



## Schedule of Services

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

### **3 December, Marin Horlacher will speak on "A Christmas Gift."**

"Christmas" - a word that is beautiful to many, but which also stirs up a great deal of controversy in an increasingly secular and multicultural society. But the question is not simply what it does mean? - the question is, what it CAN mean, for all of us.

This will be the last talk for the year. We will be resuming services on 21 January 2018.



### **Two New Kiva Loans.**

#### **Two of our loans have been repaid so we now have two new clients through Kiva.**

Huong's Group's story (Vietnam)

Mrs Huong, born in 1988, is a Thai ethnic woman. She is living with her husband and her son in Son La city, a subsidized unit of Son La province.

The main income of her family is from cultivating crops and breeding animals. The income is just enough to cover the living expenses of the family and to save a small amount. She wants to invest in raising pigs, but she does not have enough money to buy breeding pigs and food for the pigs. Therefore, she wants to borrow a loan for this purpose.

She hopes her share of the loan amount will help her family to develop the pig-breeding business well. She will work hard, to get money to repay the loan to M7-MFI (sub-lender) on time.

Perla's story (Philippines)

Perla is 67 years old and married with five children. She lives in the village of Camanga, Tukuran, Zamboanga del Sur. Even in their advanced age, Perla and her husband still engage in farming. They plant rice and have been farming for 20 years.

Perla was given a loan when she joined GDMPC (sub-lender) in 2013. She paid the loan and now she is requesting another loan in the amount of 20,000 PHP to defray the labour cost of land preparation and for the purchase of fertilizers and insecticide for her rice production. She plans to engage another business someday.



## Loving that Postal Survey!!

*Laurence Gormley*

For many members of the GLBTQI community and their supporters, when it was announced, the Postal Survey was an anathema and was roundly condemned as expensive, unnecessary and divisive. Indeed, to some extent, I felt the same way. I was concerned particularly by the real possibility of the hate it might engender from fringe groups against members of the fraternity who had already, in their youth, in coming out, or in their day to day lives, suffered bullying, discrimination and the threat of vitriol and ultimately, physical violence, simply for living their sexual preferences in an open way. Over the two plus months of the Postal Survey, I did, however, modify my views and while not wanting to be callous, I believe the outcome was ultimately worth the pain so many of our friends did suffer.

In retrospect, the great irony of the Postal Survey was that it was conceived originally by Government Parliamentarians who were opposed to same sex marriage. It very much suited their agenda. They believed that in the great tradition of past referenda, the Australian people would vote “no”. They also believed this would be enhanced by the public’s apathy over the issue, hence the non-compulsory, non-binding nature of the survey. At the same time, they would get the matter off the government’s agenda and relegate the debate to the annals of history; just as John Howard so cunningly did to the debate on an Australian republic in 1999. In response, the “Yes” advocates were concerned at the tactics of the “No” side and this proved to be prescient and very much justified by the subsequent TV and social media advertising which focused on parental rights, freedom of speech and religious freedom rather than Same Sex Marriage itself.

I personally felt putting the issue to a vote in the two House of Parliament prior to the Survey would be unlikely to produce a favourable outcome for the GLBTQI community. Firstly, in the House of Representatives, the Liberal and Nationals did not have a conscience vote and they had the most numbers in the House. Most people don’t realize that the Labor Party

doesn’t yet have a policy of requiring its members of parliament to vote “Yes”, not until 2019, the result of a compromise at the last Labor Party National Conference. It seemed to me then, that even if a handful of Liberal members defected on the issue, the Labor party and the Greens couldn’t bring enough votes to pass legislation in the House of Representatives. Passing the legislation in the Senate faced the same set of problems it seemed. From the viewpoint of Parliament acting, I felt Same Sex Marriage was ultimately stalemated. Therefore, despite my reservations, I felt the gay community should embrace the Postal Survey.

Many of our friends were very worried by the process. Many felt anxious about the outcome. Many were despondent when hearing the dishonesty of aspects of the “no” case. Many were depressed by much of the unrealized bigotry behind some of the arguments of the “no” case. Too many were justifiably angry and upset that their relationships were being judged and may be found unworthy by their fellow Australians. Without doubt, love in the gay community is as profound and deep as that of members of the heterosexual community. It was a testing time also for young GLBTQI people; school age kids can be cruel, and bullying of gay kids is rife in our schools.

