



**Spirit of Life** Unitarian Fellowship  
PO Box 1356, Lane Cove NSW 1595  
Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre  
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli  
(near Milsons Point Station)  
Tel: (02) 9428 2244

Website: [www.sydneyunitarians.org](http://www.sydneyunitarians.org)  
Editor: Jan Tendys

Volume 6, Issue 4

April, 2010

## Schedule of Services

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

<b>4 April,</b>	Ginna Hastings:	<b>"Jesus was a liberal."</b>
<b>11 April,</b>	Rev. Bill Lawton: <b>Guest speaker</b>	<b>"When an open heart to the socially marginalized becomes a central life value".</b>
<b>18 April,</b>	Ross McLuckie:	<b>"Solitude"</b>
	<b>What thoughts can come from solitude? - not to be confused with "loneliness."</b>	
<b>25 April,</b>	Janet Horton	<b>"The Tao of iPod."</b>
<b>2 May ,</b>	Ginna Hastings:	<b>"The Gospel according to Elnor Shimfissle"</b>
<b>9 May,</b>	Candace Parks:	<b>" All I really need to know I learned in kindergarten".</b>
<b>16 May,</b>	Geoff Matthews:	<b>To be announced</b>
<b>23 May,</b>	Dr. Julian Droogan * <b>Guest Speaker</b>	<b>"Working for nothing?"</b>
	<b>How true is it that Buddhists strive towards nothingness and self-extinguishing in their quest for enlightenment? Is it fair, in this case, to call Buddhism an atheistic or even nihilistic philosophy? In this discussion we will look at the classic Buddhist concept of Nirvana and no-self, and compare it with the mystical experiences of the Hindus, Gnostics and a mysterious text from the Nag Hammadi library. * See p. 7</b>	
<b>39 May,</b>	Colin Whatmough	<b>To be announced.</b>

# A Natural Faith

## - How Darwinian evolution has transformed liberal religion

Colin Whatmough

(Notes for address given on 21st January 2010.)

1. Liberal theology has relevance to people who
  - know that at its core Christianity has something good to offer the human race;
  - at the same time may have a sense that they are alone in being a “thinking” Christian and that “salvaging” Christianity is a somewhat hopeless task especially in the Western World - where church attendances are declining a great rate.

**2. Liberal theology is not new - it was enumerated in the mid 20th Century by progressive theologians such as Paul Tillich and Bishop John Robinson (as outlined in his book ‘Honest to God’1963).This book influenced Bishop John Spong’s thinking. Some modern liberal theologians are John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg.**

3. A leading church in Liberal Christian thinking has been the Unitarian Church, which had its roots in the Reformation of the 1500’s.At this time, people in many countries across Europe began to claim the right to:
  - read and interpret the Bible for themselves,
  - to have a direct relationship with their God without the mediation of priest or church,
  - to set their own conscience against the claims of religious institutions.

4. Unitarians, liberal Christian theologians and followers feel that Christianity can still be relevant to the majority of non-religious in the Western world through the presentation of a more natural faith rather than one based on supernatural premises. Thus, people can reconnect with their inherent spiritual self in a meaningful way. To do this one must take account of evolution principles of Charles Darwin to understand

how these have transformed liberal religion.

5. Darwin taught us that human beings must be viewed as a part of nature - not separate from it. Before Darwin, people in the Western world thought species were fixed entities, created by God in the exact form in which we find them today.

After Darwin, we know that all living things have evolved over hundred of millions of years - from single cell organisms that emerged in a kind of primal soup and amazingly, learned to replicate themselves. After Darwin, we know that we humans are connected as part of a great family tree stretching back across four billion years, to the dawn of life.

6. Thus, the theory of evolution by natural selection has resulted in a radical naturalisation. We now seek to understand ourselves in relation to our evolutionary biological origins - rather than in relation to a supernatural being.

7. **Does Darwin’s idea mean that we can no longer believe in God?**

Not necessarily, but it does mean that our conception of deity changes. It means that it is now more difficult to think of God as a personal supernatural being who is both all-powerful and all-knowing, as Western theology has long maintained. Instead, many liberal theologians now conceive of God as a power within the natural universe rather than a source outside it. The divine has a power of persuasion rather than coercion - like a magnet that draws us naturally towards love and goodness.

