



The  
**SUN**

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Sydney Unitarian News

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**April/May 2006**

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### **A TOUCH OF AN ORTHODOX EASTER**

*Love passed, the muse appeared, the weather  
of mind, I once more weave together  
emotion, thought and magic sound  
(Pushkin from Eugene Onegin 1823)*

Following our hugely successful Robbie Burns Birthday event in January, our next social/cultural event of the year will be an authentic and very lively Russian Easter party. Aably hosted by Michael Spicer and his wife, Nadia, it will feature such culinary delights as borsht and piroshkis, also entertainment in the forms of music, song and dance.

The party will take place in the church hall, starting at 7 pm on *Saturday, 06 May 2006*, so be sure to attend and bring a bottle or two of your favourite beverage with you. You are also encouraged to come as your favourite Russian literary or historical character and act accordingly on the night. (Standard Unitarian principles of conduct apply to anyone coming as Taras Bulba or Rasputin – sabres, knives and bombs must be left at the door.)

A donation of \$10 per person will be needed to help with our expenses (to be collected on the night). Due to our limited facilities, we can only accommodate the first 40 people to book – so, *do not delay!* This is an event not to be missed, and the numbers have to be exact for catering purposes.

Please RSVP to Michael Spicer on 0423 393 364 by 26<sup>th</sup> April 2006.

## EASTERS EAST AND WEST

Just since we're on the subject, even those members who had the 'benefit' of a Christian upbringing can probably learn something about the traditions that underlie the preparations for that most important event of the year. It's really quite interesting, even from a purely academic viewpoint, especially when we look at the different approaches of the western (Catholic, Anglican and Lutheran) and eastern (Orthodox) churches to Easter and the period of Lent that precedes it.

Looking first at Easter, whose very name comes from the Anglo-Saxon term for their pagan spring festival (*Oestre*), that is meant to commence from the Friday following the first Full Moon after the vernal equinox (21 March). Unlike the Muslims, who gaze intently at the skies to detect the first sliver of a New Moon in order to declare the commencement of the holy month of Ramadan, the Christian churches calculate the date of Easter from the cycles of an 'ecclesiastic moon' which may or may not correspond to reality.

Still, a date for Good Friday is set and that determines when the fasting period of Lent commences - that name, too, just comes from the Old English *lencten* (spring). In the western churches, this period of fasting and penitential sacrifice lasts for forty days (excluding Sundays), in keeping with similar periods spent by Moses, Elijah and Jesus in their respective wildernesses; also to the forty years that the Hebrews wandered in the desert of Sinai. Properly, the three traditional practices during that period are prayer, fasting and almsgiving, so those who abstain from something they enjoy (e.g., drinking, gambling, etc.) *may* donate the money not spent on those pursuits to charity.

In any case, the Lenten season commences with Ash Wednesday and we can be grateful that certain medieval customs are no longer in force. That day gets its name from the practice of wearing sackcloth and ashes, and the fasting in those days included abstinence from meat, fish, eggs and dairy products. Thus, Pancake Tuesday (or *Mardi Gras*, meaning 'fat Tuesday') was the last chance to use up any remaining animal products. Even today, the Catholic canon prescribes that the faithful eat only one meal per day (except on Sundays) and abstain from meat and poultry on Ash Wednesday and all Fridays in Lent.

The fourth Sunday in Lent is seen as the half-way point and celebrated as Laetare Sunday, which gets its name from the Introit at Mass, *Laetare Jerusalem* ('O be joyful, Jerusalem') - it is also a day on which a 'reprieve' is granted for the things that people have given up for the period. The last week of Lent is Holy Week, devoted to the Passion of Christ. It commences with Palm Sunday, when the blessing of palm fronds and a procession takes place commemorating Jesus' very public arrival in Jerusalem, and ends on Maundy Thursday. (The Maundy was a medieval practice of washing (other people's) feet, as Jesus did for his disciples before the Last Supper.) Also called Holy Thursday, it is followed by Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday - then 'Easter' precedes the names of the next six days.

The Orthodox Lent last for seven weeks (not counting Saturdays). It is known as 'Great Lent', in contrast to a Winter Lent prior to Christmas, and commences with Clean (or Ash) Monday. By that time, the faithful have eaten no meat for two weeks, commencing from Meatfare Sunday. A week later comes Cheesefare Sunday (same idea), and then only vegetarian food is consumed for the duration of Lent - oil and wine are also off the menu. The next five Sundays are dedicated respectively to the Feast of the Triumph of Orthodoxy, St. Gregory Palamas (14<sup>th</sup> Century Greek theologian), the Veneration of the Cross, John Climacus (7<sup>th</sup> Century Egyptian monk and author of *The Ladder of Paradise*) and St. Mary of Egypt (4<sup>th</sup>/5<sup>th</sup> Century pilgrim and patron saint of penitent women).

