

Unitarian wins top award for cautionary book

A **Toronto Unitarian** has won Canada's top prize for non-fiction writing last year, the Governor-General's Literary Award. Thomas Homer-Dixon was recognized for *The Ingenuity Gap*, a hardback bestseller from 2001 that's now moving briskly in paper – quite a feat for a serious (though not academic) book about science, economics and current affairs.

His book – subtitled, *How Can We Solve the Problems of the Future?* – is a wide-ranging analysis of social, technical and environmental change, and our human attempts to cope with it. He



Thomas (Tad) Homer-Dixon

asks a basic question: can we generate practical ideas fast enough to solve the problems we create? He doubts that we can, and he terms this growing disparity between our problems and our ways of fixing them, *the ingenuity gap*.

When he's not writing op-ed pieces for the newspaper, or giving popular lectures, or advising governments about policy, Homer-Dixon

is a 45-year-old associate professor of politics, and Director of the Peace and Conflict Studies Program at the University of Toronto.

He's also a churchgoer, when he has a free Sunday. He has attended the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto for several years, and became a

member two years ago. "I liked the open-mindedness," he says, "the recognition that spiritual questions are important, although without a fixed creed. I also like a place that's comfortable with ambiguity and tolerant of diversity – a small minority of people are nowadays."

His book presents cutting-edge social science from many fields, but after hundreds of pages of analysis he concludes philosophically that "we need to rethink our most basic perceptions of our-

selves." *Ingenuity* has led us to think we can have it all, he argues, especially in the rich countries. "But we really need to think less about what we want, and to remember instead our place in the broader scheme of things; to feel occasionally some awe before nature; and to reintroduce some real humility and prudence into our collective consciousness."

Is this where religion comes in? "That was the state of my thinking then, but I have more ideas about this for my next book," he says. "In a lecture I gave at the church last spring I talked about three types of values: utilitarian values (our likes and dislikes), our moral values (our dealings with each other), and our spiritual or existential values – how we relate to the world around us.

"Most of us are impoverished when it comes to our existential values," he believes. "We ask the big questions about purpose and the universe until we're 10 years of age, then we forget

• *continued next page*

Our seven principles in haiku

BY STERLING HAYNES

1. My father's vision
Of worth and dignity sighted
In snowstorms.
2. See compassionate justice
In the rainbow, in the raindrop
Bursting.
3. Accept spirituality
Among the flowers, in trees
Eagles soaring.
4. Three, the perfect number
A trinity – truth, honesty, spirit
Unrestrained.
5. Democracy is conscience,
An ideal unburstable in the
Downpour.
6. Peace, liberty, justice,
A symbiosis with life planted
In earth.
7. A spider weaves the
interdependent web
In my brain, global thoughts
Synapsing.

Sterling Haynes is a member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna. A retired doctor, he has turned to creative writing in recent years to help recover from a stroke – to "find my words," he says.

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"We ask the big questions about purpose and the universe until we're about 10 years of age, then we forget all about them."

**GROWING VITAL
RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITIES
IN CANADA**



Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

CUC President

We stand on the shoulders of our ancestors

The implementation team has reported, the Board has endorsed its plan, and the annual meeting is fast approaching. In July the CUC will be taking over new responsibilities. Big changes are around the corner.

But, before we charge into the future I want to give thanks – to the commission that started this process, to the teams who’ve made it happen, to all those who’ve voiced their ideas and support – and to one family in particular.

When, Nancy Babbit was sent by the American Unitarian Association to Toronto in 1926, Victor Knight picked her up at the railway station. Fifteen years later Nancy Knight (by then married to Victor) began her first term as President of the Toronto church.

Twenty years after that, Dick Knight and Bunny Turner, two of the Knight’s children, were founding board members of the CUC. Forty-one years later, one of Nancy and Victor’s granddaughters, Alyson Schaefer, is still involved with the CUC, while Kim Turner, another granddaughter, is its past president. Her steady leadership guided us through the radical change in the relationship between the UUA – the descendant of the AUA that had sent her grandmother to Canada – and the CUC, which her mother and uncle helped to found.

