of an indomitable spirit, got damp

around the eyeballs.)

***We sing in church; not always well, but we try.***

***We have instrumental music in church. It helps us sing on key.***

***We ordain women.***

***We believe there is some truth in all religions; "different paths to the same goal" is the phrase we use a lot.***

***We believe Jesus of Nazareth was a great religious leader, in the same league as Mohammed, Moses, Buddha, Confucius, Lao Tse and others.*** Some of us believe he was the greatest, some of us think he was tied for first place, and some of us don't believe religious leaders can be ranked.

***Just under half of us believe in a supreme being.*** (There was a "Read more about that" section. **JT**.)

***Most of us believe in evolution.***

***We pray; some of us expect answers, some don't.***

***Very few of us believe in original sin, salvation by grace, or transubstantiation.***

***We believe the Bible is a great book, but we don't take all of it literally.***

***We believe children should learn the basic tenets of all major religions and be taught to think for themselves.*** Our Religious Education Goals go into this in more detail. It is a mission statement, even though the author has been dead for more than 150 years.

## **What I believe, in 30 words or less.**

We asked our members to answer either "What do you believe?" or "What drew you to our fellowship?" in 30 words or less. We used the 30-word limit to make it a challenge, and because we knew most web visitors would not wade through long paragraphs. Here is what they wrote:

I believe that many paths lead to the same truth and that the journey is as important as the destination.

I believe in the necessity for care and compassion to exist between people. I was attracted to UU because it supports people's search for meaning without constricting them with dogma.

I wanted a church with diverse sources of religious inspiration, including Earth-based worship.

We came because we could worship with our family together. Since we had some different views on religion we found this was a place that we could come together.

I wanted a children's program that guided their developing religious philosophy with respect for differing viewpoints.

I'm an agnostic. This was the only church in the county that would have me.

For more along these lines, we had a service which asked everyone to answer the question "What Does Being a Unitarian Universalist mean to You?" It is in our Guest Sermon section.

[http://www.stanuu.org/being\\_a\\_uu.html](http://www.stanuu.org/being_a_uu.html)

**Jan Tendys:** I actually like the UUA's **Principles and Purposes** and their **Sources** just as they are, but I found UU Ted Pack's view definitely worth repeating.

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Travel

Dorothy Porter

Waiting on a reeking strange
railway station -
then the dead-quiet but crowded
night ferry.

What country
did I travel from
when I was born?

What alluring bait
made me leave?

William Blake
as he was dying
craned forward
towards a country
he'd always wanted to see.

His rapturous curiosity
always
an unsettling inspiration.

The Venerable Bede
embroidered his metaphor
of the brevity of life
after watching
a sparrow fly
from one darkness to another
a living flash
through a torch-bright hall.

What lives
keeps leaping
to and fro
those pregnant black tunnels
of being?

On a bold day
my own footloose
soul
can smell a good
sailing wind -
the dare
in Blake's shimmying-up-the-mask
last breath -
and then crawl
snug and wide-eyed
into the downy
undercarriage
of Bede's plucky
traveller bird.

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**Newcastle Herald** Friday May 3, 2013

Birds in Backyards (birdsinyourbackyards.net), Holly Parsons..... said many people had noticed that our house sparrows were disappearing, and she learnt about their European decline at an urban birds conference in

Europe late last year. Theories, she said, include a chemical in unleaded petrol hitting them hard or a change in gardening fashion depriving them of their favourite nesting shrubs.

**Jeff Corbett**

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What would 'wartime mobilization' to fight climate change look like?

David Roberts

The United States and 140 other countries have signed or otherwise associated with the Copenhagen Accord, in which it is agreed that the nations of the world should “hold the increase in global temperature below 2°C, and take action to meet this objective consistent with science and on the basis of equity.” For there to be a chance — even just a 50/50 chance — of limiting temperature rise to 2°C, global greenhouse gas emissions must peak by 2020 (earlier for the developed world) and fall by 9 or 10 percent a year every year thereafter.

Nothing like that has ever been done. Not even close. No major energy transition has ever moved that quickly. Carbon emissions have never fallen that fast, not even during the economic collapse brought on by the demise of the USSR. Getting to change of that scale and speed is not a matter of nudging along a natural economic shift, as clean energy cost curves come down and fossil fuels get more expensive. That scale and speed seem to demand something like wartime mobilization.

