



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
Editor: Jan Tendys

Volume 8, Issue 4

April, 2012

Schedule of Services

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

1st April

Morandir Armson
(Religious Studies student)

**"Indian food spirituality and what
Westerners can learn from it".**

Indian food is peculiarly influenced by the religious traditions of that country. Indeed, the cuisine of the subcontinent is seriously saturated with motifs of spirituality and religion, theories of spiritual progression and taboos on certain foods. Indian cuisine is the finest example of how spirituality and food can mesh.

And it can be asked - what can non-Indian people learn from the culinary spirituality of India? At present, the Western world is suffering from various food-related problems, such as childhood obesity and a food crisis amongst people of low socioeconomic status, as well as being involved in a number of food-related debates, focused on animal cruelty in the meat and egg industries, the ethics of vegetarianism and veganism and a feeling that some kind of "food spirituality" has been lost from Western culture.

8th April

Morandir Armson

"Islam for those who haven't studied it"

Islam is a fascinating religion, the third of the great Monotheistic faiths. Unfortunately, many Western people have developed a mistaken view of Islam, because of the "war on terror" and the fearful attacks that have taken place in New York, London, Madrid and Bali. In this presentation, I will try to follow the guidelines laid out by Ginna; to help us all understand this religion and see it with an open mind. I hope that the result of this talk will be to foster a discussion of Islam for those who don't know much about it and to help us all understand it. .

15th April

Dr Andrew Usher

"The Messiah is one of you."

A discussion of the story of the Rabbi's Gift.

22nd April

Rev. Rex A E Hunt

**"Earth Day and God! Beyond
'Belief' to 'Mystery' and 'Creativity'".**

Earth Day 2012 - marks the 42nd anniversary of what many consider the birth of the modern environment movement in 1970. Rex is a retired Uniting Church minister, Founding director of The Centre for Progressive Religious Thought, and Chair, Common Dreams Conference for Religious Progressives.

29th April

Colin Whatmough

"The Unitarian Principle – the goal of world community with peace, liberty and Justice" US foreign policy, survival and stark realities.

6th May

Laurence Gormley

"Cyberbullying: New ways to Intimidate". Some new thoughts on this old, obnoxious behaviour.

"UNITARIANISM: LIBERAL THEOLOGY AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY"

Geoffrey R Usher

To explain something of the way that the Unitarian approach to religion is different from that of other groups, I want to quote a brief section from an article, "Our Beliefs", by David O Rankin, in which he reported on an article by Robert H Miller, Professor of Religion at Tufts University, entitled "The Religious Value System of Unitarian Universalists". Miller's article was published in the Review of Religious Research. Rankin wrote:

"It was the result of a scientific survey which sought to discover whether there is a distinctive value system for Unitarian Universalists which is different from Catholics, Protestants, Jews, and non-churched people. The conclusions were strongly positive.

First, in the ranking of terminal values, Unitarian Universalists placed SELF-RESPECT, WISDOM, INNER HARMONY, MATURE LOVE, A WORLD OF BEAUTY, and AN EXCITING LIFE - much higher than other religious groups. The values of SOCIAL RECOGNITION, PLEASURE, A COMFORTABLE LIFE, FAMILY SECURITY, and SALVATION were ranked lower. Indeed, SALVATION came close to being a disvalue - as it was consistently ranked as the lowest of eighteen selections. (It was first among orthodox Christians.)

Second, in the ranking of instrumental values, Unitarian Universalists placed LOVING, INDEPENDENT, INTELLECTUAL, IMAGINATIVE, and LOGICAL - much higher than other religious groups. The values of OBEDIENT, CLEAN, POLITE, SELF-CONTROLLED, and FORGIVING were ranked lower. Indeed, the disdain for OBEDIENT and POLITE goes far toward explaining the occasional chaos of our meetings together. (It is good that we are LOVING.)