An old West African proverb says that we stand on the shoulders of our ancestors. As the CUC becomes our central denomination, I know we’re standing on the shoulders of this family, and those of many others.

Two of the Knight’s grandchildren and five of their great grandchildren attend Toronto First where I minister. When I see the kids there I think of Kim’s two in Halifax. Then I smile because I have no doubt that Canadian Unitarian Universalism will be even stronger in another 40 years.

It comes down to how broadly we define ‘community’

• continued from page one
about them until we’re getting old – but by then it’s pretty late in the day!”

He doesn’t pretend to have all the answers, but Homer-Dixon now suspects the solutions to our problems will come from “how broadly we define our community.” He writes: “As ingenuity gaps widen the gulfs of wealth and power among us, we need imagination, metaphor and empathy more than ever, to help us remember each other’s essential humanity.”

Like everyone else, Homer-Dixon was shocked by Sept. 11 – but he wasn’t surprised. “I’d been thinking about these things for many years.” In fact, his book anticipates just these sorts of “attacks on the symbols of wealth and power.” The book’s central story is about a near-catastrophic U.S. plane crash. And as he flies over Kabul in a 747, he wonders about the “contrasting reality” of the ravaged country below and the “six-million part” machine that carries him – all of this written a year before Sept. 11.

After hearing the news, Homer-Dixon hammered out a Globe and Mail



feature that ran the next day, arguing we have to look at the “root causes” of terrorist acts if we want to understand them.

Although he analyzed Sept. 11

in a recent Foreign Affairs article (see below), Homer-Dixon doesn’t think we’ve really come to terms with it yet, especially the psychological impact. “I was astonished by how much we became one mind, with a heightened collective sensitivity that went on for weeks,” he says. He thinks the event is like a trauma in the family – “we get on with things, but it’s not over.”

Homer-Dixon recently volunteered to serve on the CUC’s new monitoring taskforce on the Sept. 11 crisis (a tricky proposition for a guy who already receives 150 emails a day!).

For more about Thomas Homer-Dixon and his writing see:

- www.ingenuitygap.com
- www.homerdixon.com
- www.foreignpolicy.com/issue_janfeb_2002/homer-dixon.html (“The Rise of Complex Terrorism”)

The Ingenuity Gap, is published by Knopf, 2001, \$22.95, ISBN 0-676-97296-9.



This women’s retreat is an annual event for Vancouver Island Unitarians, held each fall at the Bethlehem Centre in Nanaimo, B.C. (Renée Spakowsky photo).

Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna



Kelowna: the little fellowship that does it all

A poetry group – Japanese flower arranging – a youth group – a book club – an inter-faith homeless project – a partner church in Transylvania – a part-time minister (Rev. Wendy McNiven): the Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna has all this, and more. And they've got another big project on the go: hosting the CUC annual meeting this coming May.

With about 85 members and friends, Kelowna isn't the largest UU congregation in B.C., but they're surely one of the most active. Their members still manage to form a circle at the conclusion of each service, then sing "Carry the Flame" together. There's some debate about whether they've outgrown this custom, but "it's a pleasure to look around the room at the faces of all the people you consider friends," says President Glenda Malcolm. She wants to retain the practice.

Situated on Lake Okanagan in the interior of B.C., Kelowna has had a fellowship since the mid-1960s. It began when two Unitarian ministers visited the area and put an ad in the local paper looking for religious liberals. A year later, in 1966, 10 families affiliated their fellowship to the UUA.

It grew slowly, says Glenda Malcolm, until a bequest in 1994 allowed them to purchase a downtown church. "I discovered the fellowship about six years ago, again from an ad in the newspaper," says Malcolm. "I was a recovering Catholic, and was attracted to a community that combined spirituality, a liberal approach, and social justice."

