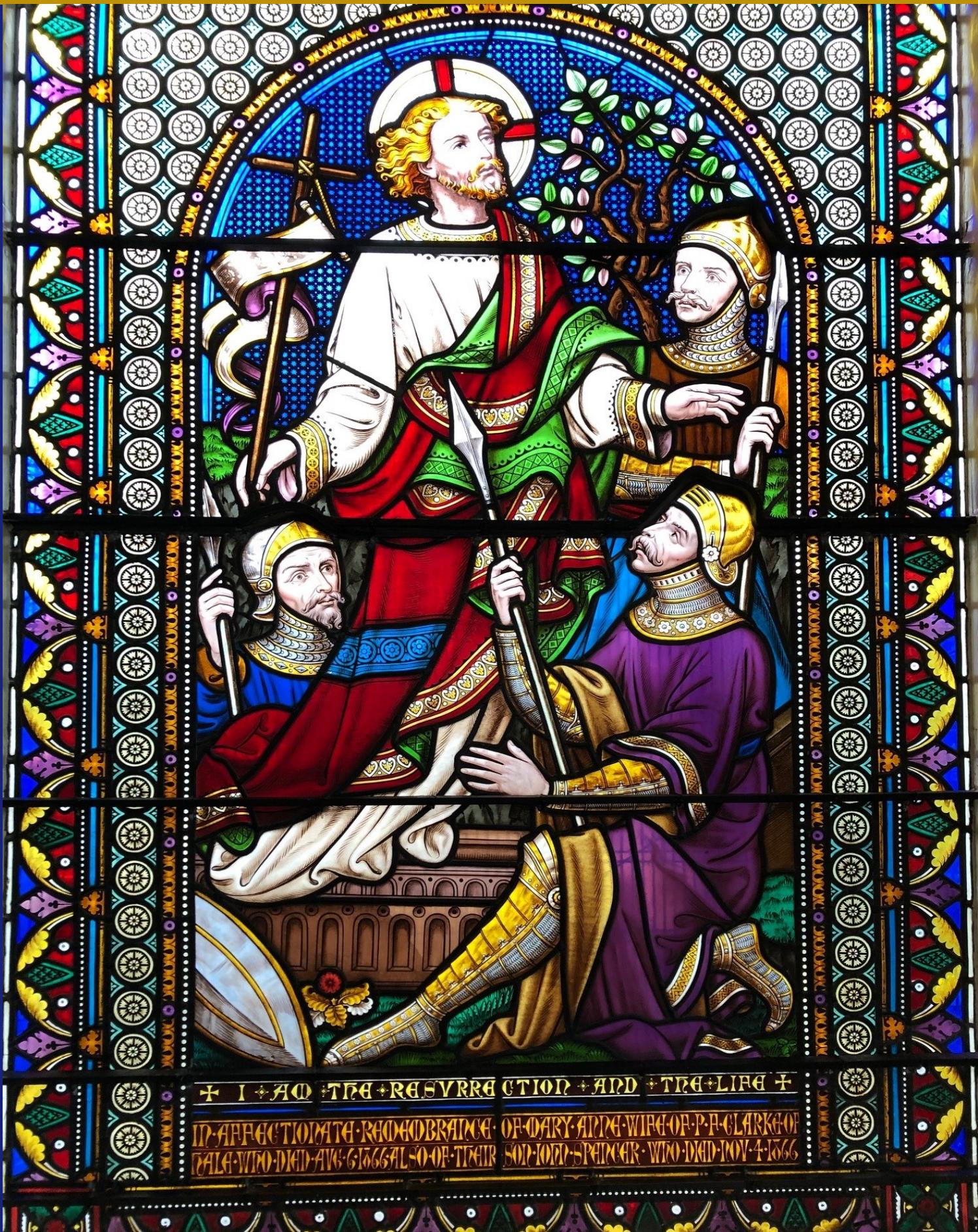


THE LIBERAL CHRISTIAN HERALD



The Unitarian Christian Association seeks to strengthen and revitalise the liberal Christian tradition.