That metaphor gets used a lot. I've used it many times myself. But is it apt? And what would it mean to take it seriously? There's been lots of academic attention to the technology side of rapid, large-scale mitigation, but little attention to the governance side. How could a country engineer such a transition? What powers and institutions would be necessary?

An interesting pair of papers from Laurence L. Delina and his colleague Mark Diesendorf at the Institute of Environmental Studies at the University of New South Wales helps to frame the discussion. “Is wartime mobilisation a suit-

able policy model for rapid national climate mitigation?” will be published in Energy Policy, and “Governing Rapid Climate Mitigation” [PDF] was delivered at the Earth System Governance Conference this year in Tokyo.

The papers, which are focused mostly on the U.S. but meant to draw lessons applicable to other countries as well, “commence the process of developing contingency plans for a scenario in which a sudden major global climate impact galvanises governments to implement emergency climate mitigation targets and programs.”

Let's pause right here for a second. This entire project is premised on the notion that harsh climate impacts will eventually spur the public to demand emergency action from governments. That is, to put it mildly, a debatable premise. I've always thought people put way too much faith in it. It's really, really difficult to know what kind of impact would be big or frequent enough to spur that kind of public unity, especially directed at climate change mitigation (as opposed to adaptation). After all, no one will be able to prevent climate disasters within their lifetime through mitigation — the next 50 years of climate change are already “baked in.” So we're talking about the peoples of the U.S. and the world rallying around emergency measures, wartime sacrifices, on behalf of future generations. I can easily imagine that never happening. And if it does, it's going to take some kind of shock that I can't even really imagine.

Delina and Diesendorf acknowledge that politicians will resist adopting a true emergency posture:

“Since rapid climate mitigation responses on the scale and scope of warlike mobilisation mean that governments may have to turn away from business-as-usual and predominantly market solutions to place more emphasis on centrally organised and publicly funded activities, politicians are less likely to support emergency climate actions for the fear of losing corporate support and, in countries with large fossil fuel reserves, tax revenues.”

Uh, ya think?

Because of political resistance, moving to a wartime-mobilization footing will require serious grassroots pressure:

“Unless the climate action movement can exert strong, growing pressure on governments, by means of lobbying backed up with media, public education, legal actions, building alternatives and nonviolent direct action, it seems unlikely that governments will undertake emergency mitigation, even when life-threatening climate disasters occur”.

Yup.

But anyway. For the sake of discussion, let's imagine such disasters did unfold and there was enough grassroots pressure to force politicians into wartime posture. What would that look like? How would it work?

Delina and Diesendorf take a close look at America's experience during WWII. (It's worth digging into the first paper's section on that topic — there's lots I didn't know about the government's domestic policy during that period.) During that time, the country went from manufacturing almost no war material to manufacturing enough of it to run the world's biggest military. It was an industrial turnaround of astonishing speed and scale.

The lessons that emerge from that period aren't ones I'm particularly comfortable with, and it sounds like the authors aren't totally thrilled with them either. Long story short, what's required in wartime mobilization is an enormous amount of centralized federal executive authority, an enormous amount of borrowing and taxing, and an enormous amount of labor displacement and retraining. At least temporarily, the economy will be more government-directed than market-based.

Among other things, pulling that off will require some sort of large-scale strategy, a set of goals and programs, that is durable enough to be insulated from the ebb and flow of passing administrations and changes in public opinion. It must be focused on long-term mitigation rather than merely immediate adaptation (which is what all the short-term political pressure will favor). At the same time, however, the mitigation strategy can't be so rigid that it is immune to public oversight and control. Some measure of democratic control must be preserved.

Delina and Diesendorf recommend the statutory creation of two new institutions in particular:

- A special Ministry for Transition to a Low-Carbon Future as the principal agency of rapid mitigation activities to conduct technical requirement studies, set and enforce production goals [for renewable energy technologies], institute efficient contracting procedures, cut through the inertia and 'red tape' inhibiting institutional changes, and serve as the coordinating agency for all transition activities.

- A separate institution, independent of the Executive and the above Ministry, reporting directly to Parliament/Congress and the community at large, to prepare a transition timeline specifying the period when executive control starts and ends; to conduct appropriate checks and balances; to scrutinise government/executive actions, especially those of the Ministry for Transition; and, through legal powers, to ensure that the government/executive sticks to its transition mandate.