Lent officially ends on Lazarus Saturday, the day before Palm Sunday, but fasting continues during the Holy Week. The high point of Easter is the Vigil Mass at midnight on Easter Sunday, conducted entirely by candlelight. For the remainder of the week (known as 'Bright Week'), all fasting is prohibited and the customary greeting is "Christ is risen!", to be responded with "Truly He is risen!"

[It looks like an article on the history of Orthodox Christianity would be a good idea on some later occasion, but this will have to do for now.]



*Nous allumons cette flamme pour les victimes des catastrophes humaines et naturelles:*

*Pour les malades du Sida qui ploient sous le poids de la stigmatisation et*

*l'incompréhension des voisins et de la famille;*

*Pour les victimes de la famine dont ces enfants aux corps émaciés qui ne savent à qui donner de la tête;*

*Pour les personnes blessées par la séparation au sein des couples notamment les enfants;*

*Pour les déplacés et les réfugiés des nombreuses guerres qui font ravages dans de nombreuses régions du monde et qui sont au seuil du désespoir;*

*Pour les victimes des catastrophes causées par la cupidité humaine dont le réchauffement planétaire n'est que l'une des manifestations.*

*Nous allumons aussi cette flamme en signe de gratitude pour l'amour, l'attention et la solidarité dont les hommes et les femmes sont capables au milieu de ces terribles tragedies.*

We light this flame for the victims of human and natural catastrophes around the world:

For those bent under the burden of AIDS, the stigma of the disease, and the lack of understanding of those close to them, neighbours and family members;

For victims of famine, among them the many children with shrunken bodies and eyes that don't know where to look for help;

For those injured by the breach of couples, especially the children;

For refugees and those displaced by countless wars that ravage so many regions of our world, and who are left to stand on the doorstep of despair;

For victims of the errors brought about by human whims and caprices, of which global warming is but one symptom.

We light this flame also as a sign of our gratitude for all the love, care and solidarity of which women and men are capable, in the face of such terrible tragedies.

Written by Fulgence Ndagijimana and submitted by the Assembly of Unitarian Christians in Burundi

[This is the monthly Chalice Lighting nominated by the International Conference of Unitarians and Universalists for the month of March. Sorry if it spoils your lunch, but it gives you some idea of what life is like in that war-torn little country. The Unitarians there must be a very special group of people – a bit more about them is on the last page of this issue. My thanks again to Anthony Raymond for reading the French words at the service on 19 March.]

## SERVICE DIARY

Meetings every Sunday from 10.30 –11.30am  
(followed by coffee, tea and biscuits)

Date	Presenter	Topic
2 <sup>nd</sup> April	Ian Ellis-Jones	King Solomon's Temple
9 <sup>th</sup> April	Anthony Raymond	Release the Hidden Splendour
16 <sup>th</sup> April	Michael Spicer	The Place of Chanting in Religion
23 <sup>rd</sup> April	Peter Crawford	Consumerism – the Religion of our Age
30 <sup>th</sup> April	Peter Roger	Music Service
7 <sup>th</sup> May	Ian Ellis-Jones	The Wizard of Oz
14 <sup>h</sup> May	Mike McPhee	The Impact of Astronomy on Philosophy
21 <sup>st</sup> May	To be announced	
28 <sup>h</sup> May	Peter Roger	Music Service

## THE DELUGE

By Patrick Bernard

26.7.2005, 4 p.m. – Mumbai, India

A mantle of darkness spread suddenly across the sky at two o'clock this afternoon. It looked more like two o'clock at night. I was working quietly in my office, drinking innumerable cups of tea kindly brought to me by my secretary, Nidhi. My air-conditioning unit was purring away in the background. I got up to switch the lights on and looked through my bay windows to see what was going on. Near complete obscurity was enveloping Mumbai. I asked Chandra and a few students passing by what these signs from the heavens augured. I rang my driver, Ramesh, on his mobile phone to get further details. They all agreed that this was looking very bad and that we should let everyone go home immediately. After some hesitation and further consultations, I agreed and decided that we should all leave as soon as possible. If disaster struck I felt it would be better for everyone to be at home with their families.

While I was getting ready, Rani, a meddlesome administrative assistant with delusions of grandeur, had taken upon herself, unbeknownst to me, to run around telling all teachers and students that there was nothing to worry about and that all classes should go on until six in the evening, as scheduled. While everyone debated and argued as to what course of action should be taken, it had already begun to rain seriously. A few wise students and some teachers left regardless of Rani's utterances. Within ten minutes the rainfall intensity had accelerated dramatically.

