



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
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Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
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Schedule of Services

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

3 October, Carolyn Donnelly "A Sense of Community"

Is it beneficial, relevant or necessary any more? (This will be Carolyn's debut talk).

10 October, Ginna Hastings "Building our Unitarian Community."

This will be an interactive session.

17 October, Geoff Matthews "Ethics as Unenforceable Obligations – The Importance of being Good for Nothing"

This will be an interactive session where we will as a group develop a list of 10 Ethical Commandments, and briefly discuss. We will then in pairs discuss a "moral dilemma", and then as a group the findings. The outcome we are looking for is that it is relatively easy to develop a list of ethical commandments, but when it comes to issues and challenges to them in our lives, as can happen, we have some tough decisions to make. Hence the title of the presentation.

24 October, Laurence Gormley "Some Thoughts on Gay Adoption."

The NSW Parliament is currently debating the idea of allowing Gay and Lesbian adoption of children but what is it really all about?

31 October, Janet Horton "Nothing to Fear."

Gremlins and goblins and things that go bump in the night. We've all got a gremlin or two - an ugly monster who sits on the shoulder and whispers negative thoughts. Today we will be talking about the great art of gremlin taming.

7 November, Jan Tendys "Hunting for Hope"

14 November, Geoff Matthews TBA

21 November, Candace Parks "Loving Your Political Opponent"

28 November Colin Whatmough "A discussion on the topic 'The Three Ages of Christianity' arising from Colin's talk in May 2010."

This will lead towards how modern man is engaging in spiritual realms in the 21st C.

"Godless Morality: Keeping Religion Out of Ethics" by Richard Holloway

(Canongate: Edinburgh 2000; 163pp)

by *Jed Perkins*.

A doctor who had worked in a mental hospital once told of a patient who claimed that he was Jesus Christ. The doctor asked how he knew. The patient claimed that God had told him. From a patient in the next bed came the words, "I did not!".

How do we verify religious statements? One can for instance read the Jewish Torah (Pentateuch) as a divine land deed for the Jewish possession of Israel. Tradition makes the Dome of the Rock (built on the site of the ancient Jewish temple in Jerusalem) the second most holy place in Islam. Thus we witness continued bloodshed in Israel. Most atrocities are committed by people who claim the sanction of God for their action. And God always seems to be giving different messages to different people.

In "Godless Morality", Richard Holloway says that we should try to keep religion out of ethics. This may seem a strange thesis for one who is the retired Primate of the Episcopal Church of Scotland. In fact the book has been condemned by the Archbishop of Canterbury, which is as good a recommendation as one might hope for.

Bishop Holloway has come to his conclusions after serving on government committees that had the task of reporting on ethical issues. Jews, Christians, agnostics, atheists, humanists and others were on these committees. Invoking the Christian God did little to advance the arrival of consensus.

It is not that Holloway rejects revealed religion as one means of moral direction:

"For personal reasons, we may choose one of these absolute solutions, the way people with spare capital sometimes hand it over to investment companies to manage it for them...What we cannot do, however, is claim that this is the only way." (77)

But he does propose that we might be better to give up scripture as a means to arrive at ethical decisions:

"We should not... have to torture scripture into self-contradictory positions, when it no longer conforms to our experience of truth and value. It is much more honest to abandon it, acknowledging that it witnesses to an earlier, no longer appropriate, attitude to human relationships. We have done this over its attitude to slavery; we have done it over its attitude to usury..." (81)

Basically Holloway calls us to own our moral propensities and prejudices rather than to call upon Scripture, tradition or God to justify them.

He does not deny the existence of sin in the human condition:

"Personal reflection and self-examination, as well as the study of human nature through the biographies of others, shows us that we are largely...determined by forces that are beyond our control." (25)

His definition of sin, however, is not moralistic:

"Human nature has a tendency to hedonistic inflation, to turn good or neutral things into bad by using them excessively." (105)

This reminds us of the need for humility in reaching our moral decisions.

It is not that Holloway doesn't believe in God. His view of God is more in tune with process theology:

"If we reject the role of God as a micro-manager of human morality, dictating specific systems that constantly wear out and leave us with theological problems when we want to abandon them, we shall have to develop a more dynamic understanding of God as one who accompanies creation in its evolving story like a pianist in a silent movie.." (33)

Holloway wants to live in a society where people have as much moral freedom as

possible:

"I'd rather be in a society that lived with the unpredictable consequences of giving people great freedom of choice than in one that told them all exactly what to do and think, especially if it is claimed that all the orders came directly from God." (125)

He asks the question, "Do we have to be religious to be moral? Do we have to believe in God to be good?" The answer is no.

