



Quest



**Journal of the Australia New Zealand
Unitarian Universalist Association**

Autumn 2011



‘FORESTS FOR PEOPLE’

On 20 December 2006, the UN General Assembly declared 2011 to be the International Year of Forests and requested the UN Forum on Forests to serve as the focal point of the activities and commemorations. This was seen as a fitting successor to the International Year of Biodiversity in 2010, so a formal transition ceremony was held in Kanazawa, Japan, on 18–19 December last year. However, the official launch will take place at the UNFF’s New York City headquarters on 02–03 February.

The UN Forum on Forests was established by the Economic and Social Council in 2000 with a mandate to promote “... the management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests and to strengthen long-term political commitment to this end...” However, international concern for the wellbeing of forests and their inhabitants goes back at least as far as the Agenda 21 program of the World Summit on the Environment held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

In 2007, the UNFF adopted the Non-Legally Binding Instrument on All Types of Forests, which – despite the vague-sounding name – marked the first time the UN’s member states had agreed to an international program for sustainable forest management. The Instrument was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 17 December 2007, which gave both it and the UNFF greater effectiveness.

Most people have watched with alarm over recent years the devastation of the world’s tropical rainforests – ‘the lungs of the Earth’ – by logging and land clearing, legal and illegal. They should remember the horrific forest fires in Indonesia in the summer of 1997/98, started by slash-and-burn land clearing, that cast their pall over much of Southeast Asia. They are also aware of the ongoing desertification of the sub-Saharan region known as the Sahel. Similar things are going on in smaller ways all over the world, but these major events clearly show the need for an international approach if they are to be prevented or reversed.

Forests cover 31% of the world’s land area, yet a mere 36% of that is primary (i.e., old growth) forest. They are home to 300 million people and 80% of its biodiversity. The global trade in forest products was \$US327 bn. in 2004 and some 1.6 billion people depend on forest products for their livelihoods. The Food and Agricultural Organisation estimates that 130,000 square kilometers of forest are lost every year, while the World Bank says that deforestation accounts for 20% of global greenhouse gas emissions. The International Union for the Conservation of Nature says that a billion hectares of lost and/or degraded forest could be restored.

In 2006, the UNFF agreed on four Global Objectives on Forests, providing clear guidance on the future work of the international arrangement on forests. Those Objectives seek to:

- Reverse the loss of forest cover worldwide through sustainable forest management, including protection, restoration, afforestation and reforestation, and increase efforts to prevent forest degradation;
- Enhance forest-based economic, social and environmental benefits, including by improving the livelihoods of forest-dependent people;
- Increase significantly the area of sustainably managed forests, including protected forests, and increase the proportion of forest products derived from sustainably managed forests; and
- Reverse the decline in official development assistance for sustainable forest management and mobilize significantly-increased new and additional financial resources from all sources for the implementation of sustainable forest management.

The design of the IYF logo on the front page depicts some of the benefits of forests and the need for a 360° perspective: forests provide shelter to people and habitat to biodiversity; are a source of food, medicine and clean water; and play a vital role in maintaining a stable global climate and environment.

[Just having a break from biographies, as that is not a requirement of feature articles. They are also not the preserve of the editor – anyone wishing to submit such articles is more than welcome to do so.]

ANZUUA NEWS

Our president, Rev. Peter Ferguson, recently toured New Zealand, visiting Christchurch, Blenheim and Auckland (see pp. 4/5). After the second quake in Christchurch, ICUU president Rev. Brian Keily sent a message of condolence to the Christchurch UUs and ANZUUA, as a whole:

“It is with deep sadness that I learned of the earthquake that struck your homes and your city today. On behalf of your Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist co-religionists worldwide I send our thoughts and prayers on your behalf. Selfishly we hope that no one in your community has been seriously hurt or suffered great damage, but on a wider scale we hold all Christchurch residents in our hearts.

Tragedies like this anywhere in the world stir our emotions, but those feelings are heightened when it happens to people or places we know or have visited.

In the days ahead may things go as right as they possibly can and may you all find some joys to celebrate.”

The ICUU blogsite adds that: A ‘Causes’ page has been set up on Facebook and UUs around the world are encouraged to show their solidarity with our sisters and brothers in New Zealand by joining the cause. You can also make a donation through the ‘Cause’ and all funds donated will be sent on to Christchurch. You can appreciate they will need our assistance, moral and financial, at a difficult time like this. The Cause Page can be reached by going to the following web page: <http://www.causes.com/causes/583046>.

Preparations for the ANZUUA Conference in Brisbane on 27–29 August, with its theme of ‘Standing on the Side of Justice and Compassion’, are well in hand but final details of the program are not yet available. The keynote speaker will be Dan Furmansky, Campaign Manager of the UUA-sponsored public advocacy initiative, ‘Standing on the Side of Love’. That campaign to harness the power of love against oppression was inspired by the 2008 shootings at the Tennessee Valley UU Church in Knoxville, in which two people died and six were injured. Please visit their website (www.standingonthesideoflove.org) for information about their objectives and infrastructure.