Then, 'it' happened, and 'it' truly was a natural event of biblical proportions. The heavens opened. I had never seen anything like it and the only memory it brought back was standing under the Niagara Falls some years ago. I learnt later that, apparently, this was the biggest downpour in recorded world history, in such a short period. As this catastrophe unravelled, I began to wonder if I was going to survive it and, for whatever it was worth, I scribbled some notes that I tried later to decipher and are now copied below.

8 p.m. – After the most terrifying deluge, nothing works any more and most of Mumbai is cut off from the rest of the world. There is no electricity and all landlines for phones and internet have been disabled. Even the mobile phones networks have been wiped out. Perversely, it is for me a blessing to be thrown back into a pre-technological age. Having no real love for the technology that enslaves us, instead of liberating us as we were promised, I am in some ways better equipped than many to adjust to a brutal return to pre-industrial living conditions. In fact, I welcome the absence of modern conveniences. Paradoxically, even though my life may be in some danger, I feel more alive than ever.

Having open sewers and no proper garbage collection system, the streets are already flooded chest high with a deadly brown soup of effluents and all sorts of refuse. Dead sacred cows have already begun to float by my window. I read later that up to ten thousand of these poor creatures drowned tonight.

As a consequence of Rani's interference, most students and teachers are now marooned in the college. We will have to spend all night in complete darkness, unable to let anyone know where and how we are. Students' parents must be in a panic by now. For me, it doesn't matter as I am alone in India and no-one is waiting anxiously for me.

Ironically, for the first time since I arrived here three weeks ago, I can enjoy some eerie tranquility. The endless roaring of motors and insane beeping car horns have literally drowned. All I can hear now is the growing murmur of the stunned multitudes as they stubbornly paddle their way home through the deadly floods, trying desperately not to fall and disappear into a deep sewer. Those who do, die almost instantly. I refused to attempt walking home through this satanic brew, and I was proven right a few days later as epidemics of hepatitis, cholera, typhoid, malaria and even the bubonic plague had rapidly spread across the city.

Hundreds of thousands of people march silently in one line in what used to be the middle of the road, because it is the safest path to follow. There the floodwater is only waist high, and they have less chances of falling into a sewer. After a brief respite the storm returns with increased ferocity. The thunder gallops across the sky beating the drums of Armageddon. The wrath of God (or “The Gods” since we are, after all, in India) is upon us.

As night descends ominously, the murmur becomes a tumult. Mobs of over-excited young men become rowdier. Packs of humanoid silhouettes in the doomsday obscurity howl and scream fiendishly like beasts in heat. The most terrifying part of this whole experience is not the rising flood or the risk of building collapse – it is the herds of human beings reverting to their primal state. One of my students sighs: “It’s now a war zone out there!” Ramesh and Chandra are worried about looters, so we decide to double-lock and secure all entrances to the building. The females in our group are quietly terrified. They know intuitively that men can turn into beasts under the cover of chaos and darkness.

Since there is no electricity, there is obviously no air-conditioning but, if we open the windows, we fear that swarms of malaria-infested mosquitoes are going to devour us. Meanwhile the rain keeps falling relentlessly and the water level is rising dangerously. Our humble little library, which had been temporarily housed in the ground floor, is completely destroyed. We have managed to save a few books in frenzy, but the rest is gone along with some of our audio-visual equipment and all students’ belongings stored in the basement lockers.

The thunder keeps tumbling down in rage. I must write these last few lines before complete darkness falls upon me. I am starting to feel that I would like to say good-bye to my loved ones but, since nothing works, it will not be possible. So, I’ll have to write more, just in case.

Everyone is huddled in one room but I prefer to stay in my office, alone with my thoughts, my fears and my memories...and of course my pen and my diary. If tragedy does come, I don’t want to scream and run – I want to watch it happen. It’s not that I am particularly courageous, quite on the contrary, I am just curious. Tonight for me, death is just another interesting experience and I want to be able to watch it unfold for as long as possible- and, besides, I don’t see any point in scrambling for my miserable survival. There is something repugnant about our rat-like urge to survive at any costs.

Now the battery in my camera has gone flat and the water level has reached the first floor of our building. The water didn’t leak but poured through the cellar walls. One of lecturers, who is an architect, believes that the foundation structure of our building is not sound and must have been further weakened by this flood. Someone tried to joke about our limited options: “To be crushed or to drown, that is the question!” No one laughed. This interlude reminds me of the frequent news items we get in Western countries about unsound buildings collapsing in India, China and other developing nations. Will I become a mere “news item”?