The Liberal Christian Herald

Editor

Jeff Gould

Design

Phil Waldron

Unitarian Christian Association

Registered Charity No 101 777 1

Subscribe

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Est. 1991

Printed by

Wheatsheaf Print

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Editorial

By Jeff Gould



The Unitarian Christian Association held its Annual General Meeting on Saturday, 9 March 2019 at Hale Chapel, Hale Barns (a member congregation), in Cheshire. The attendance was very healthy, and a good number of those persons who took part in the afternoon's proceedings were at a UCA event for the very first time. The worship service and the business of the meeting both reflected a vibrant organisation that wishes to offer itself as a resource to the wider body of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. Participants commented on the need for an articulate voice of liberal Christianity within a movement that values diversity and integrity in the area of religious identity.

It is appropriate at this time to acknowledge the retirement of Derek McAuley, who has served the General Assembly as its Chief

Officer for a period of almost ten years.

Derek's recognition of the work of the UCA and his active support of its presence within the denomination were greatly appreciated by its members, especially at the time of the 25th-

anniversary celebrations in 2016. We wish him well in his retirement, confident that he will continue to contribute his time and efforts to promoting a considered

faith.

The UCA is equally pleased to extend a warm welcome to the newly-appointed Chief Officer, Elizabeth Slade, and hopes that she will feel able to approach this affiliated society as a potential aide in understanding and serving the General Assembly. The UCA is always willing to engage with individuals, congregations, district associations and the entire denomination in a spirit of helpfulness and mutual respect.

"The UCA is equally pleased to extend a warm welcome to the newly-appointed Chief Officer, Elizabeth Slade"

The Unitarian Christian Association Summer Gathering

Saturday, 20 July 2019

12 noon until 4 pm

Stratford Unitarian Free Christian Church
West Ham Lane
Stratford
London
E15 4PH

www.ukunitarians.org.uk/stratford

Join the members and friends of the Unitarian Christian Association for an afternoon of worship, fellowship and discussion on the living witness of liberal Christianity in the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches today.

Programme

12 noon-Lunch

1 pm-Worship

2 pm-Group Exploration of 'Who We Are' in our congregations

4 pm-Afternoon Tea

There will be no charge for taking part, but numbers would be appreciated for catering purposes. Please contact Jeff Gould: 01625

402952/07989 858963, jeffrey-lanegould1959@talktalk.net



Church of England and Unitarian

By John Bunyan

The Revd Jeff Gould has kindly invited me to write something, as a UCA member, near the **60th** **anniversary of my ordination** as a deacon of the Church of England on March 22nd 1959, (ordained priest on March 20th 1960). The ministries of priest/pastor/overseer/bishop of course involve greater responsibilities but the order of deacon reminds me that I was first called to be a servant, a minister, after the example of the Servant, Jesus.

I grew up a (happily) very different world to that of today. I was taught to pray – and to read - by my mother (a quiet Anglican). My brothers and I attended Sunday kindergarten from the age of four, learning of Jesus, healer and friend (*not of his death*), and after that, Sunday School where a half-hour lesson preceded BCP Matins – home before the sermon. I enjoyed “scripture” in our state primary school, and after confirmation, became a Sunday School teacher and server, also attending early Communion and Evensong. All that, and involvement in a youth fellowship, in a church with a simple, moderate tradition now rare in our increasingly intolerant Sydney Diocese, left a life-long impression. Then from my teens and for some decades I gained an appreciation of the Anglican Catholic tradition at its best. Later, **Bishop Colenso**, **Florence Nightingale**, **Dean Stanley**, and **Percy Dearmer** have been among my heroes.

In addition to National Service and initial university studies, for five years I was a student minister on Sundays and one afternoon a week in Sydney parishes, in the first (at 18!) preaching twice a Sunday, usually at the branch church. Then after one year of high school teaching, with three subjects in Th.L. but without any college training, I was **ordained** deacon in 1959, priest in 1960, by

Grammar School (“Grammar Schools” in Australia the equivalent of English “Public Schools”).

Then until retirement in 2001, I served in schools, parishes, a theological college, and a cathedral in Australia, parishes in England, my final post that of rector for 22 years. A few years before retirement I began to assist as an **honorary hospital chaplain** and at 83 continue in that post and also as an ex-services chaplain.

Post-graduate study brought qualifications from Sydney, London University’s Institute of Education, Durham University (St Chad’s College), Lambeth, San Francisco Theological Seminary, and finally Sydney again.