Perhaps their most ambitious new project is "Inn from the Cold," a program they founded jointly with the Catholic church this winter. "We put up five to 25 homeless people per night, providing shelter and a warm breakfast," she says. The Inn is in the Catholic church, but the Kelowna fellowship contributes five teams of two volunteers. Each team either welcomes the people to the Inn at night and stays until morning, or serves them breakfast and cleans up the rooms afterwards.

"It's a brand new thing, and we're on a huge learning curve," says Malcolm. "Most of us aren't accustomed to homeless people, so we have to learn to serve

them in a non-judgemental way."

John Palmer, Malcolm's husband, is also a volunteer. "Every one of us was a little scared at the start," he says, "but you learn that they're people, just like you, but without as many opportunities. After awhile you get to know individuals, they say hi, you connect a little – it's very rewarding."

Kelowna is a prosperous community of 100,000. It was a shock when a homeless man – "Dumpster Dan he was called," says Palmer – froze to death last winter. It galvanized the church to establish the Inn. Now the United Church is thinking of joining as well.

The fellowship also has a youth group of 10 members. They'll get a shot in the arm as they host the youth conference that runs in conjunction with the CUC annual meeting. About 50 youth from across the country are expected for the gathering; they'll sleep and meet in the church building, although for showers they'll have to take a bus to the recreation centre.

"It's a marvellous opportunity for our church," says Palmer, who is also chair of the host committee for the annual meeting. "It's a chance to show the rest of the country what we're doing here, and I think that some of the CUC energy will get left behind as well."

Not that Kelowna seems to need it. Other fellowship projects this spring include publishing a book of poetry by their strong group of writers (see haiku example, front page); a Secret Pals RE project; maintaining the connection to their partner church in Czehetfalva, Transylvania; and a group that studies *ikebana*, the Japanese art of flower arranging.

They also have a serious congregational issue to decide. "We love our old building," says Palmer, "but it's not wheelchair accessible." Renovations could be very costly, and contain many unknowns, so a move may be necessary. "That means we have to do some long-term planning, in order to sort out all the different priorities." □

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*"It's a chance
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Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

We'll start by putting the 'u' in neighbour!

With all the changes happening this year, what's to become of our "principles and sources," which are a UUA creation? Actually, the UUA board will allow us to adopt them as our own. So at the annual meeting in May we'll bring forward an almost word-for-word rendition, only replacing "Unitarian Universalist Association" with "Canadian Unitarian Council." Oh – and adding a "u" to neighbour in the source related to Christian teachings!

That one little letter is a big deal to my way of thinking. I'm glad that one word needed a "u", and I'm glad it's "neighbour." After all, in spite of autonomy, we indeed remain neighbours with UU congregations to the south.

We'll also be presenting an official French translation of both the principles and sources – a first. This has been no easy task, and the simplified "children's version" is still in progress.

We've heard from many people who don't want to lose our seven principles. But we've also heard from those who think it's time to develop a distinctly Canadian statement. They argue that we're also a part of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, and have a long-time affiliation with the British denomination. They also think we should look at the many different statements from UU groups, and then start afresh. Rev. Stefan Jonasson says, "Every congregation needs to sit down and articulate the essence of its being."

At the May annual meeting we'll propose a three- to four-year process to do this work. Stefan predicts that we might add an eighth principle that's distinctly Canadian. Or, a CUC set of principles may wind up being very different from the set developed nearly 20 years ago by the UUA. In any case, they'll be ours.

And so this is how we begin change. Starting with "u".

Testimony

by Fran Dearman

Putting body, mind and spirit together

I was born and raised on Vancouver Island. Look into the green depths of an Emily Carr painting and there you will see the earthly paradise that shaped my spiritual awareness. I spent my early years "up island," near Cowichan Lake. We later moved down to the city of Victoria.

My family joined the Unitarian congregation there when I was eight. And on April 7, 2002, this beloved community that has been my spiritual home for over 40 years will ordain me into the Unitarian Universalist ministry. It's been a long road: sailor, scholar, seminarian. As I wait for ordination and a call to my first parish, wherever that may be, I take time to reflect on that long-echoing call to ministry.

