

# June Friday Forum

## From Liberal Christianity to Post-Christianity: *the evolving nature of the Unitarian Church*

**Speaker: Rob MacPherson**

**Friday 23 June 2017, 7.30 pm**  
**Effective Living Centre, 26 King William Rd Wayville**

*This talk will describe the theological evolution of the Unitarian Church of SA, from its Liberal Christian origins to its present Post-Christian iteration, with reference to the 7 Unitarian Universalist Principles and theories of religious pluralism. Rob will be joined by members of the church, Ms. Sandy Johns and Mr. David Freesmith, in a panel for questions you have always wanted to ask!*

**Tickets: \$15 waged, \$12 concession, \$10 Friends of ELC**

Please book online with Trybookings: [trybooking.com/285283](http://trybooking.com/285283)

Phone bookings: Effective Living Centre: Tuesday-Friday 10-2 (08) 82710329

### **PROGRESSIVE CHRISTIANITY NETWORK of SA**

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### **Committee Members 2017**

Jonathan Barker	Maureen Howland
Ros Chittleborough	Sue Jarrad
Esmond Dowdy	David McKirdy
Norm Habel	Val Thomas

## From Liberal Christianity to Post-Christianity

### **PCNet's Friday Forum for June 2017 is an excellent opportunity to find out more about the Unitarian Church in South Australia**



We are looking forward to hearing from Unitarian Minister Rob MacPherson about the theological evolution of the Unitarian Church of SA, from its Liberal Christian origins to its present Post-Christian iteration, and about the 7 Unitarian Universalist Principles and theories of religious pluralism.

Rob will be joined by two members of the Unitarian Church of SA, Ms Sandy Johns and Mr David Freesmith for a panel discussion, to answer all the questions you have always wanted to ask!

Rob MacPherson has been the Minister of the Unitarian Church of SA since 2011. He trained for Ministry at Unitarian College Manchester after careers as a university lecturer, professional actor, teacher, and corporate trainer. He holds a PostGrad Dip in Contextual Theology from the University of Manchester, an MLA in Philosophy from The Johns Hopkins University, and a BA in English from Towson University. A native of the US, he has lived in Australia since 1999, is married to Professor Susan Luckman, and has two grown daughters Caitlin and Rosie.

You can find the Adelaide Unitarians at their website  
<http://www.adelaideunitarians.org.au/>

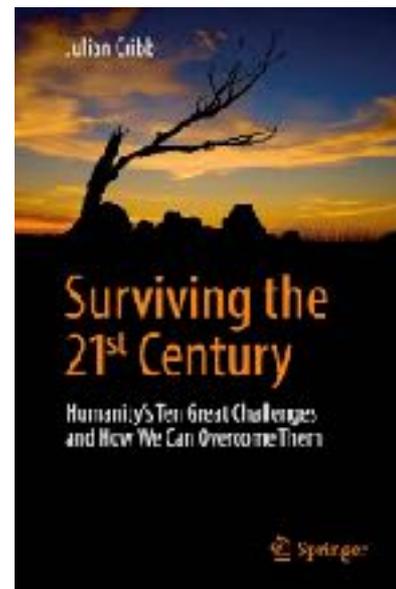
or on their Facebook page  
<https://www.facebook.com/saunitarians/?fref=ts>



You can also follow Rob Macpherson's blog "*Will Preach For Food*" at  
<http://robmacpherson1.blogspot.com.au/>

## A different kind of Lenten Study

During Lent this year Jonathan and Janeen Barker convened a series of studies on *Surviving the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, based on a book of the same name by Julian Cribb. The series was sponsored by PCNet with weekly sessions held at Morialta UC in the evening (where 10 attended) and the Effective Living Centre in the morning (with an attendance of 12). The sessions followed the 10 chapters of Cribb's book, examining his assessment of the 10 greatest threats to existence faced by the human species over the past million years. As a former newspaper editor and science communicator Cribb, now an author and science writer, has amassed a wealth of information on the nature and extent of the threats posed by:



- food crises
- self-delusion
- climate change
- mass extinction
- universal toxicity
- pandemic disease
- resource depletion
- dangerous new technologies
- weapons of mass destruction
- population and urban expansion

Alongside of this text, we considered the role of the church as a social pioneer, using Richard Niebuhr's essay, *The Church as Social Pioneer*, in which he proposes that the church truly fulfils its purpose when it acts as a social pioneer.

I was impressed with Jonathan and Janeen's imaginative leadership of the series, and the stimulating discussion engaged in by participants. The text gathered an arresting array of evidence to substantiate the seriousness of each threat presented, and clearly articulates what we must do at a global level to mollify each threat, along with suggested pathways that could take humanity on a more sustainable journey. For each threat, Cribb lists what we as individuals can do to make a global difference in assisting to solve seemingly intractable threats to the Planet. This was an inspirational Lenten event, and I recommend that you access the text:

***Surviving the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Humanity's Ten Great Challenges and How We Can Overcome them.*** Julian Cribb (2017).

Springer International Publishing, Switzerland.

Esmond Dowdy, ELC participant

## OUR BIRTH in UNITY - THE LORD'S PRAYER

O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos,  
you create all that moves  
in light.