Peter Abrehart of Melbourne UC has determined that their insurers can cover ANZUUA with no need for any of its member groups to be incorporated. Details of specific coverage and costs thereof are being sought.

Rev. Derek McCullough is producing a funding document for the *Under the Southern Cross* anthology of Australian/New Zealand Unitarian hymns, poetry and writings and a prospective editor for that has been found who has considerable skills in those areas. A subcommittee consisting of Derek, Christine Whelan (Auckland) and Renee Hills (Brisbane) has been elected to manage the development of the anthology.



ICUU NEWS

EUU Spring Retreat

UK Annual Meetings

50 Years of CUC



Unfortunately, we were only notified in mid-February about the European UUs' coming Retreat and Annual General Meeting at Spa in Belgium over 01–03 April. The guest speaker will be Rev. Walter Wieder, senior minister at the UU Church in Surprise, Arizona (near Phoenix), who will address the topic of spirituality from a humanist perspective. As is usual, the Retreat will feature workshops, cultural activities, entertainment and a worship service; being a family-oriented weekend, there will also be programs and facilities for children and youth. Located in the Ardennes forest near Liège, the beautiful town of Spa is a favourite EUU venue – as the name suggests, it has a thermal spring that has been in use since Roman times. These Retreats (but not the AGM) are held in the spring and fall of each year, with the four member fellowships, in Belgium, France, Germany and the Netherlands, taking turns to organise them. (However, this one is the work of the group in Kaiserslautern, Germany, which is relatively close to the border with Belgium.)

The EUU was founded in 1982 by expatriate American UUs, although its membership now includes many locals and the standard UUA format of worship has been adapted to suit the European environment. There are 120 adult members in the fellowships and 80 'members-at-large' living in other places. The EUU's Coordinating Council meets four times a year and consists of officers and representatives from the fellowships and members-at-large. The fellowships share programs and resources, including a Religious Education Coordinator whose particular responsibility is to develop activities for their numerous children. Their quarterly newsletter is called 'The UNifier' and their website is: www.europeanuu.eu.

The 2011 Annual Meetings of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches will be held on 15–18 April at the University of Swansea in South Wales. (The plural refers to the Business Meeting for delegates and the Annual Conference.) The theme will be 'Celebrating Our Volunteers' and the keynote speaker will be Fiona Liddell of the Wales Council for Voluntary Action. These Meetings are a very colourful affair, with bookstalls and displays set up by the various District Associations and affiliated societies.

This one will have more than usual involvement of locals in both planning and management, not least from their 'Foy Society', which is essentially an alumnus of the Fellowship of Youth. (More about them on p. 12) There will also be a *Gymanfa Ganu* of Welsh singing before the Anniversary Service on the Sunday, which will be held in the beautiful and spacious Branwyn Hall. That service will be led by Rev. Anthony Howe and the Address will be given by Rev. Jeff Gould, both of whom are quite senior ministers. Unfortunately, the residential accommodation at the University is all taken by now – but you can still get quite good off-campus accommodation via the GA's website (www.unitarian.org.uk). Just click on the 'GA 2011' tab and take it from the top.

The Canadian Unitarian Council/*Conseil Unitarien du Canada* is celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its foundation in 1961. This year's Annual Conference and Meeting will be held over 20–23 May in Toronto, where the first such event was held in 1962, its theme being: Trust the Dawning Future/*S'ouvrir au Monde à Venir*. The keynote speaker will be Dr. David K. Foot, Emeritus Professor of Economics at the University of Toronto, who has written extensively on the social and economic implications of aging societies. (Interestingly enough, Dr. Foot did his undergraduate studies at the University of Western Australia before proceeding to Harvard.)

The CUC has 49 member groups – 15 churches, 14 congregations (some of which have ministers) and 20 fellowships – in all of Canada's ten provinces, with a total membership of 5150 adults and 700 children. The two oldest churches, both established in 1842, were the Unitarian Church of Montreal and the Universalist Church of Halifax in Nova Scotia. Despite a long and friendly relationship with the UUA – the CUC's founding meeting was actually held in Boston – only a few groups use 'Unitarian-Universalist' in their names. Their website (www.cuc.ca) shows an impressive infrastructure of full-time paid officers and administrative staff, as well as regional groupings in Greater Toronto, Southern Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia with enough churches to organise their own conferences and other events.

SUFFERING AND DISASTER – A UNITARIAN POINT OF VIEW

Thoughts arising from the Christchurch, N.Z., and Japanese Earthquakes in early 2011

By Rev. Peter Ferguson

When the earthquake struck Christchurch at 12.51 p.m. (local time) on Tuesday, 22 February, my wife, Carole, and I were driving to Christchurch from Blenheim for a meeting with the Unitarian minister, Derek McCullough, when we were advised not to proceed with our journey. On that fateful day, more than 200 people were killed and the CBD was largely destroyed. Derek's beautiful home was wrecked beyond repair but he and his family were unhurt.