A good read.

(From Sofia—Sea of Faith in Australia)

Where Did the Peace Sign Come From?

It is instantly recognizable as a sign of peace, but what is the symbolism behind the peace sign? The olive branch came from ancient Greece, the dove from the Bible...but where did that circle with the chicken-footprint come from?

Rewind back to 1958 when London textile designer, Gerald Holtom, wanted to create a symbol for marchers to carry on banners and signs at a "Ban the Bomb" march planned by the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War (DAC). The event was Britain's first major demonstration against nuclear weapons—a 52-mile march from London to the town of Aldermaston, home to an A-bomb research centre.

Members of the DAC came to the march emblazoned with Holtom's circle-with-lines symbol; but to bystanders, its meaning was a mystery.

Nowadays we all know what the symbol stands for, but what is the meaning behind the design? Holtom created the symbol by combining the flag semaphore signals for the letters N (for nuclear) and D (for disarmament) and putting them in a circle. The symbol is essentially a logo for the concept of nuclear disarmament! Such graphic elegance.

Later the symbol was adopted by the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). In 1960, the peace sign was imported to the United States via a peace sign button brought from the UK to the US by Philip Altbach, a freshman at the University of Chicago. The symbol had shown up here and there in the US prior to that, but when Altbach convinced the Student Peace Union to adopt the sign as its symbol, the popularity of the peace sign grew immensely. By the late 1960s, the peace sign had become an international symbol adopted by anti-war protesters, and it doesn't seem to be losing steam any time soon.

Posted by **Melissa Breyer** on Care2

September 21 was United Nations Day of Peace. At noon UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon rang the Peace Bell for the official observation of the day.



Ralph Waldo Emerson: Unitarianism and Christianity

Max Lawson

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1883) is arguably the most important American cultural figure of the 19th Century¹ and is still acknowledged widely as a major American writer. His first book, "Nature" (1836) propounded an idealistic system of religion based upon "the monistic unity of God, Nature and the human soul".² Throughout his long life, Emerson added to his youthful message with a vast number of lectures, collected in various volumes, most of which dealt with what he called "the Conduct of Life", which became the title of his 1860 collection.

Emerson was the son of a Unitarian minister and, not surprisingly, became a minister himself after graduating from Harvard. Although he resigned from his first ministerial appointment, giving as his reason his refusal to administer the Lord's Supper³, he retained tenuous links with Unitarianism; for example, he continued to preach in East Lexington, Massachusetts, for several years.⁴ After 1846, some thirteen years after resigning his first pastorate, he had no active part in the Unitarian denominational structure, although there was a kind of rapprochement with Unitarianism in the later years of his life.

Metaphorically speaking, Emerson remained a preacher all his life, exchanging the pulpit for the Lyceum lectern. It has been said in Unitarian-Universalist literature that "all Emerson's essays devolved themselves into sermons and can only be understood as such".⁵ If this is true, it is little wonder that Unitarians still claim him as one of their own. However, Emerson's relationship with Unitarianism was always problematic. His Harvard Divinity School Address in 1838 scandalized many of the Unitarian clergy, particularly those associated with Harvard. Indeed, some forty-one years were to elapse before Emerson was invited back to Harvard Chapel to give another address.

What was so scandalous about the first Harvard Divinity School Address? Nothing less than Emerson's making a claim that Unitarianism, a fledgling new domination in the

United States that had only been in formal existence for thirteen years, had already become ossified. Like Ezekiel, he pondered: "Can these dry bones live?" However, his biographer, Robert D. Richardson, Jr., reminds us that: "despite Emerson's face-off with formal or organized religion, Emerson remained a deeply religious man with a thoroughly spiritual view of human life and the world."⁶

Emerson's first Address was given in the small Harvard Chapel on 15 July 1838 to a tiny senior Divinity class of six students, together with their families, friends and teachers.⁷ It was the students, themselves, who invited Emerson to give the Address, possibly because of the good reception of his provocative American Scholar address in 1837, which became one of the most anthologized writings in American literature. When he very pointedly talked to the Divinity school about "a decaying church" and "a wasting unbelief"⁸ it is no wonder that some of the clergy took offence at some of his "utterly tasteless remarks".