So in the view of the social scientist, those persons who choose to be identified and affiliated with a Unitarian Universalist church

do have a unique value pattern. It is best described as **self-actualizing, intellectual, independent, ethically committed, and this-worldly**. ... Being a Unitarian Universalist is characterized by holding a constellation of values which differentiates such persons from other kinds of religious communities and, at the same time, develops an internal sense of commonality and a homogeneous community." (1)

This different set of values, this different manner of seeking for meaning in our religious life as part of our place in the whole scheme of the universe, means that "it is very difficult for the newcomer to understand our approach to the religious life. ... Many people, ... while outwardly rejecting the tenets of an orthodox religion, unconsciously cling to the frame of reference which that religion embodies. Time, patience, and education are necessary, in order to encourage a different perspective which will develop into a positive system of beliefs." (2)

Unitarian theology is a liberal theology, because its exponents do not seek to develop it as an authoritative declaration to be given to, imposed upon, and accepted by the members of Unitarian congregations. In that sense, with its emphasis on the individual right of freedom in matters of belief, it is a theology of liberation from authoritarian dogmas. It is a liberation theology which proclaims the dignity, freedom and equality of all human beings; it proclaims their right to justice, fairness and equity in the sharing of the earth's richness; and it proclaims the importance of mutual acceptance, respect and tolerance.

The Unitarian movement is non-hierarchical. The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches is democratically organized as a federation of autonomous congregations, societies, fellowships, district associations and other groups, each of which is run on open, democratic lines. There are no bishops or lines of authority. Power is not vested in the ministry or in any other group of people, except as part of the selection of committees and appointment of leaders by regular, open, democratic processes.

In an article entitled "Personal Responsibility", Gabor Kereki wrote:

"A Unitarian Church is an association of individuals who wish to search for the meaning of life in freedom - it is a fellowship in which individual opinions are freely expressed, personal convictions mutually respected and responsibilities fully shared.

A Unitarian Church is a community of persons who have a great and sincere regard for the dignity of man - it is a fellowship of those who believe that truth may be found by all individuals and, therefore, it should not be regarded as the property of ecclesiastical institutions.

A Unitarian Church represents many shades of opinion, many sincerely held personal beliefs, many diverse convictions - it is a fellowship of those who are sincerely religious because they can be sincere to themselves and to their fellow men.

A Unitarian Church is a body of people who govern themselves according to democratic principles - it is a fellowship of persons who know that creative ideas can grow only in an atmosphere of freedom.

It involves us all in a personal responsibility to treasure the freedom of our fellowship, and to preserve it, to share it with all who come into it, and to extend its sphere of influence over the life of our community." (3)

This emphasis on the personal and democratic approach to religious life is something that makes it as difficult for me, as a Unitarian, to get inside the "magisterium" of an orthodox Christian church as I assume it probably is for, say, a Roman Catholic priest to get inside the way that the members of a Unitarian congregation relate to their minister - someone whom they have chosen to undertake a particular responsibility as an equal among equals; not someone sent to them by an external/higher authority to lead them, as a person set apart from them and having authority over them.

Within the Unitarian movement, there is no parallel for the claim by Leonardo and

Clodovis Boff that "as a general rule, the magisterium watches the development of new theologies with close attention but rarely intervenes and then only with great caution and discreet support or opposition." (4)

Liberation theology is a current of religious thought - and work emanating from that thought -

At the end of Chapter 6 of their book, Introducing Liberation Theology, the Boff brothers wrote about the historical significance of liberation theology in

terms that could be applied almost verbatim to Unitarian theology. For example:

Liberation theology / Unitarianism: "is the first theology worked out on the periphery on the basis of questions raised by the periphery, ... demanding humanity, solidarity, and the opportunity to live in dignity and peace."

Liberation theology / Unitarianism: "puts on the agenda for discussion questions that concern all human beings, ... the problems of ... poor persons, of international justice, of the future for the wretched of the earth."

Liberation theology / Unitarianism: "denounces the causes that produce oppression, and inspires an outpouring of generosity destined to overcome destructive relationships and build freedom for everyone."

Liberation theology / Unitarianism: "belongs to contemporary history; it does not shut itself up in splendid isolation but operates on the level of everyday life."

Liberation theology / Unitarianism: "forces theologians to think in terms of specific actions, of the real problems of life and of the community of faith, instead of the classic themes established by theological tradition." (5)

Liberation theology is a current of religious thought - and work emanating from that thought - which is closely identified with the Roman Catholic church in Third World countries where Catholicism is the official state religion, or the religion of the great majority of the population; where the majority of the population live in poverty, on the margins of society; where the majority of the population

are disenfranchised from the institutions of education, health services, power; where the majority of the population are oppressed and exploited by, and for the benefit of, the few who hold power and capital.