And then, on 11 March we watched in horror the TV footage of the great black wall of water carrying everything before it: cars, ships, houses and entire towns along the seaboard of north-eastern Japan. In the days and weeks following, the international community has been deeply impressed by the stoicism, dignity and resourcefulness of both the Kiwis and the Japanese.

And so, I began to think of the various reasons for the causes of earthquakes and other natural disasters. At school, I had learned that most earthquakes occur at fault lines below the earth where tectonic plates collide or slide against each other, sending massive vibrations called seismic waves up to the surface – and also that Japan and New Zealand were located on the Pacific Rim of Fire and were more susceptible to geological catastrophes.

It was at Moore Theological College in Sydney that I first studied the Christian doctrine that God sends earthquakes and natural disasters as a way to punish his creation. For example, in the *Book of Isaiah* is written: "And in an instant, suddenly, you will be visited by the Lord of hosts, with thunder and earthquake and great noise, with whirlwind and tempest, and the flames of a devouring fire". (Isaiah 29:6) Furthermore, other major calamities such as pain in childbirth, having to work, and our mortality are described in the 'Good Book' as punishment for sin! The Scriptures teach that, "in the fullness of time", God in his mercy and love sent his only son, Jesus, to die for our sins and restore eternal life to those who believed in him and his resurrection.

This concept of a personal god, which is so central to Christianity, is mythological and the generous promise of immortality for believing Christians is illusory at best. At worst 'the Good News' has been used by the unscrupulous to justify the exploitation of the poor by offering them 'pie in the sky when they die'.

In this paper I want to focus on the differences not within the Bible itself, but between the Christian belief in a personal god and the very different understandings of the philosophers of Ancient Greece, Persia, and in Europe during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. It seems clear that secular western society is rapidly moving away from the Christian concept of a personal god who cares for but also punishes his creation. From a philosophical point of view, Unitarians are perhaps closer to the deism of the ancient Graeco-Roman world, where the gods are noted for their indifference to human suffering.

Here are some examples:

In the 5th Century BCE, the Greek philosopher Euripides painted a dramatic picture of Queen Hecuba, widowed and broken-hearted, with her world lying in ruins while the gods are too absorbed in other things to take any notice of her as she lies in the dust.

Alfred Tennyson's poem, 'The Song of the Lotos-Eaters' (1832), is based on Homer's epic, *The Odyssey* (written circa 850 BCE). It is a powerful description of divine indifference:

On the hills like Gods together, careless of mankind.
For they lie beside their nectar, and the bolts are hurl'd
Far below them in the valleys, and the clouds are lightly curl'd
Round their golden houses, girdled with the gleaming world;
Where they smile in secret, looking over wasted lands,
Blight and famine, plague and earthquake, roaring deeps and fiery sands,
Clanging fights, and flaming towns, and sinking ships, and praying hands.

Predating the Renaissance by hundreds of years was the mathematician astronomer, Omar Khayyam (1048–1141), a Persian Sufi. He rejected divine revelation and supported the view that the laws of nature explained all observed phenomena without intervention from Allah. His *Rubaiyat* expresses these ideas beautifully and powerfully through the translation into English by Edward Fitzgerald:

And if the Wine you drink, the Lip you press,
End in the Nothing all Things end in – Yes –
Then fancy while thou art, Thou art but what
Thou shalt be – Nothing – Thou shalt not be less.

When once you hear the roses are in bloom
Then is the time, my love, to pour the wine
Houris and palaces and Heaven and Hell
These are but fairy tales. Forget them all.

And that inverted Bowl we call the Sky
Where-under crawling coop't we live and die,
Lift not Thy hands to it for help – for it
Rolls impotently on as Thou or I.

In the West, the Greek concept of an impersonal creator was revived during the early Renaissance by the French philosopher, Nicolas Oresme (1323–1382), who saw god as a clockmaker who gave the world its beginning and then left it to run its course! Years later, Isaac Newton and John Locke (both small 'u' unitarians) were among a great host of scholars who came to support the view of an impersonal and remote deity.

The Enlightenment philosopher Gotthold Lessing (1729–1781), argued that the way ahead was along the path of human reason rather than divine revelation and church dogma. Lessing rejected orthodox Christian doctrines that were based on metaphysics and miracles. He famously said: "That is the ugly broad ditch which I cannot cross, however often and however earnestly I have tried to make that leap." If God came to him, offering in his right hand the whole of truth and in his left hand the search for truth and all the toil and travail and mistakes of the search, he would choose the left and say, "Lord, give me that!"

In his novella, *Candide*, the 18th Century French philosopher, Voltaire, describes the life of a man who gradually abandons the idea of an omnipotent Creator who has given us the best of all possible worlds. Instead he comes to believe this life is all that there is and so we should do our very best to enjoy every moment of it.