I can hardly see my handwriting now in the penumbra. According to Ramesh my car has completely drowned and disappeared. I wonder if this is the end of the road for me. I comfort myself with the strange idea that I have had an interesting life so far. I refuse to delude myself, though. Let’s not idealise the past. Let’s face it, I only had a few good moments – the rest was a hard slog. If I really have to depart soon, I should record those precious moments engraved in my memory, those rare and wonderful instances which make a whole life worth living.

It’s getting really dark and I can’t even see what and where I am writing anymore - I’m just guessing. I hope it will be legible. Let’s try anyway since there is nothing else to do and time may be running out.

My first “golden moment” was that Saturday morning in June 1965 when I left my family and France. It was a radiant summer’s day. I was hitch-hiking by the side of an access road to the *Autoroute du Nord* (Paris Northern Tollway) heading to Belgium, Holland, Germany and Scandinavia. I was on my way to Lapland – I had always wanted to see the land of the Midnight Sun. I was fifteen years old. It was very early and there were no cars driving by, which made that scene even more blissful. To be fair, there were not that many cars in those days in any case. I’ll never forget that blessed moment.

Never before or since have I felt so completely free. I was the master of my destiny. I had nothing! I had left everything, even the possibility of an apartment on the prestigious *Rue De Rivoli*, in front of the Tuileries Gardens and the Louvres. I had withstood all the threats and I had refused all the bribes from my family. It may have been insane, but I have never regretted that decision and I have never felt so proud of myself. I was bursting with the ecstatic joy of youth. My real life was beginning.

The water level is reaching the second floor.

The other “golden moment” I want to take with me if I am siphoned off into the dark waters is my first kiss. It was also in early summer 1965, but this time it was in Périgord in South Western France, near a small medieval village called Sorges. Her name was Dominique Monéguier du Sorbier. Dear reader, this story may be somewhat overtly sentimental but that is how it lives on in my heart and there is no other way of recounting it. If I try your patience, please forgive me and bear with a man whose life is hanging by a thread. Fortunately for you, since my time may be running out, I’ll have to be brief, avoid superfluous preliminaries, and go straight to the particular image that is engraved in my mind for eternity.

Dominique and I had taken a romantic stroll through the luscious meadows surrounding her ancestral home. I was picking wildflowers for Dominique and we were holding hands with the passion of all innocent lovers. Her hand was the greatest treasure I had ever held. I was even jealous of the breeze caressing her magnificent black hair sparkling with deep blue touches in the summer sun. We sat in the shade of an ancient oak tree at the top of hill overlooking the tranquil valley down below, where a lazy river was winding its way between strawberry fields and ancient vineyards. Was it her, or was it me? Who kissed who? It doesn’t really matter, but I suspect it was Dominique who was older and more experienced than me. I was too naïve and too besotted for such audacity. All that remains is the fragrance of that first kiss, which lingers on my lips to this very day. We kissed, and we kissed, and we kissed tenderly for an eternity surrounded by red poppies and blue cornflowers, until the fresh evening dew brought us apart. Dominique kissed me one last time and ran down ‘our’ hill to be on time for dinner with her oppressive parents. The fugitive evanescence of time is the curse of poets and lovers. Before disappearing, myself, I stayed a while longer in the cool of the night contemplating the stars and listening to the friendly owl. I never saw Dominique again. To think that she must be sixty years old by now!

Decades later, here I am contemplating my own mortality in a flooded and plague-infested metropolis so far away from the gentle meadows of Périgord.

[To be continued in the next issue.]

## COMMITTEE NEWS

The Annual General Meeting of SUC was held on Sunday, 26 March, at which the previous (as of the January re-shuffle) officer-bearers were re-elected; namely:

President	Patrick Bernard
Vice-President	Peter Crawford
Secretary	Michael Spicer
Treasurer	Curt Fraser

Also re-elected as Committee Members were Ian Ellis-Jones, Mike McPhee and Jane Park, leaving some vacancies that any members of the congregation who are wish to volunteer are invited to fill.

Curt Fraser is also our Webmaster and is currently completing work on a SUC website which will hopefully be in the public domain before the end of April. The actual name of the website hasn’t been finalised yet, but Internet-savvy members should try the various search engines from time to time (or just check the ANZUA website for any announcements).

## HOWARD DIDN'T KNOW

With apologies to Banjo Patterson

I had written him a letter which I had, for want of better  
Knowledge, sent to where I met him at the wheat board, years ago.  
He was chairman when I knew him, so I sent the letter to him  
Just on spec, to make the point, that "Howard doesn't want to know".

