



Quest



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ASTRONOMICAL ANNIVERSARIES

This year is quite remarkable for the number of astronomers who were born in years ending in -14 and -64, especially if we include people whose contributions to that noble science were indirect but very significant. In addition, two major events took place in such years and our story begins with one of those.

Some time in 1514, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473–1543) circulated a short manuscript called *Commentariolus* (Little Commentary), in which he outlined the basic principles of his heliocentric theory. Surprisingly, he had studied mathematics and astronomy in Kraków for four years but left without completing his degree. He later graduated in canonical law after some years in Italy, where he also studied medicine and Ancient Greek – though he did find time for some astronomical work, as well.

Copernicus then returned to Poland and became the secretary of his uncle, the Prince-Bishop of Warmia. His duties were administrative, diplomatic, financial and ecclesiastical, causing him to attend diets and councils all over the country. His uncle died in 1512 and he relocated from Lidzbark to Frombork, on the Baltic coast, where he acquired a residence and an observation tower. While he now had more time to work on his thesis, he remained actively involved in the governance of the statelet and as a physician to rulers in the region.

By 1532, Copernicus had basically completed his major work, *De Revolutionibus Orbium Coelestium* (On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres), though he was reluctant to publish it. In 1539, he was visited by a young Austrian mathematician named Georg Joachim Rheticus (born on 16 February 1514!), who had graduated from the University of Wittenberg and been given two years to study under prominent astronomers. He published a preview of Copernicus' manuscript entitled *Narratio Prima* (First Report) in 1540 and, when it was favourably received, he got *De Revolutionibus* printed shortly before its author died. Ironically, that work was dedicated to Pope Leo III – yet it would be placed on the Index of Forbidden Books in 1661.

The second chapter of Copernicus' masterpiece contained some work in trigonometry, which was so little-known in those days that the very name did not exist. Rheticus pursued that discipline, publishing a tract of tables for the six functions in 1551. He then proceeded to calculate those ratios to ten decimal places but that work was not finished when he died in 1574. His student, Valentin Otto, completed the project in 1596 – almost 1500 pages containing 100,000 ratios (one for every 20 seconds of arc!) of such accuracy that they were still being used in astronomical computations in the early 20th Century.

Before Rheticus died, Galileo Galilei was born in Pisa on 15 February 1564. Unlike Copernicus, he first studied medicine but became more interested in mathematics and science (including astronomy). By about 1590, he was a professor of those disciplines, also conducting physics experiments and designing measuring instruments, such as the hydrostatic balance and the gas thermometer. He made his first telescope in 1608, refinements of which obtained a magnifying power of 30x.

Galileo advocated the heliocentric theory and his discovery of the four largest moons of Jupiter in 1610 was rejected as impossible by staunch geocentricists. In 1616, he attempted to persuade the Roman Inquisition that his views were not contrary to Scripture, only to be warned off at the behest of Pope Paul V. He duly avoided the issue until the election of Urban VIII in 1623, who asked him to write a balanced treatment of arguments for and against heliocentrism. However, his *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems* (1632) was anything but balanced and it led to his famous trial and sequestration until his death in 1642.

Pope Urban's request may have been prompted by the publication between 1615 and 1620 of three books by the German astronomer, Johannes Kepler (1571–1630). These contained the three famous mathematical laws of planetary motion, the most controversial of which was that those orbits were ellipses with the Sun at one focus. That proposal struck at the heart of the Classical principle of perfect circles that underpinned both the Ptolemaic and Copernican models, which is why both needed epicycles in order to fit with observations. (Galileo knew of Kepler's work but insisted that the orbits were circular.)

Kepler might have taken much longer to do the intricate calculations needed to develop his theory but for the publication in 1614 of a book of logarithmic tables by the Scottish mathematician, physicist and astronomer, John Napier (1550–1617). That book also contained original work on spherical trigonometry and, while he made no astronomical discoveries of his own, he developed his mathematics to simplify calculations for that purpose. His only non-mathematical work was an anti-Catholic interpretation of the Book of Revelation.

Now we come to César-François Cassini de Thury – born on 17 June 1714, he was the third of a 'dynasty' of astronomers, cartographers and directors of the Paris Observatory. His grandfather, Giovanni Domenico Cassini (1625–1712), helped to set up the observatory and became its first director in 1671. While there, he determined the rotational periods of Mars and Jupiter, discovered four moons of Saturn (Titan was already known) and identified the Cassini Division on that planet's rings. He also calculated the distance between the Earth and Mars, which provided a 'yardstick' for all planetary orbits.

The elder Cassini was succeeded as director by his son, Jacques (1677–1756), who continued his father's work on Saturn's moons and a topographic map of France. He was admitted to the Académie des Sciences and later became a fellow of the Royal Society of London, as did his son and successor, César-François. The Cassini map of France, 180 plates in total, was published by the Académie over 50 years, the last of them being produced after his death in 1784 by his son, Jean Dominique (1748–1845).

Finally, there were two later events, both in 1864, which had profound effects on modern astronomy. The first was a publication by the Scottish physicist and mathematician, James Clerk Maxwell (1831–79), in which he proved that light was an electromagnetic wave. This provided a theoretical value for the speed of light, which gave a more accurate value for the light-year as a measure of distance.

Maxwell had studied at the Universities of Edinburgh and Cambridge, then taught at Marischal College, Aberdeen, and King's College, London. At the former, he actually did some work in theoretical astronomy, demonstrating in 1859 that Saturn's rings could not be solid or liquid and therefore must be composed of relatively small particles.

Even more important was the work of the German physicist, Wilhelm Wien, born on 13 January of that year. A graduate of the University of Berlin, he first investigated optical effects and then worked in thermodynamics. In 1893, while analysing the continuous spectra of incandescent bodies, he formulated an inverse relation between absolute temperature and peak wavelength. Essentially, this quantified the observation that hotter objects emitted shorter wavelengths (i.e., blue denoted a higher temperature than red).

As a result, spectroscopists were then able to determine the surface temperatures of stars, after which stellar classes such as blue supergiants, red giants and white dwarfs were identified. That led in turn to an understanding of how stars evolve – especially the largest ones, which progress through very different phases. It's hard to imagine that all of this began in 1514.