Personally, I felt the “Yes” case was helped by good organization:

(1). the Yes case got out of the boxes quickly with very good social media presence touting a vote for love. And so, probably, a majority of people had voted Yes, and early, within the first two or three weeks, before the No case got their negative campaign rolling.

(2). I was very pleased when the Anglican Archbishop of Sydney and the Catholic Archbishops of Sydney and Melbourne made their cases. Demanding that children should have a mother and father was risible coming from them. In their ivory towers they seemed oblivious that much of the Australian public hold the hierarchy of the Churches in contempt for their complicity with child abusers, their cover up and then their appalling

treatment of those abused victims who had been in their care over many decades. Their statements seemed at once disingenuous and screamed “hypocrisy”. Indeed, they seemed like the “whited sepulchres” of which Jesus himself had spoken. Reading the newspapers almost every day, incidents of children harmed, even murdered by their heterosexual parents and stepparents also seemed to undercut the notion that gays would do a worse job. Good and bad parents exist, and people understood that, I believe.



(3). And then like Lazarus, John Howard emerged, and with his “love child” Tony Abbott. In unison, they pontificated like loveless relics from the past. They both seem to have forgotten that they had been rejected: in Howard’s case by the people as PM and by his electorate as its member, and Abbott as PM by his own party. Their moment hectoring us was to be brief. For 2017 was not to be like 1999.

(4). The final straw was when the Anglican Archdiocese spent \$1 million on the “no” campaign, an action that was widely condemned by many of its own Ministers and congregants. Coming so late in the campaign it seemed both incompetent, desperate

and misdirected and raised the awkward question, “if they can waste a million dollars to discriminate against the gay community why don’t they pay any tax? So, by the time the “no” case truly got underway I do believe they had already lost the debate.

Still, many people believe the Postal Survey was unnecessary and a waste of money.

Actually, I don’t. Although some people were negatively affected by the debate, gay people have fought for justice for themselves on many occasions, at Stonewall, the first and early Mardi Gras, and in numerous cases of harassment by police and violence from hostile members of the general public. We have not been alone. Suffragettes, Aboriginal Rights and the Black Civil Rights Movement in the US come to mind. It seems to be a truism that social change requires sacrifice and the sacrifice of those gay people today bearing the emotional cost of the Survey is the price paid for Same Sex Marriage for their community.

**But the most significant and most rewarding aspect of the Survey was the voice of the Australian public itself. No one can underestimate its power. In a very clear message it told Parliament what it wanted. In my view, for GLBTQI people, no isolated Parliamentary vote could be so meaningful. It put on the record forever that a significant majority of Australians supported their gay community, demanding the same rights for them as for other citizens and acknowledging their equality of humanity and their equality before the law.**

**That is a monumental thing**

What about the \$100,000,000.00 spent? Unlike some, this doesn’t worry me at all. Governments spend money on all sorts of things. Gays have paid their taxes and demanded very little of Governments in the past. We’ve earned it! As I recall, in 2008 Kevin Rudd spent \$400,000,000.00 on clean

coal. Personally, I think GLBTQI people are more valuable to the community than coal and will be a much more enduring part of the future of our country.

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### **The Spiritual Journey of Christopher Isherwood from Cabaret to Vedanta**

**Max Lawson**

Christopher Isherwood is still best known for the works collectively known as *The Berlin Novels*.<sup>1</sup> The most notorious of these works was the novella, *Sally Bowles*. This work in turn became the successful play and film *I am a Camera* and later became the hugely successful and highly romanticised Berlin of *Cabaret*, first, as a musical and later as a film.

The group of English writers, Christopher Isherwood (1904-1986), W. H. Auden (1907-1973) and Stephen Spender (1909-1995), were all together in Berlin in the dying days of the Weimar Republic and were only to leave when the Nazis came to power in 1933. These writers were in Berlin because “that was where the boys were.” Of this group Isherwood was to become a gay icon in the sixties, reinforced by his autobiography, *Christopher and His Kind* (1976).

Despite his continuing reputation centring on his Berlin exploits (1929-1933) as reflected in his Berlin Novels, as well as his high gay profile, Isherwood’s spiritual quest and his membership in the Vedanta Society of Southern California (a Hindu group) are far less well known.