So it's your basic balance-of-powers set-up: a single coordinating agency and a watchdog to keep it honest. The delicate dance here is to hand over extraordinary power to the executive branch on the premise that it can and will be handed back after a set period of time.

Among the many dangers in this approach is that executives are not generally inclined to give up power once it's been granted them. And it's not like the climate situation will be any less dire in 10 years, or 20. Once you switch over to wartime government in the face of a foe that cannot surrender and never stops, how do you ever switch back? (The parallels to the "war on terrorism" should be obvious here.)

Delina and Diesendorf acknowledge that the WWII mobilization comparison is not perfect, because climate mobilization will be even more difficult and more complicated. (Whee!) It will also involve state and provincial governments, along with civic and private institutions. It will also, crucially, involve international coordination and enforcement. It will eventually have to go beyond particular

economic sectors and address the larger issues of population and consumption. "Getting all these acts done in a coordinated and democratic/participatory manner," Delina and Diesendorf write, "is definitely a huge challenge."

You could say that.

So. Assuming that the climate movement can tie climate impacts together enough to galvanize the public against climate change; assuming politicians can actually be swayed by public pressure into radical, immediate action; assuming that executive power can be expanded and the economy transformed as though it were 1942; assuming that, at the end of the sprint to zero carbon, the federal government cedes back the extraordinary and democratically suspect powers it adopted ... well, assuming all that, we've got this climate governance thing nailed! Yeeesh.

One final note about this. A political conservative will see this post and think, "Aha! I knew it all along! Liberals are using climate change as a pretence to grow government and increase its power over our lives!"

As an assessment of the motivations and ideology of those fighting against climate change, this is absurd, of course. But as an assessment of what must be done to secure real climate safety, it is accurate. In any scenario where mitigation is big enough and fast enough, government really will need to be bigger and more intrusive. That is very much worth worrying about; getting through this ordeal while retaining the open, democratic character of U.S. government (such as it is, anyway) will be a tough needle to thread.

However, it's worth noting that eschewing mitigation and instead trying to adapt to 4°C world will create widespread suffering, migration, and desperation. Those, in turn, will lead to civil unrest and resource conflicts. Guess what governments do in the face of massive disruptions and unrest? They get bigger and more authoritarian!

There's no libertarian* choice here. A huge, global challenge like climate change is inevitably going to mean more government action

and intrusion. The choice is, do you want managed big government, with a bounded set of plans and some amount of oversight built in, or do you want panicked big government, responding to migrations, famines, and conflict? I'm not exactly excited about either choice, but the former definitely strikes me as the lesser of two evils.

*This is meant to mean, in Aussie terms, "libertarian" with a small "l" - not a reference to a Libertarian Party (I think). I owe David Roberts following plug :-) *JT*

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<https://services.grist.org/give/?campaign=7015000000lzgD>

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***A special kind of LISTENING***

*You are not listening to me if:*

- 1 You have the answers to my worries before I tell you what they are.***
- 2. You say you understand before I've told you enough to enable you to understand.***
- 3. You finish my sentences for me.***
- 4. You interrupt me.***
- 5. You interpret me.***
- 6. You find me boring.***
- 7. You tell me about your worries or experiences, making mine seem trivial.***
- 8. You do not like me.***
- 9. You cannot wait to tell me something.***
- 10. You talk about me.***
- 11. You are concerned about my vocabulary, grammar, accent, speech, impediment, quietness or loudness.***

## LISTENING continued

You are not listening to me if:

### **12. You do not care about me or my worries.**

But you are listening to me if.

**1. You give me enough space to discover for myself what is happening around and within me.**

**2. You do not take my worries from me, but allow me to deal with them, in my own way.**

**3. You curb your inclination to give me sound advice.**

**4. You allow me the dignity of making my own decisions no matter how wrong you think they may be.**

**5. You can sympathise with my point of view even when it is contrary to your own sincere convictions and beliefs.**

**6. You genuinely try to understand me even when I'm confused and confusing.**

**7. You are unaware of anything except me.**

**8. You find that the time you gave me has left you a little tired, a little drained and a little moved.**

**9. You care for me no matter what I tell you.**

**10. You have come quietly into my secret world and let me be myself.**

**11. You accept, humbly, my thanks by telling me how good you feel to know that you have helped me.**

**Remember, you may be the first person who has ever really listened to and shared the person's worries, fears and doubts - and it is a real privilege for you - not the person.**

From the editor's file - no source is given.

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**