



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship
PO Box 1356, Lane Cove NSW 1595
Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
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Volume 5, Issue 1

Jan. 2009

Schedule of Services

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

Date	Speaker	Topic
11 Jan.	Sarah Penicka	Music as an expression of Spirituality
18 Jan	Rev. Steve Wilson	Keeping good time; Reflections on the Sabbath
25 Jan	Candace Parks	The Audacity of Hope
1 Feb.	Rev Steve Wilson	Evolution
8 Feb.	Colin Whatmough	Still More Light and Truth
15 Feb.	Anthony Raymond	Songs of Love (with live guitar)
22 Feb.	Rev. Steve Wilson	What Jesus Got Wrong and We Get Wrong About Jesus

A big item on our timetable will be Eric Stevenson's 80th birthday. Many Happy Returns! ☺

**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.

Opinions expressed in "Esprit" are not necessarily those of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship.

Would you care to join us?

Membership is open to all adults and includes this newsletter. Membership is now \$10.

If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring 9428-2244, consult our website www.sydneynunitarians.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.

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.

Notice

DEADLINE for copy for the next issue of Esprit is LAST SUNDAY IN JANUARY

Please be sure Jan has your WRITTEN items by this date.

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to jtendys@optusnet.com.au 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.

***From your editor:** I have reached an age where I have “senior moments”, so if I publish the same poem or homily more than once (like my favourite Einstein quote) please just bear with me. Better still, give me some favourites of your own.*

COMMITTEE NEWS

Rev. Steve Wilson, who is visiting Australia from the US, will be giving us the benefit of his experience during his stay and at the same time learning something about how a small Fellowship functions in a city where Unitarianism is almost unknown. Publicity will continue to be a major focus – and remember, word of mouth is the best publicity.

The AGM will be Sunday March 15.

Our other big piece of news is that our new website is almost ready to be viewed, thanks greatly to the work of Janet Horton.

Jan Tendys, Secretary

Sensation of the Mystical

The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience
is the sensation of the mystical.
It is the sower of all true science.
He to whom this emotion is a stranger,
who can no longer wonder and stand rapt in awe,
is as good as dead.

To know that what is impenetrable to us really exists,
manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty,
which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their primitive forms -
this knowledge, this feeling,
is at the center of true religion.

~ Albert Einstein ~

HOW CAN YOU HAVE WRITER'S BLOCK?

The opening story in Nam Le's debut collection, The Boat, is as dazzling an introduction to a writer's work as I've read.

"Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice" begins as a metastory about a blocked, Vietnamese-born student at the Iowa Writer's Workshop. His estranged father visits from Australia just when he's struggling with his last assignment of the semester. What first appears to be a story about not knowing what to write – yawn – becomes, through sophisticated literary legerdemain, a devastatingly powerful exploration of a fraught father-son relationship and the son's gradual understanding of how his father's brutal wartime experiences at the hands of Americans affected them both.

The story works on several levels, and the business about finding your subject matter as a writer is a key element. Nam Le, like his character "Nam," was born in Vietnam in 1979, named after the homeland his family fled by boat, and raised in Australia, where he became a lawyer before attending the Iowa workshop.

"How can you have writer's block?" the character Nam quotes one of his classmates. "Just write a story about Vietnam." Visiting agents also push him to milk his ethnic roots, urging students to write what makes you "stand out."

Another friend agrees. "You could totally exploit the Vietnamese thing. But instead, you choose to write about lesbian vampires and Colombian assassins, and Hiroshima orphans – and New York painters with hemorrhoids." "Catalogued like that," Le's alter ego comments wryly, "[M]y stories sank into unflattering relief."

"Love and Honor and Pity and Pride and Compassion and Sacrifice" takes its title from William Faulkner's admonition to "write about the old verities." Le not only takes that advice to heart, he practically uses it as a checklist.

Part of a book review by Heller McAlpin of The Christian Science Monitor

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.How about "milking your background"? There's many interesting stories lurking in the minds of the membership of Spirit of Life. Let's have them!

Also, more poetry!
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Research on happiness has demonstrated that people are most joyous when engrossed in an activity so as to lose all track of time. We are then dwelling in a state of flow. For this to occur, the activity need to be challenging, of worth to others, and something about which we remain passionate. **Tom Owen-Towle**

LEARNING ABOUT OTHER RELIGIONS - A PROPOSED REGULAR ITEM

Basic ideas of Christian Science:

- God is divine Love, Father-Mother, supreme.
- The true nature of each individual as a child of God is spiritual.
- God's infinite goodness, realised in prayer, heals

Source; BBC

(Note: The Christian Science Monitor, widely acknowledged as one of the best US newspapers, is the first major newspaper to shift entirely to an online edition)

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FAMILY BONDS OF LOYALTY

In a culture of shifting allegiances, serial marriages, and ephemeral connections, the idea of loyalty can seem as outdated as the traditional nuclear family with a breadwinner father and a homemaking mother. Yet loyalty in families goes even deeper than love and in fact is as much the basis of love as secure attachment is the basis for healthy development.