Part of it is the people. I have been privileged to know many fine ministers, and their example is a significant element in my call. My first model of ministry was Marvin Evans, a lanky young Virginian who came to us, newly minted, in the 1960s. You could talk to Marvin about anything, and he would listen. He read neat books written by people like Martin Buber. He would preach about interesting stuff. He went sailing. Books and sailing and conversation; body, mind and spirit. This combination seemed to me a very good thing.

The people of many congregations have shared with me their vision of ministry and community and ways of being in the world. This is so precious,

the privilege of meeting with people when they are sharing their thoughts, their hopes, their dreams. A privilege and a joy.

I am so lucky. I get to do work that I love. It has taken me a long time to grow into someone I felt could do min-

istry well. I want to be a minister like the minister I saw in Marvin, and so many others. I want to be someone in touch with the physical reality of life as well as the abstractions, someone who can go where body and mind and spirit come together.

While I wait for my first parish I'm living at home with my family, taking a few courses at the university, doing a little supply preaching, and tweaking

the garden into a more nature-friendly posture. About once a month I hop the ferry to Vancouver and join the lower mainland ministers for lunch.

I walk a lot, and think about how a parish call will differ from internship. My Edmonton internship showed me that I am able to do this thing we call ministry, be this person we call a minister. I cannot imagine a life where I do not model this role in some way, somewhere where body, mind and spirit come together.

– Fran Dearman

Fran Dearman was recently received into preliminary fellowship after completing studies at the Vancouver School of Theology and internship at the two Edmonton congregations.



Emily Carr: *The Little Pine*

Letters to the Unitarian

OUR QUESTIONING FAITH

The events of September 11 and their aftermath challenge those who believe that ours is The Questioning Faith to ask some pretty bold questions on moral issues.

Question 1: In times of difficulty or error, what is the first question that should be asked? Is it – Why did they, or the fates, do that to me? Or is it – What is my, or my gang's, responsibility for the event? And then – What can I or my gang do to make things right?

Question 2: What are the moral limits of actions in defence of even such worthy causes as liberty and democracy? Great Powers have a bad habit of overstepping commonly perceived limits. UUs could prepare themselves for this debate by asking first – What are our moral limits? And in particular – What are the limits of our toleration? When should we cease to be tolerant, and become intolerant?

Question 3 – How do we deal with the fundamentalist challenge to the liberal theological and social doctrines we hold dear? To date, the denomination's reaction has been chiefly to ignore it.

September 11 suggests that this is no longer a viable position. What do we do now? Could it be that the relative calm of our waters puts Canadian UUs in a unique position to ask these questions?

– Ken Morrison, *Thunder Bay*

PROGRESSIVE CURRENTS

I read with great interest, in the last issue of the *Unitarian*, the item about the Sarnia-Port Huron Unitarian Fellowship performing the area's first public service of union for same-sex couples. I'm delighted to see Canadian Unitarian Universalism continue in the tradition that perhaps started in 1974 when the Winnipeg church joined Chris Vogel and Richard North.

It underlines how UUism embraced diversity and change long before it was trendy to do so, before the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and before subsequent court decisions and legislative changes. It also speaks well on the progressive current that exists in Winnipeg and which often finds expression and nurturing within the local UU congregation.

– Gilles Marchildon, *Winnipeg*

Unitarian People

FREDERICTON LOSES LAY CHAPLAIN

Adele Cogswell, who was a Lay Chaplain for the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton, died on January 26. Adele's illness kept her from completing her final term in Religious Studies at St. Thomas University, but based on her strong academic record, Adele's BA degree was awarded posthumously to her husband (poet Fred Cogswell) and family during the eulogy. Adele will be missed by all whose lives she touched – and those were many indeed.

MINISTERIAL CHANGES

Rev. Christine Hillman will be installed at Olinda on April 14. **Rev. Robert Gentile** has joined London Unitarian Fellowship as interim minister; he comes from New York City. **Fran Dearman** will be ordained on April 7. **Rev. Norm Stewart** was ordained by North Shore Unitarian last October.