Strangely, and against the flow, this is also a minority Biblical view. It is the thinking of the *Book of Ecclesiastes*. Its message is that we are mortal, but that that should not be a cause for despondency. His advice is for us to live each moment as it comes. "I commend enjoyment for there is nothing better for people under the Sun than to eat, and drink, and enjoy themselves." (Ecclesiastes 8:15)

Unitarians and other like-minded people would add, however, that along with the desire for personal happiness we also long for a world of mutual concern – where our differences can be sorted out creatively and without resort to hatred and violence.

In summing up, there is very little difference between straight-out atheism and belief in some disinterested and non-interventionist deity. At best it is an intellectual exercise or simply a waste of time! This extract from the *Third Humanist Manifesto* of 2003 sums up our position very well indeed:

.... We long for and strive towards a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved co-operatively without resorting to violence. The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all....

And concludes:

The responsibility for our lives and the kind of world in which we live is ours and ours alone.

ZEN GOSPEL SINGING

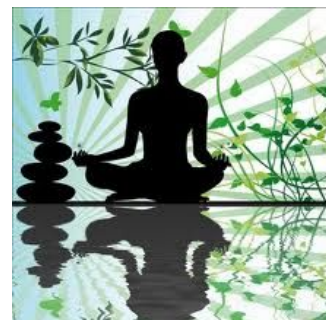
I once was a Baptist, and on each Sunday morn
I'd be in church praying, as sure as you're born.
We'd sing there like angels, in that good harmony
But sin and salvation are no longer for me.

(Chorus:)

And now I'm a Buddhist, I chant my mantra each day
But I miss that hymn singing in that good gospel way.
We sing of old Buddha and the wonders of Zen.
We'll meet in nirvana, yes, we'll be there then.

My old friends don't like me, since I shaved my head;
They all talk about me as if I were dead.
My good old Zen buddies, they think I'm okay,
But I can't get them singing more than one note a day.

And as we sit there cross-legged, eating brown rice and tea,
We chant out our mantras in four square harmony.
We don't sing of salvation (salvation, salvation) or a heavenly home
It's Zen gospel singing, just Om, Om, sweet Om.



Mark Graham

Mark Graham is a musician from Seattle, Washington, who has written many songs (not all humorous) and produced two albums. He performs with Orville Johnson as 'Kings of Mongrel Folk', playing blues, country music and even Irish folk songs. More about them on: myspace.com/the_kingsofmongrelfolk and you can hear the song by searching it at: www.mudcat.org/@displaysong.cfm.

HEAVEN IS HOTTER THAN HELL

The temperature of heaven can be rather accurately computed. Our authority is the Bible, Isaiah 30:26 reads, *Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold as the light of seven days.* Thus, heaven receives from the moon as much radiation as the earth does from the sun, and in addition seven times seven (forty-nine) times as much as the earth does from the sun, or fifty times in all. The light we receive from the moon is one ten-thousandth of the light we receive from the sun, so we can ignore that. With these data we can compute the temperature of heaven: The radiation falling on heaven will heat it to the point where the heat lost by radiation is just equal to the heat received by radiation. In other words, heaven loses fifty times as much heat as the earth by radiation. Using the Stefan-Boltzmann fourth power law for radiation:

$$(H/E)^4 = 50$$

where E is the absolute temperature of the earth, 300°K (273+27). This gives H the absolute temperature of heaven, as 798° absolute (525°C).

The exact temperature of hell cannot be computed but it must be less than 444.6°C, the temperature at which brimstone or sulfur changes from a liquid to a gas. Revelations 21:8: *But the fearful and unbelieving... shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.* A lake of molten brimstone [sulfur] means that its temperature must be at or below the boiling point, which is 444.6°C. (Above that point, it would be a vapor, not a lake.)

We have then, temperature of heaven, 525°C (977°F). Temperature of hell, less than 445°C (832°F). Therefore heaven is hotter than hell.

[The author of this piece is unknown and there are many versions on the Internet; however, the original was published in *Applied Optics* with a reference to "an unnamed environmental physicist of several decades back". Thus, its origin could be as early as 1950.]

THE FOREST



When first I knew this forest
its flowers were strange.
Their different forms and faces
changed with the seasons' change –

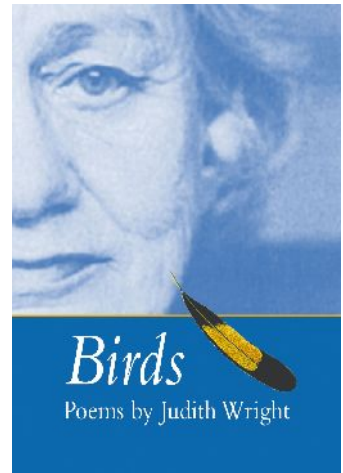
white violets smudged with purple,
the wild-ginger spray,
ground-orchids small and single
haunted my day;

the thick-fleshed Murray-lily,
flame-tree's bright blood,
and where the creek runs shallow,
the cunjevoi's green hood.*

When first I knew this forest,
time was to spend,
and time's renewing harvest
could never reach an end.