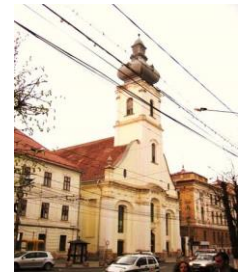


International
Council of
Unitarians and
Universalists

ICUU NEWS

IARF Conference

Transylvanian Tours



Time is running out for anyone wishing to attend the 34th quadrennial conference of the International Association for Religious Freedom in Birmingham on 24–27 August. The first such conference to be held in England since the one at Oxford in 1978, its theme is ‘Challenges for Religious Freedom in the Digital Age’. The keynote speaker is the British author, Dr. Karen Armstrong, and the presentations will include:

- ‘Cultural Intelligence’ for engaging the multicultural future
- Strategies to make liberal religious initiatives visible in the digital age (Michael Servetus project, Spain)
- Are we 'knowers who see' rather than 'believers who live'? (lay Buddhist identity among young Chinese)
- Using digital animation to promote nonviolent conflict transformation
- National internets and religious freedom; what are the boundaries of education without borders? (on web radio)
- Marking out a clear pathway between anti-religious secularism and fanatical forms of religion
- Pope Francis’ action on religious freedom using digital media
- How unequal elections disadvantage religious minorities
- How religion can harness the potential of digital media without causing offence
- The internet as a space for false accusations against the Bahá’ís in Iran, but also for their own constructive resilience and awareness-raising

Other features will include the welcoming of delegates from new chapters and member groups in Austria, Bahrain, Kenya, Macedonia and Pakistan; nightly entertainment from the city’s vibrant fusion culture; and a day-tour of worship sites in the West Midlands. After that, there will be an optional four-night tour of Belfast for peace-work immersion. Please see: www.iarf/congress/2014-birmingham for details and registration.

The travel service of the UU Partner Church Council has organised yet another pilgrimage to Transylvania over 20 September–02 October and at even cheaper rates than last year’s tour! As always, it begins and ends in the Transylvanian capital of Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca), where the headquarters of the Unitarian Church (pictured above) and its seminary are located. Participants will visit the most significant of the Unitarian holy places from the days of King John Sigismund II and Ferenc (Francis) Dávid: Torda, site of the famous Diet of 1568 where King John proclaimed the Edict of Tolerance; Gyulafehérvár (Alba Iulia), where he and his wife are entombed in the 1000-year-old cathedral; and Déva, where Dávid died in prison.

Other sites of interest are the frescoed Unitarian churches of Székelyderzs (Dârjiu) and Karácsonyfalva (Oclund), the spectacular 13th Century castle at Vajdahunyad (Hunedoara), the medieval walled city of Segesvár (Sighisoara) and the Saxon fortress church at Berethalom (Biertan). (Székelyderzs, Segesvár and Berethalom are all UNESCO World Heritage sites.) Worthy of special mention is the Alabaster Village of Mészkö (Mihai Viteazu), where the minister, poet, author and social reformer, Ferenc Balázs (1901–1937), rebuilt the jewel-box church and painted it himself. (The Romanian names are provided because they are more likely to be found on maps.)

Two new features are a tour of the Horomód Valley to view the recently uncovered 15th Century frescoes in the church at Homoródkarácsonyfalva and then to a waterfowl sanctuary. Also, a visit to Marosvásárhely (Târgu Mureş), with its Art Nouveau Cultural Palace, Mirror Hall, and Teleki Library which houses one of the seven remaining original copies of the US Declaration of Independence. In case anyone doesn’t know, the whole of Transylvania is a truly scenic place in the Carpathian Mountains; hence, all the valleys and lakes referred to.

There will also be a pre-tour of Budapest on 18–20 September, which includes transport to Kolozsvár for the main event. A post-tour of Maramureş and the Painted Monasteries of Bucovina is also planned for 02–07 October, departing from the Transylvanian capital. (More about these on p.16.) Please see the Partner Church Council’s website (www.uupcc.org/pilgrimages) for application forms and additional information.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Yesterday evening, while attending a meeting at the Melbourne Unitarian Church, I picked up the latest (Autumn) issue of the ANZUUA *Quest*. It includes a transcript of the address given by the Rev. Bill Darlison at the 2013 ANZUUA Conference in Auckland. (I believe it has also been posted on the Internet.)

Mr Darlison is very much 'into' astrology, and does not like what he calls (with initial capitals) "Prosaic Naturalism" and people like Dawkins and Hitchens. He also appears to take quite seriously an Irish comedian's explanation of the universe: 'Big Bang, Evolution, Randomness'. The whole point about neo-Darwinian evolution is that it produces *non-random* changes, which is exactly *why* it is so significant. (I have no views on the Big Bang theory, as I am no physicist or cosmologist.)

Bill Darlison's distaste for purveyors of Prosaic Naturalism is not so much "Beware the Ides of March" as beware of atheist fanatics born under the sign of Aries. They have "an almost pathological desire for personal freedom". Wow! Well, I have called myself a militant atheist for almost sixty years (I have just turned seventy), and I certainly hold the notion of personal freedom highly, as well as having a care for the rights of others.

And I have *two* star signs! I was born near the end of February, so, under the two-thousand-year-old twelve-sign Zodiac beloved of astrologers, my "star sign" is Pisces (19 February to 20 March). But the constellations have changed, and there is now a thirteenth period in the Zodiac, Ophiuchus (30 November to 17 December). In the modern system I was born under the sign of Aquarius (16 February to 11 March). But Aries does not get a look in! Where have I gone wrong?

Nigel Sinnott, Melbourne

Dear Editor

I read with interest Rev. Bill Darlison's keynote address at the 2013 ANZUUA Conference and my attention was drawn to the comment: "Virtually everyone you meet who says 'Astrology is bunkum' has never even read a page of serious astrology." Well, I have read a great deal of 'serious astrology' from my own interest in the development of the history of ideas and rationality. I have read a number of academic journal articles and scholarly books that cover the history of astrology of the Babylonians, the Egyptians, the Hellenistic, the Hindu, the East Asian (especially Chinese), medieval Christian, and, to a passing interest, to contemporary believers.

There is no doubt of the important contributions by the proto-scientific astrologers, especially with their careful calculations of the position and trajectories of the stars. However, attention should be drawn to the transformation of speculative and metaphysical astrological thinking to evidence-based astronomical reasoning. One may also include similar transformations in alchemy to chemistry, geomancy to geography, numerology to mathematics, elementalism to phase-state physics, and even the theory of humours to psychology.

It is not dogma to recognise these changes, and it is hardly slavish to accept the evidence-based disciplines against those that are based on untestable assumptions or falsified claims. For those who actually bother to inquire, they will discover that the natal predictive claims of astrology have been subject to a number of controlled studies which indicate that it simply does not work. Shawn Carlson's study (published in *Nature*, 1985, with an experimental protocol agreed by astrologers beforehand) is perhaps the best known. Some more recent studies (e.g., Dean and Kelly, 2003) have also indicated no support for association of cognitive, behavioural, and physical variables with astrological prediction. Indian astrology (Narlikar, 2013) fared no better.

This is all despite the fact that some prominent atheists happen to be Aries, which is apparently important to Rev. Darlison. 'Statistically insignificant' is a phrase that should come immediately to mind – except to the slavish and dogmatic mind that engages in a confirmation bias to prove what it already believes in.

Lev Lafayette, Melbourne

Dear Editor

It is truly significant that, on my first ever visit to a Sydney Unitarian Church Sunday service, I read in your Autumn 2014 Quest such an inspirational article by Bill Darlinson titled: *21st Century Dissent*. It is inspiring for two major reasons. Firstly, it issued a challenge to revivify Unitarianism, so as to heal the false dichotomy between science and religion, which we term the ‘human condition’. And secondly, it confirmed that, in understanding and healing this human condition in the 21st Century, the Classic Jesus shows us the Way.