The Catholic church is a hierarchical, authoritarian, top-down structure. In countries where the political regime is authoritarian and oppressive, the Church can seem to parallel and support the political/socio-economic structure, so that its liberation theologians can face a two-fold struggle: both within the church as they challenge the confines imposed by their ecclesiastical superiors, and within the society, as they seek to make manifest the essential gospel of Jesus and challenge the injustices and inequities that result from structural oppression.

The Unitarian movement has a history of persecution - by mainstream/orthodox Christian churches - because of its "heretical" theology.

There remain aspects of antipathy to Unitarianism, because of the non-trinitarian basis of its theology and its non-creedal approach. In some ways, Unitarians can identify with contemporary liberation theologians who are struggling against an oppressive religious stance which seeks acceptance of and conformity with the standards imposed by some kind of "higher authority". The difference is that the Unitarian struggle was to establish their freedom from other religious groups, while the liberation theologians' struggle is internal: within their own church's hierarchical structure.

However, Unitarians generally would want to honour and support and ally themselves with the liberation theologians in their struggle against oppressive political, social and economic systems, and in their efforts to build a better, fairer, more just, peaceful and loving world for all people.

References

1. David O Rankin, "Our Beliefs", in Harry B Scholefield (Ed), The Unitarian Universalist Pocket Guide, Unitarian Universalist Association, Boston USA, 1981: Pages 6-7

2 Ibid. Pages 7-8

3 Gabor Kereki, Egy Az Isten: Unitarism, The Lindsey Press, London, 1996: Page 1

4. Leonardo and Clodovis Boff, Introducing Liberation Theology, Translated by Paul Burns, Burns & Oates, Great Britain, 1997: Page 75

5. Ibid. Pages 88-89

(Emphases by editor JT)

Jottings

Jan Tendys

Our birthday party/fundraiser at Candace's home was enjoyable as usual - herbed sausages and salad very tasty, the pavlova really special and conversation an extra. ;-) Even a burst of sunshine on a wet day. It was good to see some visitors. Special thanks to Candace, Ginna, Caz and Peter.

Eric went to see Ross in the Longueville Private Hospital to which he has been transferred while his broken shoulder is mending. Good news is that the bone is knitting; it will take approximately three more weeks for the healing to take place. Ross is not permitted to walk unaided so his mobility is seriously restricted. Consequently he appreciates a friendly visit or call. (041 9427 684)

We're lucky to have Davy Knittle, a longtime Unitarian Universalist, visiting from the States. As advertised recently, he'll be talking on this coming Sunday (25th March). We hope also to see more of Ian Brown visiting from England.

Margaret Armstrong (McCammon) is now in "Landsdowne Gardens", at 58A Wycombe Rd, Neutral Bay. She would appreciate a visit or call (9909 5600) - preferably daytime. Those going north from Kirribilli on a Sunday might find that a convenient time. Margaret chose her aged care facility with an eye to outings to Cremorne pictures—one visit made already.

We've been appreciating Andrew Usher's piano playing. He has introduced us to Ric Marsten's song "Make it a Dance". Any other music suggestions will be appreciated.

Peter and Caz have returned from a working holiday to Tasmania. Less happily, Ginna has had to fly home because of her father's illness. We send best wishes.

Welcome to new member, Austin!

Book Review from Australian Conservation Foundation

March 5, 2012 Population growth is one of Australia's political hot potatoes. In his new book, *Bigger or Better? Australia's population debate*, Professor Ian Lowe — author, pre-eminent scientist and president of the Australian Conservation Foundation — answers the questions at the root of the debate, and provides a comprehensive analysis of the issue. [Bigger or Better? Australia's population debate.](#)

Professor Ian Lowe author, pre-eminent scientist and president of the Australian Conservation Foundation answers the questions at the root of the debate, and provides a comprehensive analysis of the issue.

[Bigger or Better?](#) sets the record straight. In a clear manner, Lowe lays out the facts about recent population increase in Australia and considers the impacts of that growth and the implications of different future patterns on that growth.

What is the link between population and economic growth?

What are the environmental impacts of population growth?

Are we an ageing society and if so, is that a matter for concern?