Now that its vines and flowers
are named and known,
like long-fulfilled desires
those first strange joys are gone.

My search is further.
There's still to name and to know
beyond the flowers I gather
that one that does not wither –
the truth from which they grow.



Judith Wright (1915–2000)

* A rainforest plant also known as a spoon lily (see bottom right).

Judith Wright was a noted Australian poet, writer, environmentalist and advocate of indigenous land rights. Born on a property at Armidale, NSW, she grew up in Brisbane and Sydney before studying English, history, philosophy and psychology at the University of Sydney. She spent the years of World War II working on her father's station, where it is thought she developed the affinity for the land and its people that affected much of her later work.

Wright's first book of poetry, *The Moving Image*, was published in 1946, by which time she was a research assistant at the University of Queensland. Her other poetic works include *Woman to Man* (1949), *The Gateway* (1953), *The Two Fires* (1955), *Birds* (1962), *The Other Half* (1966) and *The Flame Tree* (1993). The above poem is most likely from her 1963 collection, *Five Senses (The Forest)*.

In 1950, Wright moved to Tamborine Mountain with the novelist and abstract philosopher, Jack McKinney, and married him in 1962. The forest in the poem is on that mountain, where she lived until 1974 before moving to Braidwood in New South Wales. Wright was a founding member of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland and served as its president in 1964–1976. In 1992, she became the second Australian to receive the Queen's Gold Medal for Poetry. In addition to poetry, she also wrote works of literary criticism, family and pastoral history, short stories and children's books.

Tamborine Mountain is a small plateau in the hinterland of the Gold Coast in southern Queensland. Twelve parcels of rainforest on the plateau and in the foothills constitute Tamborine National Park. The name is of Aboriginal origin and has nothing to do with tambourines.

SUCH IS LIFE!: A CLOSE ENCOUNTER WITH ECCLESIASTES

By Eric Stevenson

I find *Such is Life!* to be not simply a scholarly translation into modern English of an ancient sacred text written by an anonymous author, calling himself “The Proclaimer”. It demonstrates an ingenious procedure for inducting the reader of Ecclesiastes into the culture and circumstance pertaining during the period of its composition and therefore into the true meaning of The Proclaimer’s message. Lloyd Geering explains why this is an essential prerequisite not only for gaining an understanding of this old book, but also of all the Scriptures. Despite the writer’s churchy title, the words of seers like those of the Proclaimer were not about ecclesiastical or theocratic or prophetic utterance. He tells how such a non-religious document gained a place in the library of Wisdom Literature contained in the canon of the Bible. The seers were more concerned with our common human traits than our tribal identity or religious convictions (p.142), and concentrated on the wisdom required to confront and to cope with the basic problems of human existence.

The reason why I think such a publication is so pertinent to progressive religious thought to-day is that fortuitously it is strikingly relevant to the spiritual foment taking place in our time. The advances in science and globalisation, the outcomes of what Lloyd refers to as the second Axial Age have rendered reassurances about our national heritage or the practice of our traditional religion relatively meaningless. E.g., the hymn “Land of Hope and Glory, God who made Thee mighty” is almost blasphemous! In *his* time, The Proclaimer spoke to an audience who gained no spiritual satisfaction from such assurances either. He rejected trite tribal explanations for life’s difficulties (and successes), and advocated communal personal effort as the only thing left to combat adversity instead of “looking to God for deliverance by the miraculous in either nature or in human history” (p.13). By enabling The Proclaimer to utter words as relevant to our time as they were in his, Lloyd has reflected my own questioning of, if not my disillusionment with, the religion of my youth.

Part II of the book (Ch. 3–10) contains the imaginary close encounters referred to in the sub-title. By challenging, questioning and/or affirming the writer’s proclamations, Lloyd not only explicates each topic under consideration. He also draws from it valuable restatements concerning a philosophy of life which is separate from and often contrary to *conventional* wisdom, as distinct from the wisdom of the Sage. E.g.,

- Chapter 4 is a treatise on a secular view of the ultimate, and the symbolic use of the word God by people who do not necessarily believe in him or her. (The Proclaimer relies on the cognitive abilities of human beings to conceptualise the mystery of the universe.) But it also ranges over an understanding of deism, theism, pantheism, monotheism, creationism, and determinism (p.58).
- The dialogue on Nature (p.65) is about a lay person’s understanding of evolution, cosmology and process theology. The Proclaimer’s implied humanism does not fit with the fundamentalist’s doctrine of original sin and rejects the idea of natural events being the work of a theistic deity. He is guardedly critical of thoughtless and often foolish religious utterances about natural disasters and maintains the sufficiency of man’s natural wisdom and role as his sufficient and sole resources in coping with life’s contingencies.
- On Purpose in Chapter 8 (p.113) Lloyd corrects a possible misreading of the text. The Proclaimer does not mean that our destiny is engineered by an out there God. He is simply saying that our human condition is just the way things are! And there is much more.