In their book, *Invisible Loyalties*, Nagy and Spark (1973) suggest that to the extent that we were reliably cared for when we were too helpless and vulnerable to care for ourselves, to that extent we develop a bond of loyalty that will connect us the rest of our lives. If our parents have earned our trust by unselfishly caring for us, we grow up in their debt – a debt that is repaid through our enduring loyalty.

Wylie (1999), writing about family loyalty in the *Family Therapy Networker*, said that "the experience of family loyalty is less like a high-minded moral choice than a submersion in a soup of less noble motives, like guilt, anxiety, inertia. Resembling a blind, compelling instinct, it is an allegiance no more chosen than hunger or the need to sleep." (p. 23).

The family system's bonds of loyalty can seem like something given without a second thought or can feel like a stranglehold around us, sucking us down into stale kitchens or stifling bedrooms while the hours tick our life away.

Kenneth Stewart (Psychologist)

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A challenge:

Who would like to give a talk on what makes for healthy bonds of loyalty in a family?

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SPEND FOR THE ECONOMY'S SAKE?

The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, condemned the British Prime Minister's response to the economic crisis, describing his efforts to boost spending in a downturn as like "the addict returning to the drug".

Williams said the credit crunch had been a "reality check" in a climate of unsustainable greed, and it should be used to provoke a fundamental rethink of the pursuit of wealth. It demonstrated that the country had been "going in the wrong direction" by relying on financial speculation rather than "making things", he said.

It was "a reminder that what I think some people have called fairy gold is just that – that sooner or later you have to ask: 'What are we making or what are we assembling or accumulating wealth for?'"

The criticism is wounding because Gordon Brown has prided himself on the consensus he believes he has gathered worldwide for a "fiscal stimulus" to prop up the economy and boost confidence in the downturn, including a temporary cut of 2.5% in VAT. (British GST)

Downing Street made clear its irritation over the remarks while trying to avoid a slanging match with the archbishop.

Asked in an interview with Radio 4's Today program whether spending was the right way to tackle the downturn, the archbishop said: "It seems a little bit like the addict returning to the drug. When the Bible uses the word 'repentance', it doesn't just mean beating your breast, it means getting a new perspective, and that is perhaps what we are shrinking away from."

He added: "It is about what is sustainable in the long term and if this is going to drive us back into the same spin, I do not think that is going to help us."

People should not "spend to save the economy", but instead spend for "human reasons", for their own needs, Williams said.

The credit crunch showed that British society had "accepted the message that it's possible to have an endless spiral of accumulating wealth that has nothing to do with producing anything", Williams said. Instead there should be "some very tough questions internationally about what sort of regulation is feasible internationally at a time when, clearly, an unregulated financial world doesn't make sense".

And he added: "I think there are some huge moral lessons to be learnt about the nature of accumulating wealth ... a lot of people are waiting to hear an acknowledgement of some responsibility for irresponsible behaviour."

Williams acknowledged it was "suicidally silly" for him to get involved in the debate. "I am not an economist by any stretch of the imagination. But I want to ask where these moral questions are in the economic discourse."

The Prime Minister, responding to the remarks, said that as the son of a church minister he always listened to senior church figures. He said he backed the Archbishop's call for action against reckless bankers, but it would be irresponsible of him not to intervene when Britons were suffering.

"I think the Archbishop would also agree with me that every time someone becomes unemployed or loses their home or a small business fails it is our duty to act and we should not walk by on the other side when people are facing problems," he said.

"That's the reason why our fiscal policy is designed to give real help to families and businesses and to give them that help now."

Adapted from the Guardian Weekly

"Most of the greatest evils that man has inflicted upon man have come through people feeling quite certain about something which, in fact, was false."

Bertrand Russell

DEATH OF A FAIR-MINDED IRISH PATRIOT *

Conor Cruise O'Brien, an Irish diplomat, politician, man of letters and public intellectual who staked out an independent position for Ireland in the United Nations and, despite his Roman-Catholic origins, championed the rights of Protestants in Northern Ireland, has died, the Irish government announced Thursday. He was 91 and lived in Howth, near Dublin.

Mr. O'Brien, once described by Christopher Hitchens as "an internationalist, a wit, a polymath and a provocateur," was a rare combination of scholar and public servant who applied his erudition and stylish pen to a long list of causes, some hopeless, others made less so by his combative reasoning. When called upon, he would put down his pen and enter the fray, more often than not emerging bruised and bloodied.