Both Isherwood and Spender in the nineteen fifties came to look back on their Berlin experiences with dismay.

Isherwood wrote a prologue to the book *Mr Norris and I* by Gerald Hamilton (Hamilton was the model for Mr Norris in Isherwood’s first Berlin novel, *Mr. Norris Changes Trains*). In this 1956 prologue Isherwood declared:

**“What repels me now about Mr. Norris is its heartlessness. It is a heartless fairy story about a real city in which hu-**

**man beings were suffering the miseries of political violence and near-starvation. The “wickedness” of Berlin night life was of most pitiable kind, the kisses and embraces as always had price-tags attached to them, but the prices were drastically reduced in that cut-throat competition of an overcrowded market.” 2**

Stephen Spender also had misgivings (he had arrived in Berlin in 1929, aged 20 - Auden and Isherwood were only a few years older). In his autobiography, *World Within World* (1950) Spender reflected as follows:

**“Christopher and I were leading our life in Germany as a kind of cure for our personal problems, and we became ever more aware that the carefree personal lives of our friends were facades in front of an immense social chaos.” 3**

The inner meaning of the chaotic lives of Isherwood’s Berlin friends (and their fictional counterparts) became clearer as Isherwood pursued his spiritual journey both with the Quakers and the Vedanta Society.

After 1933 Isherwood travelled widely in Europe and in 1938 went on a trip to China with Auden to report on the Sino-Japanese War, which became the subsequent *Journey of a War* (1939). After China, Isherwood and Auden migrated to the United States just before the Second World War (for which they were severely criticised back in Britain.)

After sharing an apartment in New York for a short while with Auden, Isherwood moved on to Los Angeles.

Isherwood proclaimed he was a pacifist. His father, a lieutenant-colonel, led his men into battle but, having no weapon himself while directing his men on the field, he was killed. One of Isherwood’s earliest memories was of having to wear a black arm band to school.

It was natural that Isherwood came within the Quaker orbit and Isherwood became involved in Quaker relief work, living at the Haverford Workshop attached to Haverford College, a Quaker foundation. Isherwood, being fluent in German, was able to help in various ways

German and other German-speaking refugees. By May 1942, however, the Workshop had to close down not only for financial reasons but also because by 1942 escaping refugees from Europe were far fewer in number.

Isherwood attended the local Quaker meetings and in his novel *The World in the Evening* (1952) described a Quaker meeting:

***“The silence, in its odd way, was coming to life, was steadily filling up the bare white room, like water rising in a tank. Every one of us contributed to it, simply by being present. Togetherness grew and tightly enclosed us, until it seemed that we must all be breathing in unison keeping time with our heartbeats. It was massively alive and, somehow, unimaginably ancient, like the togetherness of Man in primeval caves. The Sunday hats couldn’t disturb it; nor could the tap-tapping of leaves against the big windows overlooking the college campus. And, after all these years, the sense, the mere animal feel of it, was as familiar to me as ever.”*** 4

Like Stephen Mark, the central character in *The World in the Evening*, Isherwood “became convinced of the validity of mystical experience.” 5

Curiously, Auden also became convinced of a spiritual dimension to existence having had a similar experience back in 1934 which eventually led to his return to his own idiosyncratic version of Anglo-Catholicism (just as his fellow poet T.S. Eliot, of Unitarian background, became an Anglo-Catholic).

Auden recalled his experience as follows:

***“One fine summer night in June 1933 I was sitting on a lawn after dinner with three colleagues, two women and one man. We liked each other well enough but we were certainly not intimate friends, nor had any one of us had a sexual interest in one another. Incidentally, we had not drunk any alcohol. We were talking casually about everyday matters when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, something happened. I felt myself invaded by a power which, though I consented to it, was irre-***

***sistible and certainly not mine. For the first time in my life I knew exactly because, thanks to the power, I was doing it - what it means to love one’s neighbor as oneself. I was also certain, though the conversation continued to be perfectly ordinary, that my three colleagues were having the same experience. (In the case of one of them, I was able later to confirm this.) The experience lasted at its full intensity for about two hours when we said good-night to one another and went to bed. When I awoke the next morning it was still present, though weaker, and did not vanish completely for two days or so.”*** 6

Although both Auden and Isherwood were both returning to a spiritual view of life at about the same time at the beginning of the 1940’s, Auden castigated Isherwood on the spiritual path he was taking: “My dear, all this Hindu Mumbo Jumbo simply won’t do”.

