



Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship

Kirribilli Neighbourhood Centre
16-18 Fitzroy Street, Kirribilli
(near Milsons Point Station)

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Schedule of Services

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

6 October **Service today is cancelled owing to expected parking chaos.**

13 October **Morandir Armson** **"Pagan Ecumenicism: The Search For Common Ground?"**

When we talk about Paganism and the interfaith movement, there are many different layers to consider. Modern Paganism is a movement, an umbrella term for a number of distinct faith traditions. Pagans have to expend almost as much energy on building relationships with each other as they do with Christians, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, or Buddhists. For modern Paganism as a movement to effectively relate to the rest of the world's religions, it must be conscious of how it is progressing.

20 October **Rev. Eric Stevenson** **"Report on Common Dreams Conference"**

Eric reports on his attendance at the Common Dreams conference as the Spirit of Life Representative. Some gathered clues on birthing religious fellowships.

27 October **Rev. Dr. Ian Ellis-Jones** **"Fairy Tales and their Inner Meanings"**

Most fairy tales are not about 'fairies' at all, but are mythological in nature. Their 'inner' meaning is cloaked in allegory, parable and symbolism. Ian will discuss some well-known fairy tales, including Aladdin, Cinderella, and Snow White, drawing out some of the 'lessons' we can learn from them and apply in our daily lives.

Some references on Unitarianism and Science:

1) "Science and Religion, A Unitarian Universalist Perspective" by Helen Lutton Cohen
http://www.uua.org/documents/cohenhelen/science_religion.pdf (See p.2)

2) "The Unitarian Quandry" ([Free Inquiry Magazine](#), fall 2002) By James A. Haught
<http://www.wvinter.net/~haught/quandary.html>

Earth's Warming Climate

Colin Whatmough

(An extract from Colin's presentation at Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship, Sunday, 21 July, 2013. The research was based on the work of Professor Richard Wolfson, Middlebury College, who is a Professor of Physics. His current research involves terrestrial climate change and the sun / Earth connection).

Is the Earth warming? Global warming was first declared by Professor James Hansen in 1975. Yes, is the scientific conclusion. Recent years have been the warmest our planet has experienced in the past millennium (1000 years) and quite possibly for 100,000 years or more.

Are we humans responsible? Yes, at least in part. It has been proved that we have increased the concentration of heat-trapping gases in Earth's fragile atmosphere (only the thickness of a coating of varnish on a school globe) – to levels not seen in the past million years and probably much longer. This has happened over the last 150 years of the Industrial Age and accelerating over the last two decades.

What does the future hold? A continuing warming trend leading to increasing melting of polar and glacial ice, especially of the Himalaya Mountains; rising sea levels – a concern for low-lying islands and the insurance industry; altered weather patterns and more intense precipitation and storms – like the recent devastating Oklahoma super tornado and the New Orleans super hurricane.

What will be the impact? That's less certain but it will surely include changes in agriculture as fertile temperate climate land dries up leading to drought conditions as is happening in southern Australia; the flooding of low-lying areas as in the terrible flooding in Pakistan four years ago; the extinction of some species that cannot readapt to the new climate conditions quickly enough; and the general economic consequences (as in recent extensive flooding in eastern Australia).

Where are we at now? At the present the world has recorded breaking events of temperature readings and extraordinary droughts, floods, hurricanes – yet the Earth's average temperature has risen only 0.65 degrees Centigrade but is continuing to rise sharply. * The consensus of scientific theory clearly purports that a rise of 2 degrees Centigrade will be devastating. This level or higher could be reached by 2050 if measures are not taken to reduce CO2 emissions. On a world scale present measures have been somewhat token in enthusiasm and uncaring of future generations.

The science is now well and truly in, the issue is now economic, social and political. **The time for doubt is long gone – we need to persuade / convince our political and business leaders that they need to urgently take measures to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions to arrest the trend in global warming, certainly below a rise of 2 degrees Centigrade.** Whether by carbon taxing or emissions trading – the correct measure is the one that effectively reduces emissions quickly. So far Australia has been a leader with a policy of carbon taxing that has reduced Australia's emissions by 8%.