HE WANTED SOCIAL JUSTICE

Morry Smith, a founder of the Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice, died last September at the age of 80. He was an active letter-writer (including several to the *Canadian Unitarian*) and social campaigner. He also twice ran for North York city council, and led a three-year campaign to save a local Toronto park from development. His memorial service was held at First Unitarian in Toronto. (Morry's wife, Miriam, has recently become the CUC's representative to Project Ploughshares.)

EATING A TON OF SOYBEANS?

The Unitarian Church of Edmonton, which is in the process of looking for a larger building, was recently given some gastronomic advice by their real estate agent, **Ed Basaraba**. In explaining the complicated process of arranging financing and making an offer he said: "You folks are looking at eating an entire elephant – you have to take it one bite at a time." (No word on how the church's vegetarians felt about his choice of metaphor!)



REX THOMSON PHOTO

Capital UU Congregation of Victoria recently gave Alan Dawson (left) and Elizabeth Atchison a thank-you gift for helping rejuvenate their church: a new painting by Ted Harrison (right), a local member and renowned Canadian artist (go to www.tedharrison.com to see his work).

Across the Country

SPYING ON UNITARIANS

The RCMP spied on the Unitarian Church of Vancouver during the Cold War, according to a recent story in the Vancouver Sun. When church members opposed the Vietnam War, protested against the nuclear arms race and called for diplomatic relations with China, they were watched by the police, says Indiana political scientist Steve Hewett (no relation to Rev. Phillip Hewett, who was the Vancouver church's minister at the time). He says the RCMP didn't think the church activists or leaders were spies, but did believe they could be seduced by communism, to "erode Canada from within."

FRUIT CAKE PROFITS

Christmas fruit cakes are the butt of many jokes, but don't believe that no one likes this rich, seasonal treat. The Unitarian Church of Calgary has turned their mass production into a major fundraiser. With the help of 14 volunteers, they produced 130 cakes last fall, raising almost \$1,500 for the congregation.

IS SILENCE GOLDEN?

Some members of the First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo are arriving 30 minutes before the regular church time – and not to set up coffee or prepare for RE classes. The congregation has established a 15-minute silent meditation as an antidote to the hustle and bustle of the regular Sunday routine.

THE ARGUMENTARIANS

At the Unitarian Church of South Peel, members are getting into arguments. In fact, the church has instituted The Argumentarians, a "not-like-minded" group of individuals who like to haggle about stuff. Here's their invitation to join the group: "If you are argumentative, have a sense of humour, don't take offence easily, and are strong-willed, this group may interest you." Now, if they could just agree on a meeting time.

Mouvement universaliste au Québec

Lighting the flame of Unitarianism in Quebec

Some tentative first steps to spark Francophone interest in Unitarianism may get a boost when the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) holds its huge General Assembly in Quebec City in June.

Although Unitarians and Universalists have worshipped in the province for almost 170 years, it's an Anglophone movement, practically unknown to the French-speaking majority. It's the dream of a few Quebec Unitarians to change all that.

Over the past two years, a *Mouvement universaliste au Québec* has been working quietly behind the scenes to prepare some basic resources in French, with help from CUC Growth Project coordinator, Rev. Wendy Luella Perkins. They hope that the publicity generated by the UUA meeting will introduce the idea of a liberal religion to a wider audience.

"My dream, after Quebec City, is to identify a nucleus of Francophones who are interested in Unitarianism," says Rev. Ray Drennan, of the Unitarian Church of Montreal. "They won't view it through an Anglophone lens, but through their own – we'll help them, and then get out of the way."

Last year, Drennan edited a new liturgical resource, with readings, ceremonies and songs presented bilingually. *Fulfilling a Dream* was published by the CUC in the spring, and has almost sold out its first printing.

In his foreword, Drennan recognizes the limitations of the translation approach. He says the texts, mindsets and culture "are English in many subtle and not-so-subtle ways." On the other



hand, "we had to start somewhere," and the 114-page handbook is a concrete introduction to the faith, with its thinkers, readings and songs in high-quality translation.