In conclusion, Lloyd takes issue with The Proclaimer’s ultra-pessimistic attitude to life and to the possibility of actually gaining the wisdom which he has valued so highly. He makes a lot of The Proclaimer’s admission that there is great value in people of good will working together. This, he says, is a precursory statement to the aphorisms about love which were quoted by Jesus whom I understand would not have even claimed to have invented his most transporting aphorism, “Love your enemies”. The Sage writer of Proverbs said something like it. Our Sage of Nazareth belonged to the same non-authoritarian tradition. His favourite sayings therefore were not regarded as authoritative divine revelations because they were supposedly uttered by a god-man. (p.137). It was the ideas behind his sayings that gained credibility for his words, which still warm our hearts. He pointed to a more optimistic view of life, inspiring hope in his proclamation of the Kingdom. For him this meant people of good will, working together in a community of Love.

Thank you, Lloyd, for what I found to be an excellent progressive read.

[The book referred to, Rev. Prof. Lloyd Geering's fifteenth such tome, was published by Steele Roberts in 2010 (ISBN 159850235). Eric Stevenson is a retired Uniting Church minister and has been a member of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship for four years. He is also on the national organising committee for the Common Dreams conferences, which draw together people from New Zealand and Australia to explore ways in which progressive religion can contribute positively to the common good. Lastly, he is Co-ordinator of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought (Sydney) which hosted Geering at an all-day conference in Sydney on 19 March on the subject, 'Jesus Better Known and Bible Better Read'.]

LLOYD GEERING AT KIRRIBILLI

By Laurence Gormley

Sunday, 21 March, was an exciting day for the Spirit of Life Fellowship in Kirribilli. We were fortunate to have Professor Sir Lloyd Geering as our guest speaker and he did not disappoint. His address to the Fellowship was on the Jesus Seminar. Professor Geering gave us a brief background behind establishment of the Westar Institute, the community of scholars behind the Jesus Seminar. Using a power point presentation, he took us through the processes the seminar uses to elucidate as much as can be known about the historical Jesus. Interestingly he indicated that, through their scholarship and their unique voting method, the Jesus Seminar has allowed that about 18% of the messages attributed to Jesus are in some way accurate. This has allowed the Jesus Seminar to understand the historical Jesus better in terms of his message as it related to his time, culture and the political environment.

Briefly, Professor Geering gave us a great understanding of how the early church changed the nature of Jesus' message and how it created the divinity of Jesus, relying oftentimes on particular tertiary sources of information while ignoring others and without the benefit of later discovered historical sources. He also elucidated how the many other stories that have become part of the Christian mythology have no basis in history or in the true story of Jesus. All in all, it was a most enjoyable address. Members of the Fellowship and our visitors on the day very much enjoyed the occasion.

I would recommend people who have an interest in the story of Jesus purchase the reports from the Jesus Seminar. Equally, there are a number of other books by many of the scholars from the Westar Institute which might be of interest. As a first step, I recommend a visit to the webpage for the Westar Institute (www.westarinstitute.org).

[Laurence Gormley is Vice-President of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship and Treasurer of ANZUUA.]

REPORTS FROM MEMBER GROUPS

In addition to the above and the next two articles, we only have the following:

Adelaide UC had a very successful St. Patrick's Day function in March. Their 'Stream of Life' program (see last issue) has also organised a fundraising Supper Dance on 09 April at the heritage-listed Burnside Ballroom, the proceeds of which will go to Oxfam, the Support Association for Afghanistan's Women and the Ted Guild Village Bank of the Philippines.

Auckland UC has a Visiting Minister, Rev. Julie Hawthorn from New Jersey, staying for two months. They have also offered the children's education position to someone in the US.

Brisbane UUF has filled its first Chalice Circle group and plans to form another. Some members had to be evacuated during the recent floods but none of their houses were damaged.

Spirit of Life UF has had another visit from Rev. Steve Wilson of Massachusetts, this time for only two weeks. They celebrated six years of operation on 27 February.

Sydney UC has accepted a quote for an audiovisual system and work should commence soon. Their Music Director, Chad Vindin, has commenced work on a third set of ten original hymns.

A WONDERFUL, WISE AND WET WEEKEND

By Sally Mabelle

On the weekend of 25–27 March, about 30 of our Auckland Unitarian Church members got together at Camp Kiwanis in Huia, in the Waitakere Ranges Regional Park, for a weekend camp. Our theme for the weekend, organised by our Social Committee leaders, Willem Laman-Trip and Donna Miers, was ‘IN TOUCH’ and we did just that.