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Apparent "pause" relates to ocean uptake—see recent IPCC report. *JT*

## Embracing Science

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In order to understand ourselves as a religious movement, to know our roots, we need to understand how vital to its formation this openness to science and all new knowledge was. Both Unitarianism and Universalism emerged out of Calvinist Protestantism at the end of the eighteenth century, embracing the sense of human possibility, progress, and reason that had developed during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment. Our movement was founded in the context of a growing curiosity and optimism about the world. We believed with Unitarian minister Samuel Longfellow that "revelation is not sealed."

"Science and Religion, A Unitarian Universalist Perspective" by Helen Lutton Cohen
This UUA pamphlet can be purchased at https://secure.uua.org/bookstore/product_info.php?products_id=1263

The UU "Father of the Internet" Sir Tim Berners-Lee

Tim Berners-Lee was the man leading the development of the World Wide Web (with help of course), the defining of HTML (hypertext markup language) used to create web pages, HTTP (HyperText Transfer Protocol) and URLs (Universal Resource Locators). All of those developments took place between 1989 and 1991. Tim Berners-Lee is considered the primary author of HTML, assisted by his colleagues at CERN, an international scientific organization based in Geneva, Switzerland. (From About.com)

(Photo: Wikipedia)



The following essay was written in 1998.

The World Wide Web and the "Web of Life"

People have often asked me whether the Web design was influenced by Unitarian Universalist philosophy. I have to say that it wasn't explicitly, as I developed the Web well before I came across Unitarian Universalism at all. But looking back on it, I suppose that there are some parallels between the philosophies.

Where I'm coming from

Like many people, I had a religious upbringing which I rejected as a teenager: in my case it was a protestant Christian (Church of England) upbringing. I rejected it just after being "confirmed" and told how essential it

was to believe in all kinds of unbelievable things. Since then I have discovered that many of the people around me who were "Christians" in fact used a sort of loose interpretation of some of that stuff, but it relieved a great tension just to say no. In fact, confirmation is when you say "yes", and well, we all make mistakes. In fact the need for the basis for Christian philosophy but without the dogma was a vacuum for many years.

If you're used to other religions you might be confused by UUism being called a religion, but it qualifies I think. Like many people, I came back to religion when we had children. Why does everybody do this? Is it just that one feels that values and things are important for kids though one wouldn't have time for it otherwise? I hope not. Or is it that having kids is such a direct, strong, stark experience that it brings thoughts of life and love again bubbling up through the turgid morass which otherwise clogs our thinking? Or is it that it gives us an excuse? But for whatever, happenstance had our family living in the Boston area, where UU churches abound, and we were lucky enough to hit on a great one, with a great minister.

Unitarian Universalists are people who are concerned about all the things which your favorite religion is concerned about, but allow or even require their belief to be compatible with reason. They are hugely tolerant and decidedly liberal. The fundamental value and dignity of every human being is a core philosophy, and they have a healthy respect for those whose beliefs differ. They meet in churches instead of wired hotels, and discuss justice, peace, conflict, and morality rather than protocols and data formats, but in other ways **the peer respect** is very similar to that of the Internet Engineering Task Force. Both are **communities** which I really appreciate.

The Unitarian Universalist Association
The Internet Engineering Task Force

Can you compare?

And in fact, when you look at the way Unitarians feel society works, and the way a lot of the Internet and the Web works, it might be fun to draw some comparisons. Let's take

this all with a pinch of salt. People, after all, are people, and machines are machines. Unitarians do not have a peer respect for machines! But let's do it as an exercise.

Decentralization

The Internet community always used to be decentralized as the Internet itself. News-groups have no central server, and no central authority to determine what is and what isn't a new group. When I was developing the Web in 1990, the Internet development community was largely academic in membership and had a very academic style. People were and are judged on what they say rather than who they are. As Dave Clark said:

"We have no kings or presidents. We believe in rough consensus and running code."