Our Classic Jesus is neither the Jewish Christ nor the schizophrenic third of a Christian Trinitarianism. So, it is perhaps not too surprising to spiritually encounter him in a Uniting Church minister whose story of a subterranean tunnel of a Unitarian church in Whitby evoked in me memories of the catacombs of Rome. So whilst Bill reports: “Times have changed. We are no longer pariahs.” Yet he also suggests: “we are only echoing... the orthodox churches.”

He identifies the ‘new enemy’ as “Atheist Assemblies” with their strap-line: Live better; help often; wonder more.” But Bill rightly negates any capitulation to their ploys and instead challenges us: “Are our dissenting days finished?” He insightfully claims: “Our dissent, in part, must be from the prevailing mind-set of our time...that all the major questions about the nature of our existence have been satisfactorily answered; that...we have no need for religion.”

Note that as a Unitarian he uses the term ‘religion’ in the singular. And in so doing recreates its original scientific meaning as defined by our Classic Jesus; and as demonstrated in authentic science. Religion is a dynamic process, which Genesis symbolically describes as the “Breath of Life” and also as the “Tree of Life”; which Stephen Hawking equates scientifically to the “Mind of God”; and which in our common sense experience, we call the “Meaning of Life”.

Bill is also able to spot those who masquerade as authentic scientists but are not and try to disguise their “religious belief...in the Prosaic Naturalist’s creed...Big Bang, Evolution, Randomness.” While those terms are not authentic science, the sequence is. For Bill is not alone in pointing out the fallacy of “Christopher Hitchens and Co” in their failing to understand, as does Nils Bohr (and our Classic Jesus), that: “the opposite of a correct statement is a false statement; but the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.”

And as he states: “Evolution may well be true” but it is not “purposeless”, or driven “exclusively by...natural selection”; otherwise, it is just “a religious dogma” and life is, “in the words of Macbeth, ‘a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.’” Yet Bill, despite his best intentions, is as susceptible to false certainty or false science as Hitchens and Co.

By embracing the idea of “possibilism”, (misleadingly defined by David Eagleman as “an appeal for intellectual humility”, but more correctly understood by Bill as a fact of Quantum Physics) which he terms “open-mindedness”, he uses research in astrology, first to sustain his earlier book, *The Gospel and the Zodiac* and now, to confound atheistic orthodoxy. But, whilst in his book his open-mindedness is refreshing, his current attempt to validate his argument by using personal zodiacal characteristics is depressing.

His rhetorical question: “shouldn’t genuine rationalists, genuine freethinkers, genuine inquirers, genuine Unitarians and others...look...with a genuinely open mind” applies well to his book; but here it does not. Likewise his call to Unitarians is logically valid, for “this is our tradition...this is Unitarianism”; yet he seemingly overlooks that his unvalidated claims also “insult the soul”.

Finally, Bill’s basic argument is still valid: Unitarians can empower 21st Century Dissent, by seeing that Nils Bohr not only defines with certainty and authenticity the paradox of science but also of religion: “the opposite of a profound truth may well be another profound truth.”

Yours classically, maikel annahlee, Sydney

[It’s unusual for an article in this journal to spark this kind of interest, so perhaps I should run with it. The last writer (who spells his name that way to be “inconspicuous”) was referring to Rev. Darlison’s book, *The Gospel and the Zodiac: The Secret Truth About Jesus* (Duckworth Overlook, 2007). This is actually his fourth publication, though the others appear to be collections of his sermons and stories told in his services.]

PRESS RELEASE

In *The Gospel and The Zodiac: The Secret Truth About Jesus*, Bill Darlison offers a fascinating interpretation of St. Mark's Gospel drawing on a long tradition of astrology and cosmology. We are forever encountering debates about: Who was Jesus? Or even: Did Jesus exist? But do these add anything to our understanding of the spirituality that he represented? Bill Darlison argues that a more esoteric reading of the Gospel of St Mark offers an interpretation that goes beyond mere biography.

This book begins by examining two approaches to the Gospels that have their origins at the very beginning of the Christian church: those who believe that the Gospels are essentially historical accounts of the life of Jesus and those who sought hidden, more spiritual meanings to these books. Darlison is firmly of the latter school of thought.

In particular, he concentrates on the Gospel of Mark, arguing that a more meaningful interpretation of the book comes from reading it in the tradition of astrological and cosmological symbolism that can also be seen in other religions. He shows that by interpreting this Gospel as a spiritual journey through the twelve signs of the zodiac we can have a better understanding of the spiritual journey that it represents, and we can see the significance of why its structure differs from the other Gospels.

[This is from the website: www.thegospelandthezodiac.com, which also contains the interview below.]

Please tell us first how you came to write this book. Is this a study or a belief you have considered for a long time?

The idea for the book came to me quite by accident. I was teaching Religious Studies for many years, and had always been puzzled by the figure of the man carrying the jar of water who appears in Mark's Gospel (chapter 14, verse 13). No commentary could explain what role he was playing in the story. I knew that it was a representation of the zodiac sign Aquarius, but I didn't see the relevance of this. One day, while idly flicking through the text of Mark, I realised – with a start - that the basic themes associated with each of the signs of the zodiac were present in perfect zodiacal order, from new beginnings in the springtime sign of Aries to death and resurrection in Pisces. I realised, too, that this had to transform our understanding of the nature of the text. It wasn't history; it was a narrative account of very important esoteric teachings about the nature of the self and the journey of the human soul towards enlightenment. I have worked on the book, on and off, for about 15 years.

How has your theory been received by more orthodox Christians?

There has not really been enough time for these theories to break through the great wall of prejudice and assumption that informs most orthodox ideas about the nature of the Gospels. Most Christians think that the Gospels are a kind of 'potted history' of a man called Jesus, and even liberal scholars believe that history of a kind underlies these stories, despite their implausibility. To accept my theory would involve the reassessment of centuries of theological speculation, particularly about the 'redemption' won for us on the cross by Jesus. It would also involve a serious reappraisal of such notions as the virginal conception of Jesus, his bodily resurrection, and his ability to perform miracles – all of which are pretty central to conventional Christian thought.

The orthodox Christians to whom I have introduced my theories have listened politely, but felt duty bound to ignore my conclusions, because to accept them would involve losing too much which they feel is precious to them. And I can understand this. As a culture, we have a great sentimental attachment to the figure of Jesus, and many non-believers love his ideals and respect his courage. I love the figure of Jesus myself, and would not hesitate to call myself a Christian – that is, one who is inspired by Jesus, and who tries to live according to the principles set out in the teaching sections of the Gospels. The fact that I am doubtful about the historical basis of the Gospel stories in no way diminishes my commitment to the person of Jesus as I find him in the pages of the Gospels, whether he existed as an actual person or not. I am not trying to 'debunk' Christianity (as many who write on these themes seem to be); I am trying to give a different perspective on old stories, which, by their very familiarity, have lost some of their power to transform.