And an email came directed, not entirely unexpected,  
(And I think the same was written in some Middle Eastern bar)  
'Twas his CEO who wrote it, and verbatim I will quote it,  
"Trevor Flugge's gone to Baghdad and we don't know where he are.

But when he left Australia, he was going to meet with Alia,  
A trucking mob in Jordan, who were keen to grease the wheels.  
For 10 per cent commission, they could swing Saddam's permission  
To get our wheat accepted: it's the mother of all deals.

But I guarantee, Prime Minister, that there's nothing at all sinister:  
The chaps at DFAT told us that the sums looked quite okay.  
When you're selling wheat in billions, what's a quick 300 million?  
If it keeps the Nationals happy it's a tiny price to pay."

Sitting here at Kirribilli, I've been thinking, willy nilly  
That it's somehow reminiscent of the children overboard,  
But I can handle Rudd and Beazley as I always do, quite easily,  
By endlessly protesting that there's nothing untoward.

I'll tell Bush next time I meet him at the White House, when I greet him,  
That I'm sure he'll understand about the wheat board's quid pro quo:  
He'll forgive this minor error in the global war on terror  
When I look him in the eye and tell him Howard didn't know.

[This parody of Banjo Paterson's "Clancy of the Overflow" first appeared in the Mike Carlton column in the *Sydney Morning Herald*. While it took me a while to find who wrote it and how it got on the Internet, the following – sent by Michael Spicer – has been around far too long for anyone to remember its origin.]

## CLASSIC CHURCH BULLETIN EXCERPTS

Low Self Esteem Support Group will meet Thursday at 7 PM. Please use the back door.

The Fasting and Prayer Conference includes meals.

Ladies, don't forget the rummage sale. It's a chance to get rid of those things not worth keeping around the house. Don't forget your husbands.

The peacemaking meeting scheduled for today has been cancelled due to a conflict.

Don't let worry kill you off - let the church help.

Irving Benson and Jessie Carter were married on October 24 in the church. So ends a friendship that began in their school days.

At the evening service tonight, the sermon topic will be "What Is Hell?" Come early and listen to our choir practice.

Scouts are saving aluminium cans, bottles and other items to be recycled. Proceeds will be used to cripple children.

Potluck supper Sunday at 5 PM – prayer and medication to follow.

The ladies of the church have cast off clothing of every kind. They may be seen in the basement on Friday afternoon.

## THE LITTLE PRINCE

[Abstract of an address given at the Sydney Unitarian Church by Ian Ellis-Jones on 12 December 2004]

My favourite book is *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944). The book, written ostensibly for children, but also for adults (who, in the view of the author, understand little), is a classic of 20<sup>th</sup> Century literature. In many ways, the book is very ‘Unitarian’, as I hope to explain. In today’s current post-modern malaise, we can learn much from the author and his little book.

Saint-Exupéry was born into a French aristocratic family, but in ‘reduced circumstances’. Educated for the Navy, he was ultimately called up for the Air Force and became a ‘prose poet of the air’. The centre of all of Saint-Exupéry’s thinking and writing was Humanity (‘Man’). His view of life was “founded on reverence for man present in all men”. *The Little Prince*, written by Saint-Exupéry a year before his untimely death in 1944, concerns an air pilot who, having made a forced landing in the Sahara Desert, meets a little prince. The little prince tells the pilot lots of stories about the planet where he lives and about other planets and their rulers. More importantly, the little prince shares with the pilot something extremely important – something the little prince learned from a fox: “It is only with the heart that one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”

Ultimately, the little prince moves on, as we all must in life. It is a sad book in so many ways. What does the book have to say to us today? Many things.

### *1. Life is absurd unless and until we give it meaning*

Life is not intrinsically meaningful. In the book each planet visited by the little prince is a miniature ‘theatre of the absurd’, inhabited by some solitary entangled figure who is condemned to repeat some unbroken series of pointless acts. The king (‘authority’) has no subjects, only a rat which he must alternatively condemn and pardon, so as to exercise his authority. The businessman (‘useless possessions’) counts stars that he can only nominally claim to own. The drunkard (‘addiction’) drinks incessantly in order to forget that he is ashamed of drinking. The geographer (‘useless knowledge’) counts mountains and rivers he has never seen. The conceited man (‘vanity’) wears a hat for saluting people, but no one ever passes his way. The lamplighter (‘hurry’) follows disembodied orders, lighting up and extinguishing as his planet turns more and more rapidly on its axis.