There is very little structure. There is the idea that society can run without a hierarchical bureaucratic government being involved at every step, if only we can hit on the right set of rules for peer-peer interaction. So where design of the Internet and the Web is a search for set of rules which will allow computers to work together in harmony, so our spiritual and social quest is **for a set of rules which allow people to work together in harmony.**

It used to be the case that internet protocols were designed with some clear vision of the final harmonious inter-working in mind, whereas laws and rules of behaviour tended to be put together without a clear common understanding of what tomorrow's world would look like. Nowadays, even Web developments happen because of our gut feeling that certain properties of the Web will lead to great things, but we often expect the results to be amazing and good, but unpredictable.

Tolerance

In this decentralized world, the first common principle is of tolerance. The general principle struck me very strongly when I was logging on to the mainframe system at CERN many years ago, before CERN had internetworking. In those days terminals were all connected up to terminal concentrators which

switch you if you were lucky to a free port on the hallowed mainframe. If there wasn't a free port, it would keep you in a queue. You could wait for typically 35 minutes and then it would suddenly ask you whether you were there. You had a few seconds in which to hit a key to be connected, and if you missed it you would be dropped from the queue. This ratio of 35 minutes to 20 seconds I called the tolerance ratio - in that case, intolerance ratio! It was some indication that the system considered its time about 100 times more valuable than yours. The market pressure for terminal lines had increased their "value" to the level that to deserve one you had to nervously hover over a silent terminal waiting for that special moment. It makes you think about your own tolerance ratio. **How much are you prepared to go out of your way, compared with the extent you require others to go out of theirs?**

I don't know who formulated the principle of tolerance in Internet circles first as "Be conservative in what you do and liberal in what you expect". I have heard Vint Cerf quote it. It is a guiding rule in internet protocol design. Always say "http:" in lower case, but in practice understand "HTTP:" too. *(see end)

Unitarian Universalism is famous for its tolerance. UU people don't generally go around trying to convert other people. They respect those who believe in some sort of a God different from theirs (if they use the term). Recently I heard a UU remark (I paraphrase from memory - it was not written down),

"I have always been an argumentative type - always tending to play devils advocate and skeptical of everything. I was quite expecting to be thrown out of this church like I've been thrown out of everywhere else. I was staggered to be accepted. I was even more surprised to find that in fact, the place was full of people just as argumentative as me!"

UUs perhaps share the view that "If there is one thing I can't stand - it's intolerance!". They fight racism and inequality. They get really upset when people are killed and tortured because they don't believe in the One True God or the One True Anything.

UUs actually believe in love. But that doesn't seem to bear analogy with computers!

The Test of Independent Invention

There's a test I use for technology which the Consortium is thinking of adopting, and I'll call it the Independent Invention test. Just suppose that someone had invented exactly the same system somewhere else, but made all the arbitrary decisions differently. Suppose after many years of development and adoption, the two systems came together. Would they work together?

Take the Web. I tried to make it pass the test. Suppose someone had (and it was quite likely) invented a World Wide Web system somewhere else with the same principles. Suppose they called it the Multi Media Mesh (tm) and based it on Media Resource Identifiers(tm), the MultiMedia Transport Protocol(tm), and a Multi Media Markup Language(tm). After a few years, the Web and the Mesh meet. What is the damage?

A huge battle, involving the abandonment of projects, conversion or loss of data?

Division of the world by a border commission into two separate communities?

Smooth integration with only incremental effort?

Obviously we are looking for the latter option. Fortunately, we could immediately extend URLs to include "mmtip://" and extend MRIs to include "http;\\". We could make gateways, and on the better browsers immediately configure them to go through a gateway when finding a URL of the new type. The URL space is universal: it covers all addresses of all accessible objects. But it does not have to be the only universal space. Universal, but not unique.

Imagine a Virtue and Veracity church growing up independently, with the same UU principles but none of the same history of vocabulary. What would happen when one of the VV members strolled by accident into a UU church? An enlightened smile of recognition, the same warm feeling which someone who has really unknowingly been a UU all their life feels when walking into a congregation of UUs.