In putting forward this theory, are you ruling out historical, cultural, sociological and political interpretations?

I don't think so. In fact, I think I am really exploring a cultural dimension which orthodox commentators completely ignore. Astrology was the lingua franca of the ancient world, practised by seers and charlatans for many centuries before the Gospels were written. Franz Cumont, the great historian of religion, writing about a hundred years ago, said that astrology penetrated every aspect of the thinking of ancient peoples. Yet one can read contemporary commentators on the Gospels who never mention astrology, and who probably seem unaware of its centrality to the culture which produced the story of Jesus. The Jewish scriptures (what we Christians insultingly call the Old Testament) contain a great deal of astrology, but this is completely overlooked by conventional scholars and preachers.

Some years ago I outlined my theories to a Professor of New Testament Studies at a British university. 'I'm afraid I'm unable to comment,' he said. 'I know nothing about astrology'. This seems to me like an 'expert' on sixties music admitting he knows nothing about the Beatles! The ancient peoples could see the stars - they had no television to distract them, no pollution from light or atmosphere to impede their vision. We, who never really get the opportunity to look at the star-strewn heavens, rarely experience the awe-inspiring vision of the night sky. Our ancestors were not so oblivious.

My own theory does not deny any other plausible explanations for the Gospels as we have them. I accept that there are other factors to consider, besides astrology. I even accept that there may well have been a historical figure whose heroism and wisdom inspired the Gospel writers. My interpretation does not exhaust the subject, but it does bring in an ingredient which has been ignored, or deliberately suppressed, for centuries.

At a time when there has been a resurgence in the trite denial of the existence of God (I am thinking of Dawkins' book), do you think that this kind of interpretation adds to the epistemological debate – how can we know God?

I have been rather shocked (and amused) to find my book mentioned favourably in a list of books for atheists! It was never my intention to promote atheism. I am a minister in the Unitarian Church, and I believe that the world has a purpose and that human beings are not merely the chance product of blind processes. My book adds to the debate about God because it presents the figure of Jesus in a way that is comprehensible to the sceptical contemporary mind.

In affirming that the miracles of the Gospels describe spiritual processes and not historical events, I am removing one of the major stumbling blocks to belief in western society. Critics of religion will often point out the implausibility of the scriptural stories and perhaps even make fun of these stories. I think that the stories are deliberately meant to be historically and scientifically implausible so that we won't be tempted to treat them as history or as science.

Of course, we have not heeded this, and we have spent our time trying to untie the historical and scientific conundrums, an approach which has brought nothing but scorn from intelligent people, and rightly so. We do not come to know God by forcing ourselves to believe what our intellect tells us is highly unlikely. To read the Gospel of Mark as a treatise on the spiritual life and not as a rudimentary biography of a god-man elevates the author of the text immeasurably. People might begin to take the Gospels seriously again!

What would you most like readers to take from this book?

This book completely transforms our understanding of the Gospels; from being historical, or quasi-historical documents, to be 'believed' in, they are shown to be repositories of arcane wisdom. The miracle stories, which have been considered troublesome by scholars and believers alike, are rehabilitated as dramatic accounts of spiritual principles. The book shows how Christianity is related to other world faiths and so is deeply ecumenical. It is not meant to be a 'debunking' of Christianity so much as a rediscovery of its dynamic character; it interprets the Gospels in the light of the culture in which they were produced, rather than viewing them through the distorting lens of contemporary prejudices.

[Readers are encouraged to read the full texts of the press release and interview on the website, as there was only enough space for about half of each. Rev. Darlison's earlier books include: *The Shortest Distance – 101 stories from the world's spiritual traditions* (2006); *Enlightenment & Icecream* (2007); *The Penultimate Truth and Other Incitements* (2007); and *Spirituality and the Four Elements* (2007). Both paperback and Kindle versions of his works can be ordered from Lulu's Bookstore (www.lulu.com – just scroll down to the bottom of the home page and key 'bill darlison' into the Search space.)]

MISALLIANCE



The fragrant Honeysuckle spirals clockwise to the sun,
And many other creepers do the same.
But some climb anti-clockwise, the Bindweed does, for one,
Or Convolvulus, to give her proper name.

Rooted on either side a door, one of each species grew,
And raced towards the window-ledge above.
Each corkscrewed to the lintel in the only way it knew,
Where they stopped, touched tendrils, smiled, and fell in love.

Said the right-handed Honeysuckle to the left-handed Bindweed,
“Oh, let us get married, if our parents don’t mind, we’d
Be loving and inseparable, inextricably entwined, we’d
Live happily ever after”, said the Honeysuckle to the Bindweed.

To the Honeysuckle’s parents it came as a shock.
“The Bindweeds,” they cried, “are inferior stock!
They’re uncultivated, of breeding bereft,
We twine to the right and they twine to the left.”

Said the anti-clockwise Bindweed to the clockwise Honeysuckle,
“We’d better start saving, many a mickle mak’s a muckle,*
Then run away for a honeymoon and hope that our luck’ll
Take a turn for the better”, said the Bindweed to the Honeysuckle.

A bee who was passing remarked to them then,
“I’ve said it before and I’ll say it again,
Consider your offshoots, if offshoots there be,
They’ll never receive any blessing from me.”

“Poor little sucker, how will it learn,
When it is climbing, which way to turn?
Right, left, what a disgrace,
Or it may go straight up and fall flat on its face!”

Said the right-hand-thread Honeysuckle to the left-hand-thread Bindweed,
“It seems they’re against us, all fate has combined.
Oh my darling, oh my darling, oh my darling Columbine,
Thou art lost and gone forever, we shall never intertwine.”

Together, they found them, the very next day,
They had pulled up their roots and just shrivelled away.
Deprived of that freedom for which we must fight,
To veer to the left or to veer to the right!

Michael Flanders and David Swann

* A common misrendering of a Scots proverb meaning ‘many small things becomes a large thing’.

This will be our commemoration of Earth Day (22 April). Michael Flanders (1922–1975) and Donald Swann (1923–1994) were a legendary British performing duo who entertained audiences with their comic songs in the UK and elsewhere from 1956 to 1967. This song is from their first professional review, ‘At the Drop of a Hat’, which opened at the New Lindsay Theatre in Notting Hill, London, in 1956.

As always with songs, the words alone are quite lame – you can hear any number of renditions just by searching ‘misalliance’ on: www.youtube.com. The Scots proverb is actually ‘many a pickle (cf. *piccolo*) makes a muckle (cf. much)’. More about Flanders and Swann, as they billed themselves, on p.16.

THE OLD ASTRONOMER (TO HIS PUPIL)

Reach me down my Tycho Brahe, – I would know him when we meet,
When I share my later science, sitting humbly at his feet;
He may know the law of all things, yet be ignorant of how
We are working to completion, working on from then to now.

Pray remember that I leave you all my theory complete,
Lacking only certain data for your adding, as is meet,
And remember men will scorn it, 'tis original and true,
And the obloquy of newness may fall bitterly on you.