Culturally conservative (for example, in relation to education, literature, history, and our constitutional monarchy, and – unlike most liberal Christians, in relation to marriage), I have long retained my childhood love of the Book of Common Prayer, yet like many, such as Sir Alister Hardy, have wished for its revision in the light of modern Scriptural and scientific understanding. This drew me about forty years ago to **King’s Chapel, Boston** (a long-time member now). King’s, founded in 1686, became after the Revolution America’s first unitarian church, influenced by England’s **Theophilus Lindsey**, still using a revision (now the 8th) of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer. Its web-site today shows its lively character, less cerebrally unitarian than in the past, and more ecumenical. The Ten Commandments, Lord’s Prayer, and Apostles’ Creed remain in its sanctuary, and there is a cross over the Communion Table. The Creed is not read in services but these are seen as symbols of the Chapel’s faith, however individual members interpret them. Sadly, to my mind, most of the other US unitarian churches, including historic parish churches established by the Puritans, are no longer Christian but theist or humanist.

In 19th century England there were many unitarian Christian churches which also used revisions of the BCP, and the late **Dennis G.Wigmore-Beddoes** wrote a fine book about the association between English Unitarians and broad churchmen in the Established Church, ***Yesterday's Radicals*** (available again). Today when fundamentalist forces are strong, every link between unitarian Christians and other liberal and moderate Christians I think is important. (There are no unitarian Christian churches now in Australia.)

My studies and experience have steadily led me to become a convinced unitarian (myself believing and un-believing) but there have been other **unitarian Anglicans**, from philanthropist Thomas Firmin (1632-97) to some of the 19th and 20th century British theologians lately disparaged by the “orthodox”. I cannot find any convincing foundation for the doctrines of Incarnation, Atonement, and Trinity in any literal sense. We know too much, for example, about biology, and not enough about the historic Jesus to build a basis for those, though Maurice Casey, David Flusser and R.Steven Notley, Geza Vermes and others show us much of the **Jewish Jesus**. New scientific understanding of our bodies and how they change in our lifetime and at death, shown, for example, by David Suzuki, I think makes *impossible* a virginal conception or a physical resurrection. Jesus was not an un-sinning liberal Protestant, but the heart of his teaching and that of the Hebrew prophets are still our best guide, and his ministry and the manner of his death still our best motivation.

The case for unitarian Christianity I think has been best put by **A.Richard Kingston** who felt he had to leave the Methodist ministry because of his convictions. (In the last booklet below I argue why I think I can *remain* a minister of my Australian Church!) He joined the Free Presbyterian Church of Ireland and his book, ***God in One Person*** (now reprinted) is indispensable reading for unitarian Christians and recommended for others, clearly written, clearly argued. Beyond

these matters, raised very much recently, are considerations of what we can mean by the **one “God”**.

But in addition to that are other concerns, and above all the environment. I am a member here of **Sustainable Australia**, a small, moderate political party, and in the UK of **Population Matters**, but all these concern are reflected in my hymns and in my sonnets!

It is expensive to send books overseas, but I can freely send recent books in **Word attachments** to any who would like to see them. Contact : bunyanj@tpg.com.au). They all in one way or another reflect my unitarian Christianity. Formal prayer in any of these is addressed to God alone, but there is informal, poetic address to Jesus (as there is in the excellent hymn book, ***Hymns of Faith and Freedom***) :

Conservation Common Prayer and Communion
(BCP services radically revised) 92 pp

Sing Heart and Mind : A Coverdale Daily Psalm-Book : The English Classic Clarified (112 BCP psalms or portions of psalms, for 31 days of the month, a more manageable “diet”, the BCP text unchanged but with unobtrusive corrections and explanations, plus various notes) 148 pp

PAR for the course : prayers and readings for the Christian year (a radical revision of the BCP Communion lectionary, with 400 AV or RSV based passages printed in full, and 400 collects (St John 3.16 is a no doubt controversial omission) 248 pp strongly bound, clearly written – corrections and development in the Word attachment

God in the Golden Evening : A Sydney Episcopalian's Sixty Poems (and more!) 60 pp

Sing High Down Under : Sixty of the Australian Hymns of John Bunyan 60 pp

The Gospel of the Prophet Jesus a full-colour tract 8 pp

The End of the Journeying : Sydney Anglican Val- edictory Essays 26 pp

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
Registered Charity No 101 777 1

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Catherine Fozard (*see opposite page*)

The Spirit of God Dwells in You

By Douglas Reynolds

The text of a sermon that was preached to the Unitarian congregations of Kidderminster and Dudley in 2017 and 2018, respectively.