The next step was to create a Francophone web site, at www.uuqc.ca, which showcases the denomination in electronic form. Drennan says the committee worked hard to identify spiritual, non-Christian terms that Francophones might search for, like *libre-penseur* (free thinker), and *libérale* (liberal). These were embedded in the web site so that people conducting Internet searches would be likely to find the Unitarian resource.

For the large Quebec meeting in June, Drennan has persuaded the UUA to translate some of the key Unitarian brochures into French. As well, he's asking the UUA to hire a Francophone media consultant, so the organization can work with the Quebec media.

Drennan's dream of an indigenous Quebec Unitarianism may still be a long way off. "We're on the ground floor," he says, "and we're doing it from the outside, but it's a necessary first step to reaching Francophones who are Unitarian and Universalist in heart and mind." □

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"We'll identify Francophone Unitarians, help them, then get out of the way."

Quebec City General Assembly

The ironies and attractions of the Quebec G.A.

When the UUA selected Quebec City as the location of its 2002 General Assembly, it probably didn't foresee all the ironies the meeting would entail. (The annual gathering attracts up to 4,000 participants, mostly from the U.S. In order to book hotels and conference space, the location is chosen over three years in advance, and has traditionally been held in Canada once per decade.)

The meeting runs from June 20–24, 2002 at the Quebec City Convention Centre. The final day of the GA is St. Jean Baptiste, Quebec's national holiday. And less than a week after the del-



H.Y. TESSIER / TESSIMA PHOTO

Pop culture can contain deep truths

• *continued from back page*


ton to do his theology degree. In his thesis he developed a tool for pulling religious elements out of popular works. "I call it my four Ms," he explains. "I look for myth, metaphor, midrash and muses." (*Midrash* is a Jewish term meaning commentary on the scriptures, which Pater interprets as "the updating of sacred tradition.")

He believes that Unitarians can find spiritual fulfilment in many places – not just serious texts or high culture.


egates return home the CUC will begin taking over many of the services now provided to Canadians through the UUA districts. It will be the last GA ever for many Canadians, and certainly the last one to be held in Canada. A final irony: Quebec City does not have a Unitarian congregation, and the entire province has just three, mostly Anglophone churches.

None of which means the Quebec City meeting will be any less exciting or dynamic than usual. The lack of local contacts means that the UUA will contract some of the services normally provided by a local committee. But the GA volunteer coordinator, Barb Wallace of Hamilton, is still looking for 170 people to do jobs like ushering, childcare, office work, transportation, electronic communications and accessibility.

Volunteers work 24 hours during the conference, but get their \$240 US registration fee waived; they also receive a T-shirt and attend a volunteer's party. (It is possible to volunteer and attend GA as a delegate, although some plenaries and work assignments may conflict.)

For more information on the GA, see www.uua.org/ga. For more information about volunteering, contact Barb Wallace before Mar. 31 at 905-526-6154 or barbwallace@cogeco.ca. 

"Sarah McLachlan's music is full of religious metaphor," he says. "So are the films of Norman Jewison." He's aware that Unitarians have traditionally looked for inspiration from many sources. "But I'm not sure there's an awareness that pop culture can contain deep truths as well."

Pater is also part of a CUC committee on Canadian contextual theology – trying to answer the question, is there a uniquely Canadian expression of Unitarian Universalism? "My hunch is that we have to look in new places in order to answer the question," he says, "well beyond the boundaries our own church history." 



Katie Stein Sather

UUA Trustee from Canada

UUA clears the way for our march towards autonomy

UUA board meetings are usually a combination of details and big issues; here's a quick rundown of decisions we took at our recent January meeting.

Of first concern to Canadians were decisions regarding the CUC:

- The UUA approved for consideration at the June General Assembly, Bylaw and Rule changes necessitated by the 2001 CUC-UUA agreement.
- The position of trustee at large from Canada (my position) will end, and the list of Districts was amended.
- District Trustees who happen to be Canadian will fill out their terms of office as originally elected.
- UUA Districts will be composed of U.S. congregations only.