As a diplomat, he helped chart Ireland's course as an independent, anticolonialist voice in the United Nations and played a critical role in the UN's intervention in the Congo in 1961. As vice-chancellor of the University of Ghana he fell out with the dictator Kwame Nkrumah over the question of academic freedom, and while teaching at New York University, he took part in an antiwar demonstration that resulted in his arrest.

Most notably, as a lifelong commentator on Irish politics and as a government minister in the early 1970s, he argued passionately against a united Ireland without the full consent of the Protestant north and bitterly criticized the tacit support for the IRA then prevalent in southern Ireland. "I intend to administer a shock to the Irish psyche," he said, defiantly. With the Troubles raging in the North, his position made him a hated figure for many Irish, as did his later opposition to the peace process aimed at bringing Sinn Fein into the government of Northern Ireland.

Mr. O'Brien, known to friends as the Cruiser, was born in Dublin on Nov. 3, 1917 to a family with a long political pedigree, on both sides of the widening split in Irish political life. Ardent Republicans in the family somehow took tea with supporters of the Irish Parliamentary Party, which favoured home rule but not a break with Britain.

His father, a journalist, moderate nationalist and agnostic, insisted that Conor, his only child, attend a Protestant school, although his mother - the model for Miss Ivors in James Joyce's story "The Dead" - managed to keep him in a Catholic school until he received his first communion. He later studied history at Trinity College, Dublin, which was also Protestant, and, on graduating, found a job in the civil service, initially in the finance department but soon with the department for external affairs (now called the foreign office).

In 1939 he married Christine Foster. The marriage ended in divorce. Two of their children survive, Donal and Fidelma Sims. He later married Maire MacEntee, an Irish-language poet. She also survives him, as do their two children, Margaret and Patrick, as well as five grandchildren.

While toiling as a civil servant, Mr. O'Brien published two books to wide acclaim: "Maria Cross" (1952) a collection of critical essays on modern Catholic writers, and "Parnell and His Party" (1957). The latter, submitted as his doctoral thesis at Trinity, caught the eye of Frank Aiken, Minister of External Affairs, who in 1957 sent him to the United Nations with instructions to take an independent line. "In so far as a civil servant can, he became a minor national hero; the Irish independent, asserting his country's independence along with his own," The New Statesman wrote in 1968.

In 1961, Dag Hammarskjold, the secretary-general of the UN (and an admirer of "Maria Cross") sent Mr. O'Brien on a special mission to the Congo, which had recently achieved independence from Belgium but faced a separatist revolt in the mineral-rich province of Katanga that was being backed openly by Belgium and secretly by France and Britain.

Mr. O'Brien, determined to take decisive action, ordered in UN troops, but Operation Morthor, as it was called, ended in disarray. In the aftermath, as the UN hastily repudiated the mission, Mr. O'Brien took the fall and left the UN. He recounted his version of events in "To Katanga and Back" (1962) and later wrote "Murderous Angels," a play about Hammarskjold and Patrice Lumumba, the Congo's murdered premier, which was produced in Los Angeles and New York in 1970.

His tenure as Vice-president of the University of Ghana proved nearly as eventful. Nkrumah, becoming increasingly dictatorial, removed the nation's chief justice. Mr. O'Brien publicly protested. The Ghanaian press mounted a campaign against the university, accusing it of being a hotbed of subversion. Mr. O'Brien departed for the more welcoming environment of New York University, to lecture on literature and social issues.

Mr O'Brien then plunged into Irish politics, where a changed social climate made it possible for him as a declared nonbeliever and a divorced man, to take part in public life. "For me the idea of being able to represent a constituency in the parliament of Ireland, without accepting the teachings of the Church or pretending to accept them, had powerful existential attractions," he wrote in "Memoir: My Life and Themes" (1998). "It meant that I would be accepted by my own people for what I really was. It closed a kind of schism in the soul, which had long troubled me more than I had ever consciously acknowledged."

In 1969, as a candidate for the Labor Party, he won a seat in the Dail, Ireland's legislature, for Dublin Northeast. Regarded as left-wing by Irish voters, he soon surprised many of his supporters by attacking what he saw as the myths of the Republican movement in the provocative and highly influential "States of Ireland" (1972), which excoriated the nationalist dream as sectarian and colonialist. As Minister of Posts and Telegraphs in the coalition government that formed in 1973, he banned Sinn Fein from the airwaves.

In his later years he was known for his polemical journalism.

Adapted from the New York Times obituary by William Grimes

*** My heading; O'Brien was critical of the paramilitaries from both sides in Northern Ireland. So far no comparable figure seems to have arisen in Israel/Palestine. JT**