It's not the same when the followers of divine prophet1 meet the followers of divine prophet2. Divine prophets (often!) know who they are and know they are the only ones. The One True Churches worship the One True Gods and in many cases convince others of their Oneness and Trueness with swords and fire and destruction. The philosophies fail the test of Independent Invention. The result of this interoperability failure is not an error code or an unreadable Web page but hatred and jealousy, war and persecution.

Don't get me wrong. I believe that much of the philosophy of life associated with many religions is much more sound than the dogma which comes along with it. So I do respect them, and you if you belong to one. UUism has looked for its philosophy to contributions and writings from many religions, western and eastern.

Truth

A lot of people ask me whether I am disappointed that the Web has taken on such a lot of commercial material, rather than being a pure academic space. In fact, I know it could not be universal if it did not allow any form of communication. It must be able to represent any thought, any datum, any idea, that one might have. So in this way the Web and the UU concept of faith are similar in that both serve as a place for thought, and the importance of the quest for truth, but without labelling any one true solution. The quest for the truth is always accompanied by skepticism of anyone claiming to have found it.

Hope

There is one other thing that comes to mind as common between the Internet folks and the UUs. The whole spread of the Web happened not because of a decision and a mandate from any authority, but because a whole bunch of people across the 'Net picked it up and brought up Web clients and servers, it actually happened. The actual explosion of creativity, and the coming into being of the Web was the result of thousands of individuals playing a small part. In the first couple of years, often this was not for a direct gain, but because they had an inkling that it was the right way to go, and a gleam of an exciting future.

It is necessary to UU philosophy that such things can happen, **that we will get to a better state in the end by each playing our small part.** UUism is full of hope, and the fact that the Web happens is an example of a dream coming true and an encouragement to all who hope.

Note by editor: emphases in bold in Sir Tim's essay are mine.

***My interpretation of:** "Always say "http:" in lower case, but in practice understand "HTTP:" too." **is that one should always follow the best and accepted ways oneself, but allow for the fact that someone else may do things differently.**

I wonder if the darker side of the internet, the freedom it gives to aggressive people (which has arisen in the last decade in particular) distresses the UU "father of the internet" and his cohort or if they are still "full of hope". JT

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### **George Orwell's Homage to Catalonia**

This book was first published 1938 in England but not published in the US until 1952 because of its leftist sympathies. However, it tells about the experiences Orwell had in the Spanish Civil War, fighting the Fascists but coming to the conclusion that the Stalinists were not so different. Homage to Catalonia is less well known than Animal Farm and 1984 but it explains a great deal about how this leftist (a position he never abandoned) became one of the most effective critics of Communism as well as Fascism. **JT** Here are some quotes from the book:

**1)**

"It must have been three days after the Barcelona fighting ended that we returned to the front. After the fighting—more particularly after the slanging-match in the newspapers—it was difficult to think about this war in quite the same naively idealistic manner as before. I suppose there is no one who spent more than a few weeks in Spain without being in some degree disillusioned. My mind went back to the newspaper correspondent whom I had met my first day in Barcelona, and who said to me: "This war is a racket the same as any other."

The remark had shocked me deeply, and at that time (December) I do not believe it was true; it was not true even now, in May; but it was becoming truer. The fact is that every war suffers a kind of progressive degradation with every month that it continues, because such things as individual liberty and a truthful press are simply not compatible with military efficiency."

**2)**

"They laid me down again while somebody fetched a stretcher. As soon as I knew that the bullet had gone clean through my neck I took it for granted that I was done for. I had never heard of a man or an animal getting a bullet through the middle of the neck and surviving it. The blood was dribbling out of the corner of my mouth. 'The artery's gone,' I thought. I wondered how long you last when your carotid artery is cut; not many minutes, presumably. Everything was very blurry. There must have been about two minutes during which I assumed that I was killed. And that too was interesting—I mean it is interesting to know what your thoughts would be at such a time. My first thought, conventionally enough, was for my wife. My second was a violent resentment at having to leave this world which, when all is said and done, suits me so well. I had time to feel this very vividly. The stupid mischance infuriated me. The meaninglessness of it! To be bumped off, not even in battle, but in this stale corner of the trenches, thanks to a moment's carelessness! I thought, too, of the man who had shot me—wondered what he was like, whether he was a Spaniard or a foreigner, whether he knew he had got me, and so forth. I could not feel any resentment against him. I reflected that as he was a Fascist I would have killed him if I could, but that if he had been taken prisoner and brought before me at this moment I would merely have congratulated him on his good shooting. It may be, though, that if you were really dying your thoughts would be quite different."