For his part, Isherwood could have said all this Jewish-Christian Mumbo-Jumbo about sin, guilt and atonement simply won’t do!

Isherwood came to Vedanta through the influence of Aldous Huxley and other British expatriate writers in Hollywood.

When introduced to Swami Prabhavananda, Isherwood in the course of a conversation declared that he was homosexual. “The swami didn’t show the least shadow of distrust on hearing me admit to my homosexuality.” 7 After five years (1940-1945) Isherwood left the Vedanta monastery accommodation but he kept in touch with the Vedanta Society.

When Isherwood met the love of his life, Don Barcady, eyebrows were raised even in Hollywood, Barcady was 18 and Isherwood 48, but this was not an issue for the Swami who said, “Come to our meetings as often as you like together.”

Perhaps the Swami was thinking of the lines from the Bhavagad-Gita:

**The Lord is Everywhere  
And Always perfect**

## What does he care for man's sin Or the righteousness of Man? 8

Isherwood became not only an initiate of the Swami but for a time editor of the journal *Vedanta and the West* and remained on the editorial board for some years. Vedanta is simply the study of the ancient texts, the Hindi Vedas. In the Nineteenth Century a remarkable Swami, Ramakrishna, founded the Ramakrishna order of which the Vedanta Society is its institutional wing.

Ginna and I visited the Vedanta Temple of Southern California twice when on visits to Los Angeles. The temple was built in 1938, and is looking frayed and worn around the edges. (I was born in 1939 and in a sense I can relate to the temple!) Inside the temple there is a central shrine a la Hinduism, but on the side walls there are pictures of Jesus and Buddha. There are Protestant pews but a few Indian born devotees sit cross legged at the front. There are several services a week.

Isherwood stayed at the Vedanta Society quarters from 1940-1945, declaring "I have been a monastic despite my backslidings. Now I have become a Hollywood screenwriter who happens to live at a monastery, a semi-monk". 9

With his background, Isherwood is an excellent expositor of the main principles of Vedanta:

***"Two propositions of Vedanta which we have to consider are these: Vedanta says that a Reality exists beneath all the outer layers - the external appearances-of this universe; a Reality or, to use a word more related to the Christian tradition, a Godhead. This reality, or Godhead, is called in Sanskrit language Brahman. And when this Godhead is thought of, not as all-surrounding but as within the individual - and of course it is simultaneously both - then Brahman is called the Atman. But Brahman-Atman are one and the same as these two words simply express its two relationships to the individual."***

***The second proposition of Vedanta which concerns us here is that the aim of life is to make contact with and intuitively know this***

***Godhead, this Atman, within one's self, and by knowing it within one's self, to be able to know it everywhere; to know the atman as Atman, and then to understand thereby that the Atman is Brahman."*** 10

As Isherwood himself acknowledged the Atman, the god within, is in general agreement with the Inner Light of the Quakers, 11 the wheel had come full circle.

It was all beginning to make sense to Isherwood, never more clearly than in his lecture on the notorious playwright, Giriam Ghosh, who was much given to lechery and drunkenness but a follower of Ramakrishna. Isherwood recounts as follows:

***"There were the famous scenes, often quoted, where Girish took to visiting Ramakrishna very late at night while drunk. Girish was very fond of having tremendous longing for Ramakrishna when he was visiting his various girlfriends, etc. He would rush out to get a cab and say he had to see Ramakrishna. He would arrive - nothing could be more tiresome - in the middle of the night. And - this was so characteristic - Ramakrishna welcomed him completely. And then they would dance."*** 12

I think there's a great significance in his dancing. We hear again and again of how Ramakrishna would see drunks in the road while travelling who were perfect strangers, and how he would get out of the carriage and dance with them. This gives us an insight into the nature of so-called sin, or whatever you call getting drunk.

In other words, what Ramakrishna profoundly understood and taught to us was that all our so-called vices are in fact frustrated attempts to find the truth, or to find peace, or to find release from something.