Are boat people and refugees a significant component of our migrant intake?

What capacity do we have to influence Australia's future population?

Recognised for his commonsense, Lowe unravels the misconceptions and urban myths about the controversial debate and the choices we are making about Australia's future population

When Kevin Rudd responded to a government forecast that the Australian population could reach 36 million by 2040 by saying he believed in a big Australia, there was a strong public reaction. One insider said the focus groups went ballistic. Julia Gillard renamed the relevant ministers portfolio sustainable population, implicitly criticising pro-growth policies of previous governments. **Tony Abbott vowed to stop the boats if elected (thus limiting immigration), de-**

spite generally supporting a population growth agenda and clearly having no way of stopping the boats.

Much of the press attacked both major parties, accusing them of pandering to base prejudice by discussing the social impacts of immigration or suggesting that population growth had negative environmental impacts and urged politicians to champion what it claimed were the self-evident economic benefits of rapid population growth.

In this timely book, Lowe calls for all Australians to realise the future is not somewhere we are going but rather a place we create by our own actions or inactions now

In [Bigger or Better?](#) Lowe categorises the various contributors to the debate, those voices urging further growth and those wishing to see growth slowed or the population stabilised.

As he states, there are humanitarians on both sides of the debate, there are racists on both sides of the debate, there are totally misinformed people on both sides of the debate and there are well-informed professionals on both sides of the debate.

He looks at how population growth is affecting the environment of our major cities, the Murray-Darling Basin and South Australia's Fleurieu Peninsula, and raises the prospect of Noosangatta in south-east Queensland one continuous urban sprawl from Noosa, through Brisbane to Coolangatta and the NSW border.

Lowe makes the complex and controversial issues around population accessible to general readers who he hopes will contribute to an informed discussion about the issue and the sort of future we want for our country

[Bigger or Better? Australia's population debate](#) is published in Australia by [UQP](#).

Note: May 2011, the Hon Tony Burke MP, released Sustainable Australia – Sustainable Communities: A Sustainable Population Strategy for Australia 2011.

<http://www.environment.gov.au/sustainability/population/index.html>

Focusing on refugees

(This is part of an article that appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald 2010 shortly after Julia Gillard took over the reins as PM.)

As people pick over the bones of why Rudd crashed there will be a lot of talk about the centralisation of decision making and poor communication. But there was a deeper issue at work that is instructive.

Towards the end of John Howard's prime ministership people stopped listening to him and nothing he said cut through. Rudd descended from great polling heights to the same depths in a matter of months. Understanding why tells us two important things about modern politics.

There are two reasons people turned off Rudd. First, and ominously for Gillard, he lost that sense of having a moral core. He squandered that moral capital with his backflips on climate change and refugees.

Secondly, he underestimated the intelligence of the electorate. He failed to grasp that **just because people don't know the details of policy issues doesn't mean that they are fools you can hoodwink with spin.**

The lessons for Gillard are two-fold. She has to come up with an ethically coherent position on asylum seekers and she can't spin it; she has to level with people about the difficulties of the policy challenge. The discipline of needing to do both those things might turn out to be a blessing.

Views on asylum seekers have tended to be polarised because it raises strong symbolic values issues, but there has not been very much practical discussion of the policy reality.

The asylum seeker challenge occurs against the backdrop of a huge increase in global migration since the end of the Cold War. It is often said that the Berlin Wall has been replaced by the "wall around the West" as countries try to balance their high legal migration with strong defensive measures to shut out illegal immigration.

The high demand for migration combined with

the "walls around the West" has fostered a criminal trade as large as the global drug trade.

At the same time, there has been an explosion in the number of asylum seekers. During the Cold War asylum seekers were usually political dissidents escaping communist regimes to the West. In recent years, the developing world has increasingly suffered from failed states and civil wars that create huge numbers of highly traumatised people in crisis.

The international community has limited and inadequate systems to cope with this humanitarian disaster. Many refugees have no choice but to try and make their way to safe havens under their own steam.

The refugees usually end up catching a ride on the criminal illegal immigration networks. The result is that the world's most vulnerable people are being carried around the world by the illegal trade of international crime networks.