After five months of glorious summer weather, it poured rain on the Friday night of the Camp. In fact, it poured rain almost the entire weekend! This did not deter us from our festivities and activities, and instead may have brought us more together as we were all indoors for much of the time, rather than scattered outside doing various activities.

On Saturday morning, the children went off with our ‘games director’, John Graves, and planned an entertaining dance performance for the adults to the tune of Queen’s ‘We will Rock you’. Meanwhile, the adults, (90% of our members are over 45!) gathered in the camp living room to discuss our purpose and our mission and to get to know one another better. Our new Visiting Minister from the US, Julie Newhall, offered her wisdom and our member, Marty Behrens, used his facilitation skills to keep the discussion flowing in an open-hearted, open-minded way. We all listened easily to each other and there was no debate or argument! (Hard to believe for a Unitarian crowd, eh?)

We came up with the idea of creating a simple purpose statement that would be much easier to remember than the Seven Principles (which, incidentally, no one had memorised or could recite by rote). Instead, we created a short motto as a suggestion to remember our purpose: ‘Nurture your Spirit – Help heal the World’ and an informal covenant which was ‘Here you will be cared for, and here you will be asked to care for others’; our method is simply ‘through acts of kindness and generosity’. These short phrases were not firm decisions – just thoughts we were playing with as possibilities.

Christine Whelan and I shared our experience at the ANZUUA Growth Workshop in Brisbane last August. We also taught the group the song that Rev. Jill McCallister had given us: ‘From you I receive, to you I give. Together we share. And from this we live.’ We sang it as a round and it felt great to hear the whole group singing together. These discussions went for about three or four hours, interspersed with morning tea, lunch, and a hike up the Karamatura Loop walk (about an hour along a creek to some waterfalls through some beautiful bush in the misty rain). A few of us braved kayaking in the rain in the Huia Bay and, after our walk and kayak, we continued our talking before preparing a lavish roast dinner complete with apple crumble and custard for dessert.

On Saturday evening, after dinner and cleanup, we cleared the dining hall and set up for a night of entertainment, which included a couple of French horn duets by Chris and Rachel Childs, poetry by Karn Cleary, and a few sing-a-long songs and recorder pieces by myself. Then the room was set up for some board games and more conversation before going to sleep in our rustic cabins, with their bunk beds and communal toilets and showers.

On both Saturday and Sunday mornings, we held silent meditation before breakfast and, on Sunday, we even did some Qi Gong, led by Julie Newhall, and some vocal exercises and songs led by myself. One of the highlights of the weekend was the service given by Julie on Sunday. Some other members came out from the city to join us, so we had about 40 of us there, and Julie’s sermon was entitled ‘Holy Now’ – focusing on the miracle of life taking place everywhere in every moment when one is fully present. She played some breathtakingly moving music videos by Peter Mayer from ‘TheGreatStory.com’ to set the scene.

After lunch, many members left to go back to the city and a few of us lucky ones stayed on to enjoy an afternoon hike at Whatipu, where there are many mysterious caves and huge open vistas, rock formations, and a glorious ocean with hundreds of birds and a gentle breeze. We also climbed Mt. Don Mclean where we could see views of Auckland’s sky tower, Rangitoto Island, and Auckland Airport in the distance behind the misty cloud cover near sunset.

A warm sense of community was created and strengthened over the weekend, and we are all looking forward to getting ‘in touch’ again next March at our Auckland Unitarian camp.

PERTH UNITARIANS' RETREATS

By Kathy Nielssen

Our retreats serve to reinforce a sharing of our diverse ideas by exploring meaningful questions of moral, ethical and religious thoughts whilst getting to know more about each other in a caring atmosphere. We have established a firm connection with the Benedictine Monks at the Monastery in New Norcia, which is 132 km north of Perth and named after the Order's home town in Italy.

This monastic community, established in 1847, welcomes the traveller to peace and tranquillity. We are free to wander around the estate, explore the museum and art gallery, and wonder at the generosity of Queen Isabella of Spain's breathtakingly extravagant gifts to Dom Rosendo Salvado (the Abbey's founder), which are on display in the museum. The Spanish architecture of the cathedrals and chapels is awe-inspiring.

As a group, we have now visited there in 2007, 2009 and 2010. Some of us attend Vespers with the monks a couple of times during our stay and also attend Sunday Mass at the Abbey Cathedral, with its picturesque stained glass windows, high domed roof and wall murals. The highlight of the Mass is always the echoing of joyful voices of the soloists resonating throughout the church. This year, the voices of the Winthrop Choir (from the University of Western Australia) wove their richness into existence, swelling, winding and filling the spatial awareness of the listener from moment to moment.