### *2. Life is one*

Despite the inherent absurdity of life, there is a profound sense that this life is one, and it is all that there is. Further, there is only one order or level of reality. The book contains many examples of the ‘one’: one sheep, one rose, one well. Yet Saint-Exupéry offers us no monistic or pantheistic view of life. There is the one, but there is also the many, including the rose garden and the corn fields. The one becomes the many, but the essence of life, its livingness, is and will always be *one*. Life may be all around us, but what is truly important is not visible to the naked eye. It is the livingness of life itself ... not some illusory life force, but simply living things in the process of living. That is the essence of life, the one life. Unitarian-Universalist Dr William Schulz has written: “...[T]he Sacred or Divine, the Precious and Profound, are made evident not in the miraculous or supernatural but in the simple and the everyday[.]”

*The Little Prince* does not offer any precise hope of life after death, only the remembrance of someone who once lived, and who lives on in memory and by way of an association of ideas: “Here, then, is a great mystery. Look up at the sky. Ask yourselves: Is it yes or no? ...”

### 3. *Life is a journey*

Life is, or can be, a journey. The little prince moves from planet to planet. He knows when to move on. How often in life do we get 'stuck' in some place, in some relationship, and do not know how to move on. (Usually, it's a case of us not wanting to move on!) Read *The Little Prince* and you will learn how to move on. You simply see things as they really are, in their totality, in their actuality, without opinion, without judgment, but with complete attention. That is the ending of sorrow...and the beginning of wisdom.

As Unitarians we must always be prepared to let the past stay in the past, move on and journey 'onward and upward forever' (in the words of the old Unitarian Covenant). We are denied the comfort of fixed and absolute truth. The search for truth is endless. As Unitarian minister George N Marshall, author of *Challenge of a Liberal Faith*, has written: "[T]he Bible of tomorrow has not been written, is not completed."

### 4. *Life is solitary*

*The Little Prince* is about exile and loneliness. The six planet inhabitants appear as isolated and solitary figures. The little prince is lonely. The fox is lonely. So is the pilot, who says, "So I lived my life alone, without anyone that I could really talk to..." Saint-Exupéry says that we must create ties in order to give life meaning, and we must be prepared to experience pain and loss. The little prince loves a rose, but the rose is fickle and conceited. Yet the little prince learns that it is the time he has 'wasted' for his rose that makes his rose 'so important'.

### 5. *Life is hidden*

Saint-Exupéry does not suggest that there is some inner, esoteric 'secret' to life. Not at all. Life is all about us, ready to be experienced in all its fullness. Yet the story has so many things that are 'hidden' or 'concealed' – the unspoken, the elephant inside the boa constrictor, the sheep inside its box, the seeds in the earth, the fox in its hole, the secret well in the Sahara, and so forth. Life may be all around us, but what is important is not visible to the naked eye. It is the livingness of life itself...not some illusory life force, but simply living things in the process of living. That is the essence of life, the one life.

*The Little Prince* is, above all, a story about love and friendship: "To forget a friend is sad. Not every one has had a friend." Yet love and friendship don't just happen. One must "tame" and be tamed: "One only understands the things that one tames..." Further, "[y]ou become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed."

The book affirms the supreme worth and dignity of the individual. It affirms that this life, rather than some future life, is or at least ought to be our main concern. It affirms, as Krishnamurti often pointed out, that truth is a 'pathless land' and that you cannot approach it by any creed or path whatsoever. Direct perception of truth is, however, possible, when there is choiceless awareness of life as it really is. The important thing is life itself. Whatever 'it' may be, it is all here now, and all we have to do is to learn to perceive it here and now. We need to see each thing as it really is - as a new moment.

I urge all of you to read this book, if you haven't already done so. If you have, read it again...and again.

[Antoine de Saint-Exupéry spent most of his working life as a pilot in various parts of the world, the experiences from which inspired many of his books. Other than *The Little Prince*, his best-known works (in their English translations) include *Southern Mail*, *Night Flight* and *Wind, Sea and Stars*. He died flying a fighter plane during World War II, the wreckage of which was only found in the sea off Marseilles in 1998.

Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986) was an Indian poet, philosopher and luminary of the Theosophical Society. Perhaps Ian will tell us more about him some time.]

## REFLECTIONS ON HONG KONG

By Peter Crawford

I have just returned from Hong Kong, where I had dreams of doing some English teaching for a year or two. The salaries of English teachers are quite high in Hong Kong and the tax level is quite low: generally a flat tax rate of about 16% applies. The Chinese are, of course, keen and polite students as a general rule, and everything seemed clear. But I have returned after two months, before I actually started working and seem in no hurry to return. Why is this so? The answer is simply the state of the air. That's right, the quality of the air. Hong Kong is subjected to the worst air pollution of any city of the advanced world. While it has not hit the appalling levels of third world cities like Manila or Calcutta, the industrial revolution in full swing just over the border in China and reaches its extreme as much in Hong Kong as in the towns so nearby.