8. **Darwin’s story, the great epic of cosmic and biological evolution, is a religious as well as a scientific story. It calls us out of our little self-centred worlds to see ourselves as part of a great living system. It gives a larger meaning and a broader ethic to our lives as we draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by conventional faiths.**

9. Finally, religious movements, if committed to truth, wherever it may be found, must embrace the tremendous increase in knowledge and understanding made by Darwin’s revolutionary idea, if they are to be relevant and meaningful to our modern world.

~~~~~

# H.G. Wells 1866-1946

Jim Scarfe

H.G. Wells lived through one of the most violent times in World history which saw two world wars with cruel loss of millions of lives and the Great Depression with much privation and suffering.

The period also saw great advances in all areas of science, manufacturing and construction and many changes in society, in all of which Wells made a significant contribution.

He was science educated, a teacher, historian, journalist, novelist and author on just about everything. Science fiction was his specialty and with Jules Verne he is regarded as "The father of Science Fiction". Wikipedia lists as perhaps his most notable works: The Time Machine, The First Men in the Moon, The War of the Worlds, The Invisible Man, The Island of Doctor Moreau, The Shape of Things to come.

A visionary he predicted in his books:

**-in 1901. The World in 2000**

**Hits**-trains, cars, population increase and suburban living

-moral restrictions declining (in which Wells himself made a contribution in his advocacy and practice of free love)

-defeat of German militarism

-the European Union

**Misses**-aircraft not successful until 1950 (although in 1901 the Wright Bros. had not made their epic flight and the Frenchman Bleriot had not flown the English Channel).

-submarines (he thought crews would suffocate!).

**-in 1914.** A first prediction of what would lead to the nuclear chain reaction and nuclear fission.

**-in 1930.** The rise of fascism

**-in 1934.** World War II in 1940. A year out but the War didn't really start until Germany overcame France in 1940.

**In his "Short History of the World" first published in 1922 Wells wrote: If the Great War (1914-18) had not come in the way it did it would have come in some similar form-just as it will certainly return on a still more disastrous scale in 20 or 30 years time if no political unification anti-**

**pates and prevents it.**

Wells' most consistent political ideal was the World State (involving political unification). In contacts made pursuing this, by the 1930's, he was internationally recognised and visited President Roosevelt and Marshal Stalin.

He was a constant and very active supporter of the League of Nations and greatly distressed at its failure. He might have been encouraged by the U.N., at least its longevity compared with the League.

A bibliography shows that Wells wrote scores of books on almost every imaginable topic, such was the diversity and range of his interests.

As he aged he became increasingly didactic and hard to get on with. As he devoted his final years towards causes which were largely rejected by contemporaries, his literary reputation declined. Perhaps these causes may not have been rejected in later decades.

The failure of the League to stop WWII and the War itself increased the pessimistic side of his nature. In his last book "Mind at the end of its tether"(1945) he considered the idea that humanity being replaced by another species might not be a bad idea. He came to call the era "The age of frustration".

H.G.Wells died on 13 August, 1946 at his home - 13 Hanover Terrace, Regent's Park in London.

He wanted his epitaph to be "I told you so, you damned fools". But his wish was not granted as he was cremated and his ashes scattered at sea. A commemorative blue plaque in his honour was installed at his home in Regent's Park.