The board heard about the CUC's new service plan. They had questions and concerns, but are hopeful about our future. They also gave us permission to adopt the UUA Statement of Principles and Sources for use in Canada.

Everyone is getting ready for June's General Assembly in Quebec City. Stephen Lewis will give a major address, along with the usual plethora of workshops, meetings and presentations.

Big changes are underfoot for the UUA administration. Beacon Press, the UUA publishing house, is in financial dire straits, and the board is considering just how much of the operating budget (if any) should subsidize it.

I've been very impressed with the UUA's approach to socially responsible investing (www.uua.org/finance/sri/). They practice shareholder advocacy, raising issues of concern to companies in which they hold stock.

Throughout the meeting, there was a sense of caring for both the association and all its manifestations, and each other as individuals. It is inspiring and energizing.

The Canadian Unitarian is published quarterly by the Canadian Unitarian Council / Conseil unitarien du Canada

Editorial Policy – The Canadian *Unitarian* is the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Unitarian Council. It is mailed to all Canadian members for whom the CUC has a current address. The *Unitarian* reports on newsworthy events in the denomination, including the annual meeting each spring. It attempts to reflect all segments of Unitarianism and Universalism in Canada. We welcome submissions of articles, photos and news releases to the *Unitarian*, however, publication is at the editor's discretion based on the criteria of newsworthiness, relevance to readers, length and balance. The *Unitarian* attempts to publish all letters to the editor, although they may be edited for brevity and clarity.

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Printed on Canadian-made recycled paper (30 per cent post-consumer fibre)

Deadline for next issue **March 29, 2002**

Canada Post Agreement #1774530
Returns to: CUC, 55 Eglinton Avenue E., #705, Toronto, ON, M4P 1G8

Unitarian Theology

Finding spirituality in popular works of culture

Is Harry Potter a new religion for our time? (Can we find spiritual meaning in the highest-grossing film of the year?) John Pater thinks so. His passion is scouring the world of pop culture for modern religious expression. And he thinks that current film, music and books have plenty to offer, if we know how to look.

"J.K. Rowling imitates Christian and Greek mythology in Harry Potter," argues Pater, "but she also strays from it. Her hero is a saviour, but he isn't divine. Evil still roams the earth, in the character of Voldemort, who Harry once vanquished. But Harry must keep fighting him, not with super divine powers, but with what he learns at school. So our hero becomes more like Nelson Mandela than like Christ."

Pater thinks the Harry Potter series is a myth for modern times. "It's not triumphalistic, like Greek and Christian myths. There is no victory for all time, but there are small victories. In our world, we have evil in the form of terrorists, holocausts, plane crashes and bombings – all manifestations of destructive, awful force. And no supernatural messiah is coming to the rescue. We are left to our own devices – we are our own saviours."

Pater, a CBC radio journalist, recently preached about Harry Potter at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton (accompanied by music from the musical *Joseph* and the film *Shrek*). He led a Saturday workshop there on religion in movies. And he's co-leading a workshop at the upcoming CUC annual meeting on pop culture, with intern minister Meg Roberts. Did we



Harry Potter: we're our own saviours

mention Pater is a lay person, albeit with a master's degree in theology?

It was his own religious "conversion" that led him to suspect that we should look to the popular world for religious meaning. "I'm a Unitarian

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"I'd say I'm a Unitarian because of Peter Gzowski! His interviews moved me from narrow Christianity to Unitarianism."

because of the everyday culture I was exposed to as a young adult – not because of theology, or the church I was raised in," says Pater, who grew up in the conservative Christian Reformed Church.

"In fact, I'd say that I'm a Unitarian because of Peter Gzowski! In my early 20s I loved hearing

artistic Canadians from across the country on *Morningside*. It's what moved me from a narrow Christianity into a broader pluralistic religion."

Pater spent four years in Iqaluit, NWT, as a morning radio show host. After that, he stayed at home for seven years, raising children, then returned to school at St. Stephen's in Edmon-

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