Surprisingly Hong Kong is a green city. Like Sydney it is magnificently embedded in rural and country parks. About 1,500 of its 3,000 square kilometres are full land and country parks. The last tiger died, or was shot in Hong Kong as late as 1903. There are more species of butterfly in Hong Kong than in Western Europe. About one-seventh of China's 1350 bird species hold out at one time of the year or another in Hong Kong. The foresight of British imperial officials like MacLehose\* ensured that Hong Kong would not have the pure industrial future of so much of the world, not least so much of the world in China. Like Sydney, Hong Kong had had the good fortune to have been in the hands of people with an eye to something more than simply the holy dollar. Its mountainous beauty, its islands of the South China Sea, all ensure a wonderful heritage.

Yet the city is beset with a current popular policy of gigantism. Take places like the Peak on the main Island or the Big Buddha on the island of Lantau or the new elite Western settlement on the island. Such places, all three of the ones I have just mentioned have been currently beset with jack hammers which prattle and batter all day to the chagrin of anyone who goes to these places for something more than an extension of the material world. Hong Kong, taking advantage of Chinese prosperity, is going through an almighty tourism and construction boom. So while the actual green space is present, so also is the sense of being overwhelmed with overpopulation and development.

Then there is the air pollution. It is seemingly out of control and probably getting worse. When you look down from the 'Peak' you can't see across the Harbour. It is a great mist of air pollution. Yet just twenty years ago you could see out to Macau some thirty miles away. In the environmental sense how things are changing for the worse! I would feel most unsafe health-wise living there for a year or more. Hong Kong is great for a short holiday but for the sake of your respiratory health I would think twice before living there for an extended period. For me the risks are too great.

Hong Kong is also a city of crass materialism. It has endless numbers of jewellery stores, clothes shops and mega regional shopping centres which tend to make it a model new Asian city, a city with certain similarities to Fritz Lang's notorious Metropolis. Is this the way of the future for all China? I would hope not!

Also I had the experience of being a foreigner in a distant land. For some reasons I became very homesick for Australia. To me all the shopping and the little Chinese restaurants were not enough to hold me this time. Anyhow, while I felt not so happy, I nevertheless hope that I will get to see a lot more of Asia and of course the variety of cultures if any are left after the massive philistine modernisation. Meanwhile I would like to look around the bush and the quieter areas of Australia.

[\* Crawford Murray MacLehose was Governor of Hong Kong from 1971 to 1982, having previously served in the British Embassy in Beijing and as Ambassador to Denmark. During his term, he enacted a major ten-year housing program, construction of the Mass Transit Railway, the development of satellite towns and expansion of community facilities. An enthusiastic hiker, he gave his name to the 100-kilometre MacLehose Trail, which consists of ten hiking segments stretching from Sai Kung to Tsuen Wan. He returned to Hong Kong for the 1997 hand-over and died in Scotland in May 2000.]

## UNITARIAN MARTYRS

By Mike McPhee

Eastertide always gets me thinking about the many other instances of religious martyrdom that have occurred in the course of history, including cases in our own denomination. It is true that only Christianity has the martyrdom of its leader as its very foundation, though Islam and Sikhism were founded in very hostile environments and some of their early leaders were killed or died in prison. However, my interest at this time is in those who lost their lives for principles that we can relate to.

My story concerns the two most famous martyrs from the early days of 'historical' Unitarianism, a time when the Protestant Reformation and Catholic Counter-Reformation were well under way but had not yet reached the stage of open warfare. There are ironies in both men's histories, in that one was not seeking to found a Unitarian denomination and the other met his fate at the hands of fellow Unitarians.

Miguel Servet, better known as Michael Servetus, was born in Spain about 1511, just after the expulsion of the Jews and Moors by Ferdinand and Isabella. He grew up and studied law amidst the terror of the Inquisition's relentless search for *conversos* (converts) who privately adhered to their original faiths. Convinced that the doctrine of the Trinity was the principle barrier to the sincere conversion of Jews and Muslims, Servetus set out to prepare a convincing defence of that doctrine. Instead, his studies revealed that the doctrine of the Trinity had no basis in Scripture or in the teachings of the early Church prior to 325 AD.