~~~~~  
The above brief biography is a follow-up to Jim's "H.G, Wells' view of Jesus" printed last month. Of possible further interest is a book, published first in 1908 giving his views on Metaphysics, Beliefs, General Conduct and some personal reflections. The book was reissued at least seven times. It should be available from most libraries."

~~~~~  
I want to go ahead of Father Time with a scythe of my own.—H.G. Wells

Every time I see an adult on a bicycle, I no longer despair for the future of the human race.—H.G. Wells

# Spirit of Life President's Report

21 March 2010

## Candace Parks

We have just past a very significant milestone – our 5<sup>th</sup> birthday! The majority of new “businesses” don’t make it this far, so a big congratulations to us all for even being here. But we have done a lot more than just be here. We have continued our slow but steady increase in membership and we feel that 2010 is going to be our year for a real growth spirit. We are very encouraged by the number of visitors who are finding us (primarily by the website – many thanks to Janet) and the percentage that are coming back for more.

### Statistics

Attendances:

Average: 17.2 per service (up from 15.4 last year)

Highest attendance: 24 (same as last year)

Five new members

Michael Bucciarelli

Peter Donnelly

Caroline Donnelly

Martin Horlacher

Membership total 30, from original 12

### Guest speakers

Linda Horton (mother of Janet Horton, visiting for US)

Elizabeth Watson from Amnesty International

Mary Lou Johnson, Unitarian visiting from Canada

### Promotion

Continuous improvement to our website (Check it out – [sydneyunitarians.org](http://sydneyunitarians.org))

Geoff – community notice boards

The Village Observer

North Shore Time Christmas edition

### Accomplishments

Emergency Fund contributions

\$200 – Plan International

\$150 - Amnesty International

\$400 – Project Chacocente\*

\$560 – UUA fund for Haiti

\$250 – Emergency Fund

\$310 – Fundraiser

UUA has raised > \$1.4m  
as of 2/3/10

Micro-financing

Mary Rose Oshiagha of Nigeria – Loan of \$25 for clothes stall has been repaid; we will reinvest with additional \$25

### Social Events

Yulefest

Farewell party for Steve Wilson

Blue Mountains Retreat

SOL 5<sup>th</sup> birthday party

### Miscellaneous

- Jim Scarfe attended 2009 Parliament of World Religions
  - Special General Meeting to elect Janet Horton as secretary (many thanks to Jan Tendys for her many years of service and continued work on Esprit and providing morning tea)
- Laurence Gormley, Geoff Matthews, Helen Whatmough and Candace Parks attended the ANZUAA conference hosted by the Sydney Unitarian Church in Francis Street.

### Plans for next year

Engage the services of a part-time minister for the following:

- Lead two Sunday services per month
  - Provide pastoral care on a needs basis
- Be involved in the growth of the fellowship through completing publicity functions as directed by the committee.  
(achieve this by inviting guest speakers)