The opening of the Harvard Divinity School Address is gentle, poetic, even mellifluous, lulling the listener into a sense of false security:

"In this refulgent summer it has been a luxury to draw the breath of life. The grass grows, the buds burst, the meadow is spitted with fire and gold in the tint of flowers. The air is full of birds and sweet with the breath of the pine, the balm of Gilead and the new hay. Night brings no gloom to the heart with its welcome shade. Through the transparent darkness, the stars pour forth their almost spiritual rays."⁹

Later in this opening paragraph, Emerson shocks the young Divinity students by claiming: "One is constrained to respect the perfection of this world in which our senses converse."¹⁰ Hold on! - whatever happened to Original Sin, or 'fallen nature' and other linchpins of orthodox Christianity (which most of the audience would have adhered to)? The answer follows from Emerson's first work, "Nature", in which he held that Nature mirrors the divine. Thus, when Man truly knows Nature, he knows the divine spirit.

Understandably, with such a claim, Emerson was denounced as a pantheist (one who believes God is everything), when in fact - to use a term made popular by recent discussions of Celtic Christianity - he was really a panentheist (one who believes God is in everything). Just as one knows Nature direct from first-hand experience, religion is a matter of direct experience. You cannot have a second-hand religion, as Emerson told his small audience, giving them this cruel account of what that was:

"I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say I would go to church no more. ... A snowstorm was falling all around us. The snowstorm was real; the preacher merely spectral; and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him and then out of the window behind him into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended or cheated or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it."¹¹

The hapless preacher contrasted with "the beautiful meteor of the snow" was named Frost - Barzillai Frost, the minister of Emerson's local church at Concord.¹²

What can be done about organized Christianity? Does this small body of students now entering the ministry have to abandon it before they had even begun their careers? On the contrary, Emerson had a very high view of ministry: the preacher is no less than "a kind of poet", "a newborn bard of the Holy Ghost".¹³ In a famous admonition to the small graduating class, he declaimed:

"We mark with light in the memory the few interviews we have had, in the dreary years of routine and of sin, with souls that made our souls wiser. We knew that gave us leave to be what we truly were."¹⁴

These remarks have had a long shelf-life - for example, Carl Rogers used them as a front-piece to his Client-Centred Therapy (1941). So, the preacher was always to draw from his own experience - a key-word in the writings of William James and John Dewey, who were not only influenced by Emerson but wrote on him.

Thus, the graduating class members are to 'go it alone', just like Jesus did, although Emerson had dethroned the supernatural Jesus based on miracles: "The word 'Miracle' as pronounced by Christian churches gives a false impression. It is Monster. It is not one with the blowing clover and the falling rain."¹⁵ Nevertheless, he claimed that Jesus had made "a unique impression on mankind whose name is not so much written as ploughed into the history of this world."¹⁶

Without too much exaggeration, it could be said that Emerson's Divinity School Address ploughed itself into the history of Unitarianism: the issues that the Address raised are with us still, even if not so hotly contested.

Max Lawson was Senior Lecturer in History of Education at the University of New England in Armidale, then taught World Literature at the International People's College in Helsingor (Elsinore), Denmark, after he retired.

¹ David Robinson, *The Unitarians and Universalists* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985), P. 253

² *Loc. cit.*

³ See Carl Sandberg, *The Communion Book* (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, 1993) for a treatment of Unitarian/Universalist view on Communion and sample services. Emerson's address, 'The Lord's Supper', is conveniently found in *The Works of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Tudor Publishing Company, undated), pp. 417-432.

⁴ Robinson, *op cit.*, p. 253.

⁵ UUA Pamphlet Series: *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

⁶ Robert D. Richardson, Jr., *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), p. 291.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 288.

⁸ Harvard Divinity School Address, reprinted in William Gilman (ed.), *Selected Writings of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Signet Books, 203), p. 260.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 246.

¹⁰ *Loc. cit*

¹² Richardson, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

¹³ Gilman, *op. cit.*, p. 202.

¹⁴ *loc. cit.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

¹⁶ *Ibid*,m p. 250.

I Think Continually of Those

I think continually of those who were truly great.
Who, from the womb, remembered the soul's history
Through corridors of light where the hours are suns,
Endless and singing. Whose lovely ambition
Was that their lips, still touched with fire,
Should tell of the spirit clothed from head to foot in song.
And who hoarded from the spring branches
The desires falling across their bodies like blossoms.

What is precious is never to forget
The delight of the blood drawn from ancient springs
Breaking through rocks in worlds before our earth;
Never to deny its pleasure in the simple morning light,
Nor its grave evening demand for love;
Never to allow gradually the traffic to smother
With noise and fog the flowering of the spirit.

Near the snow, near the sun, in the highest fields
See how these names are fêted by the waving grass,
And by the streamers of white cloud,
And whispers of wind in the listening sky;
The names of those who in their lives fought for life,
Who wore at their hearts the fire's centre.
Born of the sun, they travelled a short while towards the sun,
And left the vivid air signed with their honour.