But, my pupil, as my pupil you have learned the worth of scorn,
You have laughed with me at pity, we have joyed to be forlorn,
What for us are all distractions of men's fellowship and wiles;
What for us the Goddess Pleasure with her meretricious smiles.

You may tell that German College that their honor comes too late,
But they must not waste repentance on the grizzly savant's fate.
Though my soul may set in darkness, it will rise in perfect light;
I have loved the stars too fondly to be fearful of the night.

What, my boy, you are not weeping? You should save your eyes for sight;
You will need them, mine observer, yet for many another night.
I leave none but you, my pupil, unto whom my plans are known.
You "have none but me," you murmur, and I "leave you quite alone"?

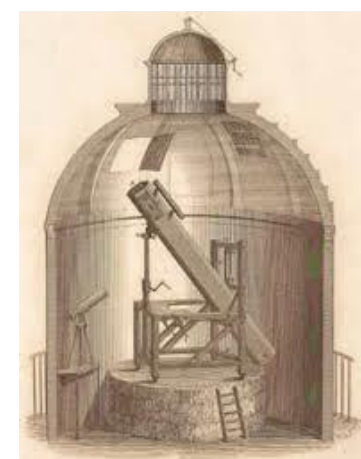
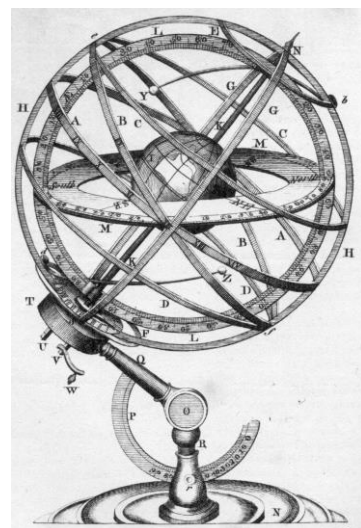
Well then, kiss me, — since my mother left her blessing on my brow,
There has been a something wanting in my nature until now;
I can dimly comprehend it, — that I might have been more kind,
Might have cherished you more wisely, as the one I leave behind.

I "have never failed in kindness"? No, we lived too high for strife, —
Calmer coldness was the error which has crept into our life;
But your spirit is untainted, I can dedicate you still
To the service of our science: you will further it? you will!

There are certain calculations I should like to make with you,
To be sure that your deductions will be logical and true;
And remember, "Patience, Patience," is the watchword of a sage,
Not to-day nor yet to-morrow can complete a perfect age.

I have sown, like Tycho Brahe, that a greater man may reap;
But if none should do my reaping, 'twill disturb me in my sleep
So be careful and be faithful, though, like me, you leave no name;
See, my boy, that nothing turn you to the mere pursuit of fame.

I must say Good-bye, my pupil, for I cannot longer speak;
Draw the curtain back for Venus, ere my vision grows too weak:
It is strange the pearly planet should look red as fiery Mars, —
God will mercifully guide me on my way amongst the stars.



Sarah Williams (1841–1868)

So little is known about this short-lived poet that we couldn't even find a picture of her, nor even be certain of her birth-year. She was born in London to Welsh parents and attended the Queen's College independent school. In the 1860s, her poetry came to the attention of Alexander Strahan, who published her work in his many popular literary periodicals. After her untimely death from cancer, he published her only volume of poetry, *Twilight Hours: A Legacy of Verse*, later in 1868.

NORTH ISLAND NEW ZEALAND TOUR

By Kathy Nielsen

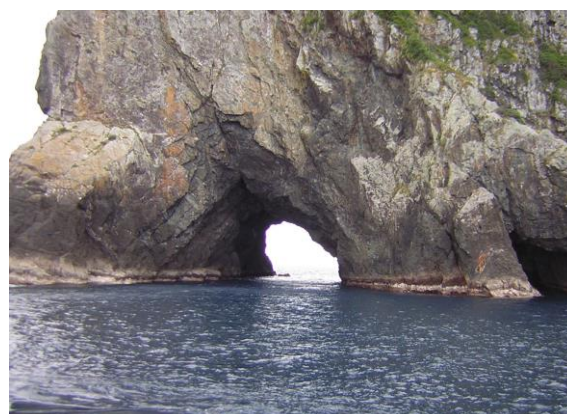
After the ANZUUA Conference in Auckland, in October 2013, I did a tour of the North Island with Anzcro Kiwi. I travelled right up to Cape Reinga, the northern tip of New Zealand where the Tasman Sea and Pacific Ocean merge. One can look through polaroids and see the intermingling of the dark blue Tasman with the aqua blue of the Pacific in a spectacular swirl of currents.

As well as the lighthouse at this northernmost point, there is a gnarled pohutukawa tree supposedly over 800 years old and, according to Maori belief, the spirits of deceased Maori leap from this tree into the ocean to return to their ancestral homeland of Hawaiki. As I stood under the gateway to the lighthouse listening to the tune of the wind blowing through the wooden slats above me, I was reminded of Japanese feudal times when wooden slats on the veranda floors were set at various angles so as to play a tune to alert the inhabitants of a castle of an approaching enemy. I felt that this structure must have been erected with the design of the Japanese 'Shinto Gate' in mind, although this wasn't mentioned by our guide.



The off-road part of this tour took us along the sand on Ninety Mile Beach, with waves crashing beside the custom-built coach, which I'll remember for the rest of my life. We dug for cockles at the sites indicated by a guide dog. We drove up Te Paki stream, stopping at massive sand dunes where the young people struggled up and sandboarded down to the great merriment of onlookers, including me. One of our group clambered up for about 20 minutes, only to have his board blown out of his hands back down to the base of the sandhill before he could sand-surf down. Next, our guide asked if we were ready to go searching for brumbies (wild horses), as they hadn't appeared on the beach. So, off we went in another mad ride into the saltbush and tree vegetation near the beach. On this tour, we also visited a kauri forest and strolled along an elevated walkway, surrounded by these graceful giants.

When I returned to Paihia, the main town on the Bay of Islands, I noticed a slight trembling of the ground. At first, I put this down to me overdoing things but, as it continued every day, I asked fellow travellers if they also felt it. Nobody else was aware of this phenomenon, which continued until I flew out of Wellington and back into Sydney, whereupon when I first deplaned I was acutely aware that the trembling had stopped and I've never felt it since.



The Bay of Islands launch cruise by catamaran was a wonderful experience, although rather scary as we sailed through the Cape Brett 'Hole in the Rock' on Motukokako Island. We then sailed on to view the magnificent Grand Cathedral Cave. We sailed past sandy beaches and rugged rocky outcrops on our way to Cape Brett and saw dolphins that gyrated in unison for our cameras, as if responding on cue to some invisible hand orchestrating their performance.

We also had a stopover on Urupukapuka Island, where some of the younger members were very helpful and mindful of me, their older companion, as I huffed up the hill towards a distant viewing point. Talking to some tourists holidaying on Russell Island on the way back in the catamaran, I became enamoured with the mystique of this small island. I've decided that I'll return one day and spend a summer on this beautiful island, maybe as a kitchen hand in one of the cafes!