~~~~~\

\*

Project Chacocente moves families from the city dump of Managua, Nicaragua to the clean air and fertile soil of rural Masaya, where the people learn skills ...  
[www.outofthedump.org/about.html](http://www.outofthedump.org/about.html)

~~~~~

**CONGRATULATIONS TO CANDACE  
AND HER TEAM!**

**PLEASE NOTE  
THAT MEMBERSHIPS ARE NOW DUE .**

# The Original Adams: Unitarianism's Chief Critic of Liberal Religion

Dr. Max Lawson

Theodore Parker when he returned on a visit to the Harvard Divinity School (where as a young minister to be he had been in the small audience to hear Emerson's celebrated address) acidly remarked that in ancient Egypt the embalmers only took seventy days to make a mummy out of a dead man but the Harvard Divinity School Unitarian embalmers took three years.

James Luther Adams (1901-1994), Unitarian gadfly par excellence, was certainly no embalmer during his years as a professor (1957-1968) at the Harvard Divinity School, nor, for that matter throughout his long and provocative career first as a parish minister then in various academic positions including Meadville Unitarian Theological College and the University of Chicago Theological College and the University of Chicago, before joining Harvard.

Adams came from a small country town, Ritzville, Washington, where his father, a fundamentalist Christian, changed from Baptist to Plymouth Brethren, combining farming with itinerant preaching. His mother was equally pious.

It's no doubt Adams, steeped in German theology, as well as being the leading translator and interpreter of Paul Tillich, would have been only too painfully aware of what in German was called the phenomenon of *Aufhebung* - the transformational process in which that which is rejected is preserved in new form.

Adams rejected religion entirely in his adolescent years. Then, while a student at the University of Minnesota, Adams listened to the preaching of John Dietrich, the Unitarian denomination's leading exponent of humanism. Characteristically, after Adams himself decided to become a Unitarian minister of the liberal Christian type, he ruefully recalled that whenever he detected two or three humanists "gathered together in Unitarianism's name," he gave them a hard time till he realized that this was counter productive. Adams was also eager to pounce on

what he perceived as Unitarian's "wooliness" - growling, "you can't flunk Unitarianism." (1) Adams and his provocative stance brought him, somewhat perversely, countless invitations to be the key-note speaker at Unitarian conferences and assemblies and he certainly troubled the waters of Unitarian thought.

**Adams' quarrel with liberalism is closely tied up with his lengthy study visits to Germany - in the 1920's and two extended visits to Germany in the Nazi period.**

In the course of his theological studies Adams came to know well German theologians of all stripes. He was closely associated with the oppositional Confessing Church (which earned him a lengthy visit with the Gestapo) and also met official "German Christians," ministers who supported Hitler. With such witnesses as Bonhoeffer being few and far between, the German churches, Protestant and Catholic, soon fell into line with the Nazi state and even the Confessing Church eventually could offer no effective opposition as the grip of the state which ruled by terror tightened.

On his return to the United States Adams threw down the gauntlet to Liberalism of "a new beatitude: Blessed are the Powerful." (2) What Adams was pleading for was a frank recognition that "power was a fundamental and unavoidable aspect of human nature and that we must have the courage to use power responsibly in the face of demonic forces." (3)

Many of Adams' key concepts came from Tillich who often said that Adams knew more about Tillich's writings than Tillich did himself (4) as exemplified in Adams's "Paul Tillich's Philosophy of Culture, Science and Religion" (1965-a rewrite of his 1945 University of Chicago PhD.)

Even in the Weimar Republic period before Tillich was driven out of his chair at the University of Frankfurt in 1933, when the Nazis came to power, Tillich had written about "the Demonic." Adams, following Tillich, after stressing that "awareness of demonic evil is deeply rooted in the New Testament" (5) pleaded with Unitarians to take evil seriously, to cast aside the liberal blinkers that the denomination was wearing with its over-optimistic views of human nature and its vague spirituality "which stressed serenity

and inner peace." (6)

Adams called attention to the Nietzsche's typology of philosophical outlooks - the calm, rational approach (Appolonian) and the passionate, irrational approach (Dionysian) and considered that the Jewish/Christian outlook "was a synthesis of these views but learning closer to the Dionysian viewpoint." (7)

The lack of passion and commitment Adams saw as the bane of liberalism, even entitling one of his editorials "Liberalism is Dead." It must be stressed, however, that Adams wanted to transform liberalism not to destroy it - "his arguments with liberalism are finally arguments for liberalism." (8)

In a 1934 address Adams pointedly spoke of the dangers of liberalism and suggested a solution which would have been unpalatable to many Unitarians:

We discover that our principal basis for unity is the right of private judgment. Our liberalism is in danger of dispersing itself into sheer variety. In the name of Freedom we have the Tower of Babel and its confusion of thought as an unmitigated blessing... the rejection of some brand of orthodoxy or some vague espousal of one kind or another of idealism is not enough to make a religious liberal. There must be a doctrine and a discipline. (9)

For Adams this doctrine and discipline was liberal Christianity, "the religion of Jesus not the religion about Jesus." This distinction had become familiar to many Unitarians through the publication and reprintings of Clayton Bowen's 1922 pamphlet "Why Are Unitarians Disciples of Jesus?" a publication quoted and strongly endorsed by Adams. With such a stance of course Adams was always "rowing against the tide" (10) as an ever increasing humanist position became dominant in American Unitarianism.

As well as being the interpreter of Tillich, Adams made his academic reputation with his work on "Voluntary Associations" what we would now probably call grass-roots organizations. Not only was Adams an historian of such movements, but he was an activist in various social causes - civil liberties, urban community organization, fighting racism and other expressions of engagement in voluntary organizations. Leading by example, Adams said every Unitarian should be involved

in one such project listed above outside their immediate church concerns.

Adams stressed the obvious but neglected claim that the free churches in their struggle against the established churches were the first important and influential voluntary association.

Adams seemed to be at his happiest in the company of those who disagreed with him, particularly those who claimed no faith:

Actually the non-religious are not without faith, even though they reject what they call speculation. There are many kinds of faith that can be dispensed with but there remains one kind of faith that no one can live without. We do not need the word "faith" to refer to it. The word "confidence" will do just as well

All alike place their confidence in something, whether it be human nature, reason, scientific method, church, nation, Bible or God. This confidence finds explicit or implicit expression in belief and in disbelief. As Emerson observed a man bears belief as a tree bears apples. (11)

For Adams belief or faith must be examined - indeed the title of one of his books is *The Examined Faith*. (12) To this end every week there was an Open House at the Adams's place where over several decades all subjects were open to critical enquiry. This quality, together with the kindness and hospitality of one who was called "the smiling prophet" despite his having seen "so much evil under the sun" both in Germany and in his social projects in the United States, marked James Luther Adams as a true son of Unitarianism in spite of himself.

Notes:

1. George Kimmerich Beach, *Transforming Liberalism: The Theology of James Luther Adams* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2005) p. 12.
2. *Ibid*, pp. 162-163
3. *Ibid*.
4. *Ibid.*, p. ix.
5. *Ibid*, p. 133
6. *Ibid*, p. 123
7. James Luther Adams "the Changing Reputation of Human Nature" reprinted in George Kimmerich Beach (Ed) *The Essential James Luther Adams* (Boston: Skinner House Books, 1988), p. 54.

8. Beach, op. cit., p. xxvii
9. Ibid., p. 28.
10. Beach, op. cit., p. 29.
11. James Luther Adams, "The Love of God" reprinted in Max L. Stackhouse (Ed) On Being Human Religiously: Selected Essays on Religion and in Society by James Luther Adams (Boston: Unitarian Association 1976) p. 91
12. James Luther Adams, An Examined Faith: Social Context and Religious Commitment, edited by George Kimmerich Beach (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991).