Shortly after completing my minister's training, I was asked to conduct a funeral service at the Coseley Unitarian Church, to be followed by a committal at the cemetery on Sedgeley Beacon. I went from the church to the cemetery in one of the funeral cars, sitting next to the driver. The driver asked me what Unitarians believe. I said something about reason and conscience; and not excluding anyone, and that it was complicated to explain. The driver replied that he was a Methodist and could give me a good idea what he believed. What did I believe? As a Methodist, he knew what he believed; as Unitarians, what do we believe?

At this point I need to invoke the Moravian Church. Why are the Moravians key to the Methodists? After attending a Moravian meeting, John Wesley, an Anglican clergyman, felt his 'heart strangely warmed', leading to his bringing the Methodist movement into being. What particular feature do the Moravians and Unitarians share? They have no doctrinal tests for membership. I had a friend who was a Moravian; she lived in the Moravian colony at Okbrook near Derby. I was explaining Unitarianism to her. 'It sounds restrictive to me,' she said. A member of a church whose worship and belief are similar to those of Methodism found Unitarianism restrictive. Clearly, our openness of belief is not the unique selling point our publicity tells us it is! So what are the features that do differentiate us?

The inevitable first thing to look at is what 'it says on the tin': Unitarian. Not a way of belief that is peculiar to us, nor one which we as individuals necessarily hold, but one which, for better or for worse, defines us. We belong to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. The word Unitarian means someone who believes in the unipersonality of God. In this sense it can be used of Jesus, Muslims and many of us. The well-known Charles Wesley hymn, which refers to 'those cursed Unitarians', refers to Muslims, not us. In fact, the Wesleys had generally good relations with our predecessors and when unable to preach in Anglican churches, preached in ours.

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity holds that God is three in one--one God but containing three persons: God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. Unitarian Christianity arose from the inability of our ancestors to find justification for belief in the Trinity in the Bible. Since the Bible does not support the Trinity, thoughtful Christians throughout the years have rejected it.

The early Ebinonites or Poor Men, mainly of the area east of the River Jordan, held a reduced doctrine of Christ, that he was the human son of Joseph and Mary, and that the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove lighted on Jesus at his baptism. Adoptionism arose in early Greek theology and again in Spain in the late 8th century, and in the 12th century, when it was put forward by Peter Abelard and others. They held that Jesus was only adopted as God's son when the Holy Spirit descended upon him at baptism [Mark 1.11; Luke 3.22; Matthew 3.16; John 1.32].

In the third century, Paul of Samosata (Bishop of Antioch) was condemned by Synod (c. 266-8 CE) for expressing Unitarian views. At the end of the 4th century, Nestorius (the Patriarch of Constantinople) was attacked for expressing the view that there were two separate persons in the divine Christ: the one divine, the other human, rather than the orthodox view that Christ was a single person, at once God and man.

In the 16th century Reformation, radical reformers failed to find the Trinity in the Bible, leading to Unitarian churches being founded in Poland and Transylvania. The 18th century Enlightenment brought about Latitudinarianism in parts of the English Church, and Samuel Clark produced a non-Trinitarian version of the Book of Common Prayer, and in 1774, Theophilus Lindsey founded the first church for non-Trinitarian worship, in Essex Street in London.

The lifetimes of many of us have seen the publication of the works of Karl Rahner and Wolfhart Pannenberg, J.A.T. Robinson's *Honest to God; The Myth of God Incarnate*; Geza Vermes' *Jesus the Jew*, and A.N. Wilson's *Jesus*.

We see that the Trinity is constantly under attack, but although most members of Unitarian churches, whether they define themselves as Christian or not, reject it. It is a subject in which we have largely lost interest, despite it being the thing by which the outside world defines us. This is, perhaps, unfortunate, since research tells us that the fastest growing churches have been non-Trinitarian, but they are not ours, rather they are traditions such as the Christadelphians and the Jehovah's Witnesses.

Unitarian rejection of the Trinity, however, does not mean that we deny finding the divine in Jesus. Shortly after I came to Unitarianism, the Rev Keith Hill preached about Joseph Priestly and the growth of Unitarian thinking. Afterwards, I spoke to Keith, commenting on how we had dropped belief in the divinity of Jesus. 'No, no, you've got it wrong', he said.

Going on, he commented, 'I made exactly the same mistake when I became a Unitarian. I said the same to an older minister who told me, 'You are making a classic error. Unitarians do not deny the divinity of Jesus, rather they affirm the divinity of all men and women'.