~ Stephen Spender ~

Contributed by Margaret Armstrong who says it is one of her favourite poems.

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## A young couple moves into a new neighbourhood.

The next morning while they are eating breakfast,  
The young woman sees her neighbour hanging the wash outside.  
"That laundry is not very clean", she said.  
"She doesn't know how to wash correctly.  
Perhaps she needs better laundry soap."  
Her husband looked on, but remained silent.  
Every time her neighbour would hang her wash to dry,  
The young woman would make the same comments.

About one month later, the woman was surprised to see a  
Nice clean wash on the line and said to her husband:  
"Look, she has learned how to wash correctly.  
I wonder who taught her this."  
The husband said, "I got up early this morning and  
Cleaned our windows."

And so it is with life. What we see when watching others  
Depends on the purity of the window through which we look.

***Contributed by Caz Donnelly***

## Social Change Radio Dramas

Port Moresby, PAPUA NEW GUINEA – The United Nations in Papua New Guinea in co-operation with the Population Media Center (PMC) is pleased to announce a groundbreaking partnership with Colgate-Palmolive. Colgate-Palmolive has signed on as a private sector sponsor of two social change radio serial dramas to be developed for public broadcast in Papua New Guinea in Pidgin and English.

“The United Nations is delighted that Colgate-Palmolive has taken on a role as a corporate partner for development in PNG. Through this support, Colgate-Palmolive is developing a legacy of civic participation and helping PNG move towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals,” said United Nations Resident Coordinator David McLachlan-Karr. Colgate-Palmolive’s partnership for development comes at a time when the UN is looking at partnering more with civil society and the private sector for development.

The programme is being carried out by Population Media Center on behalf of the UN as part of its Millennium Development Goal campaign, aimed at raising awareness and encouraging citizen participation in the promotion and delivery of the MDGs.

It will include the production and broadcast of two radio drama series that will each air twice weekly over the course of two years. Each series will be 208 episodes in length and will be broadcast nationally and via provincial stations. The original radio dramas will be written and produced by Papua New Guinea nationals who will receive technical support and training from world renowned dramatic writers, producers, and communications professionals from both Hollywood and the developing world.

The dramas will be written to reflect the realities of life in Papua New Guinea and will feature character role models that the audience can follow over time and learn from. The dramas will address issues such as gender equality and women’s empowerment, education, environmental protection, and poverty

eradication. By first engaging audiences in riveting, dramatic stories, the programme is able to not only deliver important social and health messages to the public at large, but to motivate them to change their attitudes and behaviours on the issues of common social interest. The series in PNG is slated to go on the air at the beginning of 2011.

Given the percentage of people who listen to radio in Papua New Guinea, the programme has the potential to reach between 2 and 3 million people.

“We are very excited about the tremendous support that Colgate-Palmolive is providing for this important effort in Papua New Guinea,” Bill Ryerson, President of Population Media Center said. “Colgate-Palmolive is a leader in corporate social responsibility, and we are grateful for their commitment to improving life in Papua New Guinea.”

***Population Media Center release . The PMC promotes family planning and contraception.***

## The Importance of walking

Walking can add minutes to your life. This enables you at 85 years old to spend an additional 5 months in a nursing home at 2,000 per month.

My grandpa started walking five miles a day when he was 60. Now he's 97 years old and we have no idea where he is.

I like long walks, especially when they are taken by people who annoy me.

The only reason I would take up walking is so that I could hear heavy breathing again.

I have to walk early in the morning, before my brain figures out what I'm doing..

I joined a health club last year, spent about 250 quid. Haven't lost a pound.

Apparently you have to go there!.

***Contributed by Candace Parks***

## Jottings

The travelling bug has bitten again! Martin is visiting Japan, Claire and partner are visiting UK and Europe, Liliun is taking a 3 month trip to Europe from early October, and Col and Helen have just returned from Broome via Perth. Also Peter Donnelly was recently visiting his and Carolyn's geologist son, Tim, SW of Mackay for a few days

Maybe all the travellers can report in Espirit of their travels!

We wish Margaret Armstrong a good recovery from a cracked pelvis.

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"A sense of justice and a sense of security are established in early infancy - in the infancy of an individual and perhaps in the infancy of a nation also - providing things have gone well enough. Without these two treasures deeply held in our bones and our culture, we are truly unfortunate and have either a lot of healing to do or a lot of harming to do." Michael Leunig

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 Espirit 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.