In 1531, Servetus published a book entitled *On the Errors of the Trinity*, which argued that the doctrine was a human fabrication and should not be the basis for persecution. After futile attempts to convince various Protestant leaders of his discovery, Servetus settled in France and studied medicine – eventually discovering the principle of blood circulation. He then wrote a book on the restoration of Christianity which he shared with John Calvin, the dictatorial theocratic ruler of Geneva. Someone in Calvin's court leaked Servetus' whereabouts to the Inquisition and he had to flee for his life. Heading for a radical Protestant haven in northern Italy by way of Geneva, he was recognised there, tried for heresy, and burned at the stake along with his books in 1553.

That Protestant community was stamped out shortly thereafter, but two famous survivors were Giorgio Biandrata (another physician) and Faustus Socinus, founders of the Minor Reformed Church of Poland (later known as the Socinian movement). Biandrata made his way to Transylvania, which was then an independent Hungarian principality, where he encountered Ferenc (Francis) Dávid. Born in 1510, Dávid had been a Catholic educator, but converted to Lutheranism in 1550. A decade later he was a Calvinist and, within five more years, had become a Unitarian. In each of these denominations, Dávid became superintendent of the country's churches and their chief spokesperson.

At Biandrata's nomination, Dávid became preacher to the royal court in 1566. His debating skills persuaded the ruler, Prince John Sigismund, to adopt Unitarianism and issue the famous Edict of Torda (1568), which made the Catholics, Lutherans, Calvinists and Unitarians all official state denominations on an equal footing. However, the prince died three years later and was succeeded by a Catholic relative, Stephen Báthory. The new prince did not repeal the Edict, but proclaimed that the state churches could not change their doctrines.

Unfortunately, Ferenc Dávid held the view that truth was not obtained by revelation, but continues to unfold under critical examination. He came to reject infant baptism and praying to God through the mediation of a non-divine Jesus. Biandrata feared that the denomination would be disestablished, and called Socinus to dissuade Dávid from his advanced views. But Dávid held to his convictions and was disavowed by his erstwhile colleagues. He was tried for 'blasphemous innovation' and imprisoned for life at Deva in 1579, where he died later in that year.

Much more could be written about Prince John Sigismund, the only Unitarian monarch in world history, and I will do so some other time.

## ICUU NEWS

This is the text of a letter written to Rev. William Sinkford, President of the Unitarian-Universalist Association in the US:

I have [the] honored privilege to greet you from Africa and from Burundi. I am the president of the Assemblée des Chrétiens Unitariens du Burundi, ACUB, which is the Unitarian organization in Burundi beside the ones in South Africa and Nigeria.\*

We are a Unitarian group which is faithful to our Christian roots. We meet twice a month and use scriptural, philosophical (I have done Philosophy at University myself) texts and all other interesting wisdoms during our celebrations or service.

For almost a year now, we have been blessed to have a worship place thanks to the Blackpool Unitarian Church in Great Britain which supported us in getting some funds to rent the place.

Having an important place of worship is a big deal for us because we are in a stage of visibility and witness, our own way of telling the UU story. We run now a project in favour of HIV/AIDS people and this is a way to get our humanitarian side known.

We are then requesting from you, Rev. President, support for some months to rent our worship place which is at the same time our office and meeting place. We are not telling you how much we need because all kind of support would be helpful for us and we depend on your kindness.

We are looking forward to hearing from you soon,

Ndagijimana Fulgence, President ACUB

[\* In fact, there is also a Unitarian group forming in Kenya whose listing on the website just says:

We meet on Sundays, under trees. We are 8 congregations with 200 people who believe as Unitarian Universalists believe.]

## CONTACT US

As your Editor, I am grateful for the additional input that I asked for last time and just hope that such input will be sustained for coming issues.

The SUN will welcome any and all contributions other members may have. If you have any items you believe would be of interest to the congregation, please submit them for publication. As you can see from the contents of this issue, such items can be serious articles, informative 'fillers', poems or even jokes. We also welcome your comments and suggestions, either as 'Letters to the Editor' or just to let us know your views.

Deadline for copy for the June issue of the Sun is Sunday, 21 May 2006.

The preferred method for sending actual documents is as an attached WORD file to: [beth@zip.com.au](mailto:beth@zip.com.au) – otherwise, simple email is suitable for short items or messages. Alternately, copy can be posted or brought to SUC (see mailing address in the masthead).

Anyone wishing to contact the President or other Executive members should ring the SUC number in the masthead and the minister will put you in touch with them.

The Sun is the star in the center of our solar system. It is a yellow dwarf star. It gives off energy as light. That includes light, infra-red energy (heat), ultraviolet light and radio waves. It also gives off a stream of particles, which reaches Earth as "solar wind". The source of all this energy is nuclear fusion. Nuclear fusion is the reaction in the star which turns hydrogen into helium and makes huge amounts of energy.