Having learned this the hard way, I kept it in mind, and as a student minister, intended to use it for my sermon when leading Sunday worship in the chapel at Manchester College, Oxford. But if I was to preach it, I needed to know how such thinking arose, so I asked the ministry tutor and college principal, the Rev. Bruce Findlow. Bruce thought for a moment and then said, 'That is the thinking in John McLachlan's book, *The Divine Image*'. So I skim-read through *The Divine Image*. There was plenty of thought on the subject, but no clue as to the basis of the idea. That evening, for some reason, I went into the college chapel and there was the answer looking me in the face. It was in the Edward Byrne-Jones stained-glass window behind the communion table: 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?' I reported this to Bruce, who looked it up in his Concordance. He quickly located it as First Corinthians, chapter three, verse 1b: 'Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's spirit dwells in you?'

Some years later, I was on holiday in Torquay and attended a Sunday afternoon service at the Unitarian Church led by their minister, the Rev. Patricia Wormersley, who had been a fellow-student at Manchester College, Oxford. After the service, there was tea, which some of us took outside to drink. An elderly woman came up the street and asked some of the congregation if it was true that we did not believe in the divinity of Jesus. 'Yes, it is true', they began to affirm. I interjected, 'No, we do not deny the divinity of Jesus, we believe in the divinity of all men and women'. I then went on to explain that this understanding had originated in the writings of the Apostle Paul, and quoted the passage from First Corinthians to her. She went away satisfied and thoughtful.

Unitarians do then, generally experience God as indwelling—what Quakers would describe as 'the inner light', or Trinitarian Christians as the Holy Spirit.

I have probably spent far too long on rejection of the Trinity but as 'it is what it says on the tin', it is important, even if we no longer care about the issue. It is important that we both understand and can explain the standpoint. The major difference between Unitarian and mainstream Christianity is actually that we are Pelgian. Pelagian thinking takes its name from Pelagius, a Briton who taught in Rome in the late fourth and early fifth centuries. Pelagian theology holds that a human can take the initial and fundamental step toward salvation by his or her own efforts, apart from God's grace. Humanity's freedom to choose by virtue of its God-given nature is emphasised. Pelagian thinking can be seen to come from those passages in the Bible that exhort choosing good works and caring for each other, the care of the stranger. The Letter of James comes to mind: 'So faith, by itself, if it has no works, is a dead thing.' [James 2.17]

This translates directly into, 'Unitarians believe in deeds, not creeds'.

Pelagius' supporter, Rufinur the Syrian, went on to deny the transmission of original sin. That is to say, Adam and Eve's sin of rebellion against God was not passed on to their descendants. This can be taken from the prophet Ezekiel, chapter 18, verses 1-20, and Jeremiah 31.30, and means that humanity is not inherently bad. Again, this is a Unitarian point of belief. Humanity not being thought inherently bad has two results: 1. It is fit to be God's temple; God's spirit can dwell in humanity, and 2. Humanity does not need to be redeemed by Christ's death. We see that the thinking of Ezekiel, Paul and James fit together in a coherent whole, which stands over and against mainstream Christian theology.

Unitarians have not only taught that humanity is not basically bad and is capable of saving itself by its own actions, they have also held that at the end, all will be saved. This belief in the salvation of all souls, or universal salvation, was more common in the United States of America, and gave rise to the Universalist Church. The Unitarian and Universalist Churches believed in universal salvation, and both being non-creedal, they merged into the Unitarian-Universalist Association in 1961. There were differences between the two traditions, and it has been said that whereas the Universalists thought God was too good to damn them, Unitarians thought that they were too good to be damned. The Universalist tradition did exist as a separate entity in Great Britain. St. Mark's Church in Edinburgh was founded as a Universalist church.

No, we do not deny the divinity of Jesus, we believe in the divinity of all men and women'.

We see from these points of differentiation that there is a distinct Unitarian form of Christianity. It is a Christianity that sets aside the doctrine of the Trinity, experiences God as indwelling the human, is Pelagian in that it affirms the fundamental goodness of humanity, and exhorts good deeds, not creeds. It is universalist, as it affirms salvation for all. Like Christianity in general, it originated in the teachings, ministry, and ethics of the historical Jesus. It values the relationship between Jesus and God, and his faithfulness unto death. The phenomenon of the Resurrection is left to the individual to interpret according to one's understanding of the event. It also takes on board the religious insights of the evangelists, the Apostle Paul and the authors of the other documents of the New Testament together with the insights given in the Old Testament, but at the same time, it is freed from the shackles of discarded dogma. It remains open to reason, science, the individual conscience and the insights of other faiths, and that of religious humanism.