The problem gets even more difficult. In a system governed by the rule of law such as ours, **it is administratively difficult to distinguish between refugees and economic migrants.** As Third World states teeter at different levels of collapse there is a continuum of experience between those that have watched their whole families murdered and those wanting to escape crony corruption and poverty to build better lives for their children.

But the complexity does not have to be a political disaster. Focusing on the practicalities defuses the symbolic politics. By discussing the realities it is possible to validate the concerns being voiced on both the left and the right. The policy challenge is to protect the neediest people in the world while seeking to impose order on a genuine global problem. Acknowledging that this is the goal, and that the practical issues are difficult, offers a credible, respectful and honourable approach

Gillard should reject Abbott's test that the challenge is to stop the boats. The goal should be to intercept the boats so that we

can sort out the victims, the aspirational and the criminals. That is what is required to take control of the problem and to respectfully address the range of concerns across the community.

By **Lindy Edwards**, a political scientist at the University of New South Wales and a research fellow with the Australian Prime Minister's Centre (at time of writing)

To read the whole article:

[.http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/keeping-it-real-on-asylum-seekers-20100625-z93r.html#comments](http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/politics/keeping-it-real-on-asylum-seekers-20100625-z93r.html#comments)

Note from editor:

Our website blog gives an account of an earlier discussion on population and sustainability:

<http://sydneyunitarians.com/news-services/blog/page/3/>

However, this discussion did not get into the question of what Australia is to do if climate change results in large numbers of "climate refugees" heading our way. Will we have to abandon some of our ideals for preserving the environment or preserving our present quality of life? Where does compassion come into all this? Where does border security? Can a regional solution do justice to Human Rights?

Please leave a comment on our website blog above.

~~~~~

***Journeying god,***

*Journeying god,  
pitch your tent with mine  
so that I may not become deterred  
by hardship, strangeness, doubt.  
Show me the movement I must make  
toward a wealth not dependent on  
possessions,  
toward a wisdom not based on books,  
toward a strength not bolstered by might,  
toward a god not confined to heaven.  
Help me to find myself as I walk in other's  
shoes.*

*(Prayer song from Ghana, traditional)*



***when the wind is perfect***

*On a day  
when the wind is perfect,  
the sail just needs to open and the world is  
full of beauty.  
Today is such a  
day.*

*My eyes are like the sun that makes  
promises;  
the promise of life  
that it always  
keeps  
each morning.*

*The living heart gives to us as does that  
luminous sphere,  
both caress the earth with great  
tenderness.*

*This is a breeze that can enter the soul.  
This love I know plays a drum. Arms move  
around me;  
who can contain their self before my beauty?*

*Peace is wonderful,  
but ecstatic dance is more fun, and less  
narcissistic;  
gregarious He makes our lips.*

*On a day when the wind is perfect,  
the sail just needs to open  
and the love starts.*

*Today is such  
a day.*

*~ Rumi ~(trans. Landinski)*

## Rutgers Spying Case

***From the New York Times March 16, 2012***

A jury convicted Dharun Ravi, a former Rutgers University student, of hate crimes, witness tampering and other charges. Mr. Ravi used a webcam to spy on his roommate kissing another man in their dorm room. Tyler Clementi, the roommate, jumped to his death from the George Washington Bridge three days after Mr. Ravi viewed him on the webcam. The case became a symbol of the struggles facing gay, lesbian and bisexual teenagers and the problem of cyber-bullying in an era when laws governing hate crimes have not kept up with evolving technology.

The New York Times comments: The trial of the Rutgers student Dharun Ravi, has raised questions about whether Ravi's actions were a hate crime or simple boorishness. But some have even questioned whether there need to be hate crime laws at all. Do they protect against intimidation and bigotry, or are they unnecessary and unfair? Read the discussion:

<http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2012/03/07/are-hate-crime-laws-necessary/justice-not-vengeance-for-hate-crimes>

**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 Ginna or Janine 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. 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.*

**It would be helpful if items for publication, including articles and talk topics with themes could reach Jan by the 15th of each month.**

**Variations to this timetable may be necessitated by circumstances.**

Preferred method is as an MS-WORD or email to [jtendys@bigpond.com](mailto:jtendys@bigpond.com)

Hardcopy submissions can be hand-delivered to Jan or posted to:

Spirit of Life  
PO Box 1356  
LANE COVE NSW 1595