**3)**

"There was no boss-class, no menial-class, no beggars, no prostitutes, no lawyers, no priests, no boot-licking, no cap-touching." (In Barcelona, held by Anarchists.)

**4)**

"There are occasions when it pays better to fight and be beaten than not to fight at all."

## Meadville-Lombard Theological School

President Rev. Lee Barker says, "For more than 165 years, our school has educated people for the liberal religious ministry -- specifically, but not exclusively - for service in the Unitarian Universalist tradition. We are academically rigorous, spiritually grounded, and unapologetically progressive.....In recent years, Meadville Lombard has taken exciting steps. Our curriculum has been newly designed to shape ministry for the multicultural and multiracial world. And we recently moved to an all-green downtown building that allows us to best conduct our 21st century graduate education in religion."

Meadville Lombard is Chicago based but their TouchPoint<sup>SM</sup> Theological Education enables students to live, work, and study in their own communities across North America or around the world. Students and faculty build community online, through telephone networking, and in person when intensive classes and convocations meet in Chicago several times annually.

The Association of Theological Schools (US) recently reaffirmed Meadville-Lombard's accreditation for a full period of ten years, to spring 2023, and approved its four degree programs.

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Solar

On a grey day, when the sun
has been abducted, and it's chill
end-of-the-world weather,
I must be the sun.
I must be the one
to encourage the young
sidetracked physicist
working his father's cash register
to come up with a law of nature
that says brain waves can change
the dismal sky. I must be the one
to remind the ginger plant
not to rest on the reputation
of its pungent roots, but to unveil
those buttery tendrils from the other world.
When the sky is an iron lid
I must be the one to simmer

in the piquant juices of possibility,
though the ingredients are unknown
and the day begins with a yawn.

I must issue forth a warmth
without discrimination, and any guarantee
it will come back to me.
On a dark day I must be willing
to keep my disposition light,
I have to be at the very least
one stray intact ray
of local energy, one small
but critical fraction
of illumination. Even on a day
that doesn't look grey
but still lacks comfort or sense,
I have to be the sun,
I have to shine as if
sorry life itself depended on it.
I have to make all the difference.

~ Thomas Centolella ~
(Views from along the Middle Way)

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### Trying to Be Thoughtful in the First Brights of Dawn

I am thinking, or trying to think, about all the  
imponderables for which we have  
no answers, yet endless interest all the  
range of our lives, and it's

good for the head no doubt to undertake  
such  
meditation; Mystery, after all,  
is God's other name, and deserves our

consideration surely. But, but -  
excuse me now, please; it's morning, heav-  
enly bright,  
and my irrepressible heart begs me to hurry  
on  
into the next exquisite moment.

~ Mary Oliver ~

(Swan)

~ Mary Oliver ~

(Swan)





Dear God,  
I went to this wedding  
and they kissed right in church  
Is that ok?  
Neil

Dear God,  
Instead of Letting people die  
and haveing to Make new ones  
Why don't you just  
Keep the ones you got now?  
Jane

Contributed by  
Caz Donnelly.

### 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 . If you would like to join us as an active member of Spirit of Life, please ring **0466 940 461** or consult our website [www.sydneynunitarians.org](http://www.sydneynunitarians.org) . Please note that all membership applications are subject to approval at a meeting of the Committee. Ask Rev. Geoff Usher or Ginna Hastings 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: [jtendys@bigpond.com](mailto:jtendys@bigpond.com) 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**