Today, Russell is a quiet tourist town but it was known as the 'Hell Hole of the Pacific' in the 19th Century, with European whalers trading with local Maori and attracting thugs and convicts to the region. The British erected the Union Jack on Flagstaff Hill in 1845, replacing the name of Koroareka with Russell, after the British Secretary of State for the Colonies, Lord John Russell. The Maori leader, Hone Keke, ransacked the town and cut down the Union Jack four times. Russell is now a tourist's delight with many old historical buildings, a museum, swimming at Long Beach and a 21-kilometre walk through native kauri trees. In town are small bars, restaurants and cafes with gourmet food and local wines made in the French tradition. Russell Island is a short ferry ride from the mainland town of Paihia.

The other memorable part of my tour was when I enjoyed a helicopter flight over Mount Tarawera, which is the sacred mountain of the local Maori tribe, Ngati Rangitihi. During the 1800s, the world-famous pink and white terraces were regarded as the eighth wonder of the world. In the early hours of 10 June 1886, the people of Te Wairoa were awoken by continuous rumblings. The ensuing volcanic eruption lasted over five hours, destroying the terraces and devastating the surrounding villages, resulting in 150 deaths. We flew over the 8-km long volcanic rift along the summit of Mount Tarawera that was left after the eruption. Looking down on the rift, I felt that my own body had been split apart. The magnitude of this great force of nature brought to me the realisation of how soft and gentle and yielding was the planet in response to such powerful potency. One lived the violation of the land from this viewpoint.



The scenic flight continued over stunning lakes and we landed at Hells Gate, which the guide/pilot informed us was the most active geothermal attraction in Rotorua. We were guided through mud pools, springs and steaming geysers. A small handful of grey mud could be rolled between your palms like plasticine and, when dropped back onto the ground, your hands felt very smooth with a powdery cosmetic feeling. This mud is used in beauty products. We returned to our base on the lakeside flying over Lake Rotorua. This had been another unforgettable experience in New Zealand.

[Kathy is the secretary of the Perth Unitarians and a founding member of that group. All of the pictures are her own, with the exception of the sand dune on the previous page. She recommends the Anzcro Kiwi tour operator to anyone and you will see from their website (www.anzcro.com.au) that they have everything from 21-day guided coach tours to motorhome rentals.

Just with the reference to the ancient tree at Cape Reinga, the Maori's ancestral home of Hawaiki is thought by some scholars to be Savai'i, the largest island in Samoa. Others suggest that the name refers to an underworld where their ancestors now reside.]

WHAT SHAPE ARE WE IN? — PROGRESSIVES SHAPING RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES

Report on the third Common Dreams Conference held in Canberra, September 2013

By Eric Stevenson

[Adapted from an address to the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship on 20 October 2013.]

It was my privilege to represent Spirit of Life at Common Dreams 3. The theme of the Conference was 'Midwives of Change' – the birthing or rebirthing of a faith community that practises a religion which is relevant to our time and place. The Conference was well worth Unitarian participation for two main reasons.

The first is that we have a proud history of having shown the world how to fulfil the goal of the Conference – how to shape an alternative religious community that is relevant. As far back as the mid-17th Century, our people in Transylvania were wanting to do just that and they succeeded! I believe we can build on that history, be inspired by their accomplishments, strengthened by their courage and enthused to make our community better known and more available. Three centuries later, we should be seen to be still in the forefront of such a movement. The second reason is the opportunity it gave us in Spirit of Life to learn from other faith communities how they are doing it. We have had eight years of formation – but our task is a work in progress, so it was helpful to share with people of similar aspirations for new ideas, support and encouragement.

In regard to the first reason, I was helped by our Committee to maintain a Unitarian presence at the Conference. Our Statement was placed in the show bags of the 400 registrants and the leftovers were at the entrance for the taking, together with a plentiful supply of Unitarian brochures. Unitarians from most states were in attendance, including John Maindonald from Canberra and Rev. Rod McFarlane from Adelaide. Rod has a kind of roving permit and is interested in the formation of new Unitarian congregations. I had a few regrets about CD3 which, as a member of the Planning Committee, I have tried to do something about.

My first disappointment was that the potential for Unitarians to contribute to the Conference was hardly known and therefore not acknowledged or utilised. The Catholic martyr, Servetus, who was burnt at the stake for his progressive declarations, was quoted once but no mention was made of the fact that his martyrdom constituted the birth pangs of Unitarianism. I believe Unitarians in Australia need to get on board this wider religious movement. There is an Aussie groundswell of progressive religion and our Seven Principles give us an excellent opportunity to catch the wave, to become known and available to those who are searching for a more satisfactory way of becoming better people and making a better world.

In regard to my second reason that CD3 was worth attending, I must first ask you if you agree with my last sentence. I said that being there was important because we could learn from other faith communities how they are doing community. Do you agree that we, as a fellowship of Unitarians, are searching for a more satisfactory way of becoming better people and making a better world? Or do we just come here occasionally to give intellectual assent to the Seven Principles and find our experience of community elsewhere? The CD3 evokes the question not only "to what shape do we aspire?" but "to what shape are we committed?" It is because, as a Unitarian, I am committed to us modelling "what shape we are in?" that I found CD3 so important for us. So, back to my second reason about Unitarians being prepared to catch the wave of progressive religion that is sweeping Australia and the world.

I was disappointed that CD3 was dominated by progressive Christians, though I don't use that term harshly or behind anyone's back. I have made it clear to the organising committee that progressive Christian involvement is natural and essential. But, if we continue to provide high profile progressive Christian presenters, we will continue to attract a progressive Christian demographic who will continue to request Christian presenters and rank them high on the agenda! – a self-fulfilling recipe for turning the purpose of the Conference away from progressives in other religious cultures.

Nevertheless, it was possible to cherry-pick the presentations and learn from the ways the Christian contributors were living the Common Dream. It was evident that the goals we have already achieved and the standards we have currently reached in our respective communities should not be disowned, even if some of them need to be discarded. 'Deconstructionism' was a dirty word at CD3, but room was left for us to dream about the things in our current practice that required revision, modification and, in some cases, elimination. The Conference was about bringing to birth individual ideas and individuals' belief systems, as well as faith communities.

Rev. Dr. Lorraine Parkinson gave a brilliant address on the removal of the church's Christological foundations. She is the author of *The World According to Jesus – his blueprint for the best possible world*. She spoke of the need for a second reformation, which has arrived! This is seen by traditionalists as blasphemous, scary, and dangerous. Dr. Parkinson asserted that the church fathers, by equating the person of the historical Jesus with Christ, created a confusion that could only be resolved by removing the "illusion of the Christ" and opening the door to "the Jesus way". "The gospel of Christ and the gospel of Jesus are different", she said. "One is a gospel of fear and the other is a gospel of love." The Christ version of Christianity was "a religion for infants, a primitive morality which turned Jesus into a divine whipping boy".