~~~~~

## Have you heard of the Philegelos (Laughter lover) ?

asks **Margaret Armstrong?**

It is the only surviving ancient book of jokes, written in Greek and probably compiled in the 4th Century BCE. Here's some samples of what made the ancients laugh:

- A man buys a slave who dies soon after. When he complains, the vendor says: "Well, he didn't die when I had him!"

- A barber, an absent minded professor and a bald man are making a long journey together and decide to camp the night. They arrange to take it in turn to mind the luggage and the barber offers to take first watch. After a while he gets bored and passes the time by shaving the head of the professor. He then wakes him up to take second watch. The professor pats his head and exclaims, "That idiot barber! He has woken up baldy instead of me."

A man from Abdera met a eunuch walking along the street with a woman. "Nice to meet your wife," he says. "People like me don't have wives," says the eunuch. "Nice to meet you daughter then," says the Abderite.

As Margaret says: Not brilliant, but at least you can say they don't make jokes like that any more!

~~~~~

## RE-INVENTING THE SACRED

"WHY THE WAY WE LIVE IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN WHAT WE BELIEVE"

"THE BABY, THE BATH WATER AND THE BATH"

This is the title of a Gathering with two internationally acclaimed progressive authors, to be held in the Beecroft Community Centre, 9 am to 4 pm, Saturday, April 24, 2010

cprtffreedomtoexplore@yahoo.com.au

~~~~~

## News & Views from the Pews

\_ Eric Stevenson has had carotid artery surgery on Friday- recovering well. We wish him all the best.

- Caroline Donnelly is recovering from her knee replacement operation and is at Mt Wilga rehab this week.

- baby shower on 2 May for Paddy

- web sites for further reading on Unitarianism: [www.anzuua.org](http://www.anzuua.org) which includes: History of ANZUUA; what is Unitarianism?; Unitarians of note and links to Australian Unitarian groups.

**Helen Whatmough**

~~~~~

## Dr Julian Droogan (see p. 1)

is a professional archaeologist and historian of religious myths and symbols who works at the Centre for Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism, Macquarie University. He completed his PhD at the University of Sydney looking at the relationship between religion and material culture in India. In it he reconstructed people's lifestyles from the Stone Age to the emergence of earliest Buddhism.

Julian has participated in archaeological fieldwork in Australia, the Netherlands, Pakistan, Indian and Papua New Guinea. He takes yearly study tours through the archaeological and religious sites of India and the Mediterranean for the Art Gallery of NSW and the Centre for Continuing Education, at the University of Sydney

## Question to the Congregation

Members of the Spirit of Life Fellowship, will you welcome these new people into our congregation? Will you reach out to them in friendship, including them in our activities and fellowship? Will you be open to their unique gifts and perspectives? Will you extend a warm welcome to each of them, remembering that each of us was once a new member?

## Charge to New Members

Becoming a member of this church is an important step, but it is only a first step. I charge you new members to grow in your faith. More importantly, I charge you to find and share your special gifts with us. Ours is a shared ministry. Each of us has a crucial role to play. We need you. We need your energy; we need your ideas. (From the "Welcome to New Members" designed by **Rev. Steve Wilson**)

***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 OF THE MONTH

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](mailto: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:

### **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](http://www.sydneyunitarians.com) or speak to one of our members before or after the Sunday service.