Our 2010 retreat, which 17 of us attended on 19–21 November, was a very restful and unstructured weekend. Our stay at New Norcia this year coincided with the Festival of New Norcia, so there were paintings by Western Australian artists to be viewed, with the presentation of an award for People's Choice and the Mandalo Award for best painting. The movie on the Saturday night, which some of us attended, was 'Girl with a Pearl Earring', a fictional account of how Johannes Vermeer produced his famous painting of a household servant maid.

The Abbot, Father John, shared his thoughts with us on his idea of God – "my concept which I shall call God", I think was how he explained the presence of God in and around us, in nature and in ourselves. His daily experience involves balancing the lives of six monks and 70 staff at New Norcia. He read to us from a selection of topics such as hospitality, prayer, work, reading, mutual support, obedience, silence, humility, patience and stability. He left us with some verses on which to reflect.

We again decided to make this a rest-and-recreation weekend with another round circle discussion. We had plenty of time out for walks, feasting and enjoying the wine of the monastery. A few of us joined together in a river walk at 6 a.m., clambering over numerous stiles on either side of fences and visiting a disbanded bee aviary in the shape of a yurt as we plodded along the track.

One memorable occasion was sitting at table under a canopy of Jacaranda blooms on a hill overlooking a vista of gum trees. It was snowing vivid lilac-blue trumpet-shaped blossoms. We became quite deft at moving our Abbey Ales just out of range as the blossoms dropped.

At this stage, five of us decided to read out loud and comment on the verses that Father John had left with us. One reading which appealed to me was: "All guests who arrive should be received as Christ ... When guests are announced, let them be met by the superior or some members of the community with every mark of love. Let them first pray together and so socialize in peace ... All arriving or departing guests should be received with profound humility ... One must adore Christ in them, for he is in fact the one who is received. Rule of Benedict ... Compared to other precepts, the Rule provides a moderate path between individual zeal and formulaic institutionalism; because of this middle ground it has been widely popular. Benedict's concerns were the needs of monks in a community environment: namely, to establish due order, to foster an understanding of the relational nature of human being."

Our discussion led us to thinking of the gift in whatever we were receiving, whether it be good or not so good. "The things we really need come to us as gifts, and in order to receive them as gifts we have to be open. In order to be open we have to renounce ourselves, our autonomy, our fixation upon our self-willed identity." (Thomas Merton) I realized at this stage that we were actually participating in a covenant or friendship group. This was totally unplanned but had evolved naturally and drew us all together in a shared communication of mutual enjoyment.

And some recently read words to leave you with concerning “*Pax*” (peace), which is the pervading feeling which greets the traveller to New Norcia: “When the power of love overcomes the love of power, there will be peace.” (Jimi Hendrix)

[Kathy Nielssen, Secretary of the Perth Unitarians, actually submitted this article last year but we never had space for it. We will have to wait till her hand recovers from recent surgery to find out about this year’s Retreat at their usual venue.]

INTRODUCING SALLY MABELLE

There wasn’t space after her article in which to tell you this, but Sally Mabelle (pronounced MAY-bel) is a member of Auckland Unitarian Church’s committee, originally from Pennsylvania (via Colorado and Hawai’i. Her qualifications include a BA in Rhetoric and Communication Studies and a Master of Education. She is an international speaker and a specialist in ‘the voice of leadership’. You can see more about Sally and her business operations on her website: www.sallymabelle.com.

QUICK QUIPS

Q: What do you call a dead Unitarian Universalist?

A: All dressed up with no place to go.

Q: Why are Unitarians so bad at singing in church?

A: Because they’re always reading ahead to see if they agree with the lyrics.

Q: How do Unitarians begin their prayers? □

A: “To whom it may concern...”

Q: What did the UU who was studying Zen ask the hotdog vendor?

A: “Make me one with everything.”

Q: Why did the UU cross the road?

A: To support the chicken in its search for its own path.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This has not been the easiest *Quest* I’ve ever produced but I guess that was because of the short time-frame that I had committed to. As always, I am grateful for the contributions that I have received and particularly to those contributors who knew I was pushing my deadline and rushed their material through. I trust that others who submitted material that was not included in this issue understand that I must determine which items must have priority at a given time – but they can be assured that their work will ‘see the light of day’ as soon as I can find space for it.

This is not to say that I currently have a great deal of material for the intended June issue, so I ask once again that anyone who wishes to submit articles, poems, jokes or anything else do so at their earliest convenience. Please send your copy to me at: michael.mcphee@optusnet.com.au. I am also hoping to produce a ‘bumper’ 16-page *Quest* for the ANZUUA Conference at the end of August, for which I will need yet more material and this is not too early to ask for contributions.

As before, the intention is that *Quest* be made available to the general membership of the ANZUUA groups and my offer stands to provide folded-and-stapled copies to any congregation that request them. Alternately, groups can circulate the electronic files when they are sent and/or refer their members to the ANZUUA website when a new issue is released.

The readership may be interested to know that I have been asked by Rev. Steve Dick, Executive Director of the ICUU, to send him copies of *Quest* every time it is issued.