You might be wondering why I should report this Christian thing to you, a non-Christian Unitarian audience. My observation is that this second reformation is happening in Australia! It outshines the first reformation during which Servetus lived. People like Lorraine are speaking from inside a growing number of Australian Christian churches who are at last doing what he was burnt at the stake for. If we are not careful, they will be becoming more Unitarian than us! Lorraine would make a good Unitarian but we are not attracting her in! Is it because we have lost the spirit of Servetus?

Although he was yet another Christian presenter, I want to tell you about Dr. Nigel Leaves because of what he said on ABC Radio National last Sunday night. Although he is Canon of St John's Anglican Cathedral in Brisbane, this speaker was unafraid of rebirthing the church. He was astounded at the lack of basic knowledge of parishioners who had not heard or been taught the latest academic insights about Jesus of Nazareth. In a scholarly address, he made it abundantly clear that he agreed with Servetus. Jesus was not God stalking around the planet. He presented four possible portraits of the historical Jesus: the possibility that he was Jesus – a literary creation which taught that Apocalypse comes after Crucifixion, or that he was a scandalous Jesus provoking people to re-imagine their faith and was married, or that he was Jesus – a social revolutionary advocating a discipleship of equals in a radical inclusive community, or that he was Jesus with a message – the illegitimate child of a Jewish girl who was raped by a Roman soldier.

Nigel was interviewed by Rachael Kohn on *The Spirit of Things* last Sunday. He spoke of the 'something more' that undergirds us and our planet and explained the philosophy of the founder of the Sea of Faith, Don Cupitt. Sea of Faith in Australia (SoFiA), for those of you who have not heard of it, is a network of Australians who are seeking a radical reappraisal of past religious traditions in order to meet today's spiritual challenges. It sees religion as a field of creative human endeavour which must be ever-changing to remain relevant. It provides stimulation and fellowship in the common quest for meaning and fulfilment. That sounds like a replay of Unitarian history to me! And, wait for it, *Nigel said that in Perth, Unitarianism has become the church for members of the Sea of Faith!* It seems extremely important to me that we get to know progressive groups like SOF, move in alongside of them and offer to them in NSW what we have done in Western Australia.

Then there was the constructionist side of CD3. A number of speakers had an obvious reluctance to be as deconstructionist as Lorraine. Many carried a brief for preserving, analysing and remodelling Christian church structures, which was quite boring for those of us who could not give a damn. (I sometimes wonder if we in our Fellowship are also trying too hard to do church as distinct from doing community.) Bruce Sanguin was refreshingly more concerned about how we do religious community, regardless of how it affects the institution. He spoke about what it means to be "deeply human together". From his perspective in evolutionary theology, he gave us a new story which completely identifies us humans with and within the process of evolution. *He suggests that, as members of a religious community, we can claim our status not as a part of evolution, but as the presence of it, an enthusiastic, zestful presence – being what evolution is and doing what evolution does.* This involves participating in evolution's "failures" with courage, encountering evolution's crises as opportunities, and "surrendering to grace". By that he meant letting go of the anxieties and cares of life. He advocated guided meditation for the latter and highlighted the need for members of congregations to be taught how to bring their religious communities to birth. He submitted a regime for doing religious community by way of an agreement.

Another two keynote speakers led us into the ways in which we can facilitate such progressive religious change. Val Webb, the author of *Living with Doubt* (2nd Edition), described the birth which we can midwife in others and in ourselves. It is an emergence into spiritual change in which we claim the right to choose what we believe. The "pregnancy" is much longer than nine months. During that time, no question is off limits, no institution is beyond criticism, and no theological definition is finally definitive. We are continually chipping away at the things in orthodoxy we were taught were "truth". She warned us about progressive orthodoxy – becoming encrusted in the new things we fought to believe in. As a newcomer to Unitarianism, I interpreted that warning as a message for us.

Margaret Mayman spoke about giving birth to new ways of *being*; and about doing so in the post-modern world:

(a) in a less religiously affiliated society.

(b) in a Judeo-Christian culture where an uninterpreted Bible is not worth reading. She called that 'critical receptivity'.

(c) in a world where God language needs to make sense and where G-o-d is widely regarded as a human construct – a product of human imagination.

You can try her one-liners on for size: "Love is what justice looks like in practise"; "God is the making of right relationships".

She then insisted that, as individuals and as faith communities, we should do what Martin Luther King did – link the pursuit of our dreams of justice with our beliefs and live them out, not just in our Fellowship but in the whole of society. Once again, the importance of this address to us was not so much the message, which is what we are already about, but the messenger! Margaret will be the new minister of Pitt Street Uniting Church next month and, if we are worth our salt, we will treat her as an ally in shaping the macro-religious community.

Other presenters emphasised different aspects of a progressive religious community. Notably, Glyn Cardy, in his address on non-theistic prayer, spoke about prayer as a journey involving relationships with children, co-operation with animals, the appreciation of beauty, the sacredness of laughter and the exercising of kindness and hospitality. He began his session on non-theistic prayer in the context of protest culture with a visual illustration – it was a video of the Pussy Riots. He saw their protest not as a desecration of the cathedral but as a prayer for social justice. And along the same lines, David Feltham spoke of using posters to demonstrate, to create ripples and to get the conversation on justice going. One of the posters used by his faith community was a satirical picture of Jesus toting a rifle: "Violence is our God, Hallowed be its name".

I found that the Midwives of Change conference presented us with a challenge: What are we trying to bring to birth by coming here at 10.30 on a Sunday morning? Are we willing to learn how to be midwives of something wonderful that is coming into life among us? If so, what is that dream? Do we agree that it is to help each other and those in our demographic to be "deeply human together", as Bruce Sanguin advises? If so, are we ready to risk failure and see crises as an opportunity, convinced that we should be zestful and passionate about it? On the deconstructionist side, are we prepared to relinquish any of our agendas that have passed their use-by date? To be helpfully critical of our own structure? Ready to review our own principles? And is our passion reflected constructively in the way we relate to brother and sister organisations, deliver our addresses, conduct our discussions, plan our services, attend our meetings, practise our principles, value our relationships, cultivate and exercise our gifts?

[Eric is a retired Uniting Church minister and has been a member of the Spirit of Life Unitarian Fellowship for seven years. He is also Co-ordinator of the Centre for Progressive Religious Thought (Sydney), whose website is: www.cprtfreedomtoexplore.org.au. The CPRT is a member of the Common Dreams alliance, which has held its previous conferences in Sydney (2008) and Melbourne (2011). For more information, see: www.commondreams.org.au.]

ANZUUA NEWS

Our Treasurer, Henri van Roon, has produced a draft budget, which the ANZUUA Council will deliberate on. James Hills, our Secretary, is pursuing high-tech alternatives for a new website in conjunction with Sandy Bair in Adelaide.