For Isherwood the moral became clear: all that frantic world of the Berlin days was not a world of sinners but desperate people in the utter chaos of the closing days of the Weimar Republic trying "to find release from something."

Isherwood's final years were ones mainly of happiness and contentment. As he wryly commented, he can't be "too hard on Sally Bowles, the central character of *Cabaret* because she is supporting me in my old age."

13

In October (1980) in Isherwood's last book he wrote:

**"I often wake up in a state of inexplicable happiness This is not a state that appeals to literary critics. They have always preferred the religious writing from Dostoevsky to Graham Green who tell us in effect, "I suffer therefore I am". The Vedanta approach is enlightenment and joy."**

14

**(Max's footnotes have turned into my end-notes JT)**

1. The Berlin Novels comprise of Mr Norris Changes Trains (1935), Goodbye to Berlin (1939) republished as The Berlin Novels (London: Vintage Books, 1992)
2. Prologue to Gerald Hamilton's *Mr Norris and I* reprinted in Christopher Isherwood, *Exhumations* (London: Melheren and Co, 1966) pp. 86-87.
3. Stephen Spender, *World Within World* (London: Methuen and Co., 1966) p. 131.
4. Christopher Isherwood, *The World in the Evening*, (New York: Avon Books, 1954 (1952) pp. 43-44.
5. Jonathan Fryer, *Isherwood: A Biography of Christopher Isherwood*, (London: New English Library, 1997) p. 224.
- 6, Richard Davenport Hines, *Auden* (London: Minerva, 1996 (1995) p. 132.
7. Christopher Isherwood, *My Guru and His Disciple* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2001 (1980) p. 26.
8. Quoted in Robert Adjemian, *The Wishing Tree: Christopher Isherwood on Mystical Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Co., 1986) p. xx
9. Christopher Isherwood *My Guru and His Disciple*, op.cit., p 187.

10. Christopher Isherwood, "The Writer and Vedanta" reprinted in Adjemian (Ed) *The Wishing Tree*, op.cit., p. 147.

11. Christopher Isherwood "Vedanta and the West" in Adjemean, op.cit., p.66.

12. Christopher Isherwood "On Girish Ghoshi" in Adjemian, op.cit., pp. 148-149.

13. Introduction to *The Berlin of Sally Bowles* (London: Hogarth Press, 1978) p.5.

14. Quoted by Gavin Lambert in Introduction to Adjemian, op.cit., p. xix

**(The present editor is responsible for the less-than-academic presentation of Max's article JT)**

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**Your favourite too?**

The November Guardian seemed to say the Superb fairy-wren won a national poll to identify the country's most-loved feathered animal. However, it turns out the Magpie has won. Not my favourite bird!

The Superb fairy-wren is found throughout the south-east. When I was a child we called our little blue backyard buddies "blue wrens". We see them but rarely now in the same district. If you Google "blue wren images" you will find not all Australian blue wrens are the Superb fairy-wren.

It's the Superb that is my favourite however.  
**Jan Tendys**

## Feedback on the November Esprit from Eric Stevenson,

(with some question marks for YOUR responses—we'd love to hear them.)

Thanks Jan for your newsletter work. I have read all of Maurice and your comments on Coleridge. Maurice says sacraments and worship over-ride dogma. SOL says, morning tea and candle lighting and discussion over-ride dogma AND sacraments AND worship!!!

Maurice says all institutional religions have a common origin. They all come from God. We agree they all have a common origin, but maintain they all come from human imagination???

He said Unitarian Christian Socialism was humans co-operating with God. I think SOL says secular/religious socialism is humans co-operating with each other.

He ended up saying Unitarianism was incoherent and feeble. I think SOL Unitarianism is very coherent about its principles and somewhat tentative about scientific rationalism but very, very strong on anti dogma.

Coleridge wanted both liberal in addition to rational theology because liberal theology gave him an opportunity to find the reality of faith in an immanent God which he discovered within the human imagination. SOL go a bit beyond him by not requiring a reality of faith and therefore not insisting on an immanent God to fire our imagination. We like to hang on to his rational theology.?????

Best wishes,

Eric. .

### 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* . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher 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: jantendys@yahoo.com.au 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**

**Website [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org)**