O Thou! The Breathing Life of all,  
Creator of the Shimmering Sound that  
touches us.

Respiration of all worlds,  
we hear you breathing - in and out-  
in silence.

Source of Sound: in the roar and the whisper,  
in the breeze and the whirlwind, we  
hear your Name.

Radiant One: You shine within us,  
outside us --even darkness shines - when  
we remember.

Name of names, our small identity  
unravels in you, you give it back  
as a lesson.

Wordless Action, Silent Potency -  
where ears and eyes awaken, there  
heaven comes.

O Birther! Father-Mother of the Cosmos!



*Sent by Jann McGuire who was a student of Neil Douglas-Klotz, an Aramaic scholar. This prayer is from his book, 'Prayers of the Cosmos: Meditations on the Aramaic Words of Jesus' published by HarperSanFrancisco, 1994*

## Diary Date

The Friday Forum on Sept. 22<sup>nd</sup> will focus on The Rev. Charles Strong, A Pioneer Progressive of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Strong founded The Australian Church in 1885. Strong held that Christianity should follow the way of Love found in the life of Jesus, escape dogmas and infallible books, and present itself as a spiritual way of life that makes society a place of justice, goodwill and empathy for all.

## Reflections on the Church as Social Pioneer - Jonathan Barker

When I first read Julian Cribb's book "Surviving the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" something he said about humanity's ultimate survival skill - foresight - struck a bell. I recalled a little gem by the late renowned sociologist-theologian Richard Niebuhr, "The Church as Social Pioneer". Written in the wake of World War Two when humanity had to face up to the social "evils" of racism, nationalism and economic imperialism, Niebuhr proposes that to be true to its calling to forward the love of God and neighbour in the world, the church must take on the role of social pioneer. He contends that in every society there are the "sensitive and responsive" ones who are the first to step forward in response to the challenges of their times. Here is the connection - people of foresight, who can name a crisis, understand its causes and then be bold enough to take a lead in meeting that crisis, are surely "social pioneers" whose action will be for the sake of all.

Cribb "names" the greatest crisis facing us, the prospect of extinction of life on our planet because of human induced climate change. There are ten risks to civilisation – mass extinction, resource depletion, WMD, climate change, universal toxicity, food crises, population and urban expansion, pandemic diseases, dangerous new technologies and finally the capacity for humans to be self-deluded. But if the human capacity of foresight is matched with the will to act, then ultimate disaster may be averted. Again, those who respond for the sake of sustaining life on earth may be called social pioneers.

To me the Jesus movement that arose after the resurrection was a social pioneering of the peaceful alternative to Roman rule based on fear and an economy based on slavery. Although it took almost 1800 years for church and society to name slavery as truly against the will of God (how do we know what is against the will of God? Niebuhr says the clue is "innocent suffering"). It began with an enlightened few who pressed home the idea that slavery was "evil" thus shaming nations into abolishing slavery. I am sure we can all think of other examples over the past century when "social pioneers" acted to bring about freedoms that we may now take for granted.

Niebuhr is also clear that the institutional church itself may have to be awakened by "social pioneers" to act responsibly when faced with new threats to life. Looking back 500 years it took the courageous pioneering of the monk Martin Luther to make the breakthrough necessary to restore Christianity to its gospel centred identity, calling into question the ecclesiastical aberrations of the time.

Then Niebuhr says of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, "As the representative and pioneer of humankind the Church meets its social responsibility when in its own thinking, organisation and action it functions as a world society, undivided by race, class and national interests." Regarding the imminent threat to the continuation

## Reflections on the Church as Social Pioneer cont.

of life on earth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, has not the time come for the church locally and in Councils to take a lead in our society? The Papal Encyclical is one step forward – we await for responses from others.

Niebuhr concludes by proposing that social pioneering is “the highest form of social responsibility of the Church. It is the direct demonstration of love of God and neighbour... the radical demonstration of faith.” And when this happens, “the deed of Christ is reduplicated.” Maybe we could also say that when this happens the hope is the planet itself will witness a resurrection!

Jonathan Barker

Niebuhr, H. Richard *“The Responsibility of the Church for Society in The Gospel, the Church and the World”* ed K.S. Latourette N.Y. Harper & Bros 1946

### Exciting New Project under discussion for 2018

#### Seminary of the Third Age - Challenging Our Traditions

##### Rev Dr Norm Habel

The Seminary of the 3rd Age, like the University of the 3rd Age, is designed to provide people, regardless of their age, with an opportunity to explore, to question and to challenge their beliefs, their faith tradition and their religious worldviews. As in a seminary, the subjects explored will cover the Bible, theology, spirituality ethics and the mystery of life in our cosmos.



The materials offered in the Seminary of the 3rd Age are designed to enable free discussion and debate, regardless of religious background or tradition. This seminary, unlike some other seminaries, encourages people to re-think their past beliefs, to re-consider their past readings of the Bible, and to re-interpret what faith, spirituality and identity might mean amid the whirlwind of ideas and mysteries we now associate with the 21st Century.

Our vision is not to develop a new creed or belief system but to open a door, a door that leads to new possibilities, new dreams and new experiences in the wide world of ideas that should be explored in a contemporary seminary.