Our delegates to the ICUU Council Meeting in New York found it a mind-enriching and invaluable experience, despite the travel difficulties inflicted by the snowstorm. Henri van Roon attended the Climate Change stream of the Conference, while Pauline Rooney went to the Administrative stream (as befits her position as Vice-President of the ICUU).

Pauline reports that the 2016 Council Meeting and Conference will be held in the Netherlands, near Amsterdam, with a Ministers' Conference in the week before. ICUU staff have recently been working in ministerial training and capacity building with UU groups in Burundi and Kenya, and a South American initiative is being planned for later in this year.

REPORTS FROM MEMBER GROUPS

Adelaide UC are saddened by the passing of Audrey Abbie – a huge loss, as she had been with the church since she was a child. They had a large service on 09 March to celebrate the 100th rug made by the their volunteer Ruggers group. Members also participated in the Walk for Refugees on 13 April. AUC can now be followed on Twitter.

Melbourne UC took part in a large Interfaith service earlier this year, as well as a big gathering in Federation Square in support of refugees. They raised \$15,000 in a few weeks to pay for the Australia Institute to come up with a 34-page alternative report on the budgetary state of Australia called ‘The Peoples Audit’ (see last issue), which is being circulated to all ANZUUA congregations. MUC are now an affiliate of Pax Christi, meeting with up to 30 other faith groups in the city. (Despite the name, Unitarians and Quakers are welcome to join that alliance.)

Perth Unitarians had an interesting talk on 18 May with local Humanist and Atheist groups on the Creationist crisis. They have also opened a Twitter account and members are booking in now for the Annual Retreat at New Norcia in August. The lunches after their Sunday gatherings continue to be an enjoyable exchange of ideas forthcoming from the Address on that day.

Spirit of Life UF now have a Facebook page and are also advertising their services on Twitter and the Sydney Talks website. They recently had a speaker from the Women’s Plans Foundation, which raises funds for family planning initiatives.

Sydney UC had two more Music Services, performed by opera students from the Conservatorium. In April, the theme was popular music from the Victorian era, followed by a May Day (both international and traditional) celebration that included a luncheon party with more songs. Their regular services have included a series of talks by Peter Crawford on visions of the Apocalypse (i.e., the end of the world) expressed in Zoroastrian lore, the Old Testament and the Book of Revelation.

REPORT FROM BRISBANE UUF

We have been privileged to have Rob MacPherson come to Brisbane again to take a service and run a workshop on developing our UU elevator speeches. We are very grateful to the Adelaide Church in their support and for allowing Rob to leave Adelaide!

One of our members and active committee member, Kathryn Young, is returning to her native Canada. She will be greatly missed.

On the last Sunday in March, we showed the video, *Mary and Mohammed*, which we had purchased, and afterwards had a lunch. We raised just over \$200, which was donated to the Red Cross and Rosies on the Street. We also made a contribution to the Quimada House dormitory project in the Philippines.

A year ago we raised just over \$1,000 to fund a scholarship for one of the Philippine UUs, a boy who had just completed school and wanted to do agriculture engineering. He has just completed his first year and won a place on the Deans List for Engineering Excellence. He has also been chosen as one of two students to attend the Philippine Agricultural Engineering Seminar later this month, so we will now be fundraising for his scholarship for the next twelve months.

Our Annual Retreat in the Gold Coast hinterland is coming up in early July. We now have with us a US UU Naval Chaplain, Stephen Warfield, who lives in Toowoomba and has completed significant divinity training. Stephen conducted our Sunday service on 11 May and will conduct another one in June.

[Written by Renee Hills, President of the BUUF. Rosies on the Street is an initiative of the Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate, whose 850 active volunteers in Queensland provide unconditional acceptance, friendship and practical assistance to marginalised people within the community. According to their website (www.rosies.org.au): The basic building blocks of friendship are to spend time with, listen and talk to people. ... Rosies is non-preaching and non-discriminatory.]

REPORT FROM CHRISTCHURCH UUs

The Christchurch Unitarian Universalist community is missing Derek and Rebekah McCullough who have taken leave for a year because of family responsibilities. The Committee is sharing responsibilities and adjusting to a new schedule – one meeting each month at our usual Workers Education Association venue and another for a meal in a member's home. Every member has gifts/talents to offer and this challenge can be seen as an opportunity to bring our gifts forward.

While the city is not shaking (well, there are no absolutes – there was a small quake last month) we are still living with a desolate city centre. We also had a 1-in-100-years flood that was very difficult to drain due to remanent damage caused by the earthquake. Gathering in homes helps connect us and, at the same time, helps us to feel a bit more normal.

If you are coming our way, do let us know. We are glad for visitors and also offers to lead our services. In June, Myrna Mitchell from the North Island is coming to lead our group on the topic: 'Peace and War: Is it black and white?'

[Written by Valerie Wycoff, the Christchurch UUs' representative on the ANZUUA Council.]

BEYOND TRANSYLVANIA

The pre-tour of Budapest will take participants to Castle Hill, Hero's Square, the Jewish Quarter, and the Bela Bartok Unitarian Church. There will also be plenty of free time to take in museums, the famous thermal spas and a cruise on the Danube.

With the post-tour, the Maramureş region is on the border with Ukraine, where four of the most famous painted monasteries are located in Voroneţ, Humor, Moldoviţa, and Suceaviţa – all of which are UNESCO World Heritage sites. Two other such sites will be seen on the way there; namely, the monastery at Birsana and the 12th Century Orthodox church at Leud. Also, the churches in the Mara Valley include the tallest wooden structure in Europe

Anyone who is travelling to this part of the world for the first time should allocate some extra time to tour Bucharest, once hailed as 'the Paris of the Balkans'. The palaces, avenues and early government buildings in Vienna and Budapest should be seen by those who wish to understand what the Austro-Hungarian Empire was like at the height of its power. Lastly, there are no places like Prague, with its distinct Gothic, Baroque, 19th Century and modern precincts, and Bratislava, the capital of Slovakia.

MORE ON 'MISALLIANCE'

Michael Flanders and Donald Swann were classmates at the Westminster School, where they performed their first revue in 1940, and then at Oxford. Flanders, also an actor, wrote the lyrics of their songs and Swann, a pianist, composed the tunes. They performed in the UK, US, Canada and Switzerland, also touring Australia, New Zealand and Hong Kong in 1964.

Michael Flanders had polio as a child, so he always performed in a wheelchair while David Swann sat at the piano. Five of their reviews were recorded on albums, either live or in studio. Some of their better-known songs are 'The Gnu Song', 'The Hippopotamus', 'The Reluctant Cannibal' and 'Madeira M'Dear'.

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

This has been a bit of a 'rush-job', as I was going for a holiday in the last week of May. My thanks to the various contributors to this issue, but now my cupboard is almost bare and I really need more input for the September instalment. So, please send anything you have to: michael.mcphee@optusnet.com.au – as, you've seen in this issue, I'm particularly happy to receive comments from the readership and more detailed reports on what member groups are doing than what I can glean from the Minutes of Council meetings. I am also open to suggestions as to what the readership would like me to present, even if they can only give me a start.