Religious seekers can only come to such beliefs by thinking about them and having the intellectual honesty to hold on to them, rather than accepting mainstream doctrine. As such, Unitarianism can be seen not as non-Christian, but as a form of better Christianity, rooted as firmly in the Bible as other churches, but also open to science, reason, and other sources of divine inspiration. It is a tertiary faith, to which thinking people move.

At the start of this address, I invoked the Moravians in order to demonstrate a point about non-creedal churches. Being non-creedal allows for a latitude and drift in members' beliefs. Non-creedal churches can accordingly be seen to sit on a continuum, which extends from those who have not moved, to those who have moved so far that they have fallen off. At one end, we may place the Moravians. There is no drift with them, as they have not moved in 400 years. At the other end, we could put the South Place General Baptist Church in London. They have moved from a General Baptist position to a more radical Unitarian one. They adopted their own hymnbook before ceasing to sing hymns, then squeezed out the religious elements of their meetings,

before deciding that they were not a church, and became the South Place Ethical Society. Today, they are just Conway Hall.

We are obviously somewhere on that continuum. We have seen what distinct Unitarian belief has been, and we know our own thoughts. So where do we place ourselves on that continuum? Where do we want to be on it? When we answer these questions, we can answer the question that was put to me by the funeral car driver, and we will articulate not only the 'how' but also the 'what' in which we believe. Then, we would have 'something to sell', and be able to sell it to those seekers who come in.

Coming Home

By Francis Elliot-Wright

I don't recall the opening hymn in the worship preceding the U.C.A.'s Annual General Meeting in Hale Barns, Cheshire, in March. But I'll never forget singing it. I had been attending Unitarian services for several months but this was the first time, since leaving my old Trinitarian church, that I was worshiping with people who believed they were singing to someone, and the experience moved me to tears of joy and relief. The worship was serious, the fellowship warm, and my spirit soared.

Unitarianism just hadn't felt right until I met the U.C.A. I was on spiritual starvation rations and now I felt free: to be a follower of Jesus, a worshiper of God, *and* a Unitarian.

A couple of years ago, after 20 years in various non-conformist churches (United Reformed, Congregational, Baptist) I concluded that I had to quit Christianity as I knew it.

I'd thought of leaving mainstream Christianity before, and came close to it a few years earlier when it dawned on me that, as far as same sex relationships were concerned, the church was now less progressive than the Conservative Party. I attended some Unitarian services, but couldn't quite make the move stick and went back to a mainstream, Trinitarian church.

What was it that stopped me making the move back then? As much as I wanted to make a clear statement on LGBT equality I just wasn't ready to accept that Jesus wasn't God. I'd been told that you could be a Trinitarian Unitarian, but this was news to the Unitarians I met at my local chapel!

But the bigger problem was that, never mind different opinions about the nature of Jesus, all mention of God seemed to have vanished from those Unitarian services I attended. I'd expected a significant agnostic or atheist presence, but was shocked by the almost total absence of any Christian element.

To be fair, the Bible did get mentioned in services, but it only in negative terms: '*This is what we used to believe, but obviously that's not possible any more*' seemed to be the message. Some tangents from scripture verses led to statements on contemporary issues, but it was hard to see that the Bible had been at all necessary, or even that useful in making the point.

This wasn't how it was supposed to be. From my online research I'd thought that I'd be right at home in Unitarianism. I expected a broad, inclusive approach that was nevertheless rooted in liberal Christianity. This was more like a humanist congregation, a social justice sing song with a sprinkling of spirituality drawn from nature and eastern religions.

It was a stark choice, between spirituality and ethics: I could be part of a faith community in which Jesus, God and the Bible were taken seriously; or I could join a community that had an acceptable ethical position on sexuality. And I had thought that Unitarianism would offer both!

So I chose spirituality and went back to mainstream, Trinitarian Christianity. Within the church there were others maintaining a dissenting, liberal position on LGBT issues, and if I stayed I could be fed spiritually within a community of believers. As uncomfortable as this was it was preferable to spending the rest of my life sitting through humanist services trying to think private religious thoughts.

But then something happened that persuaded me that I had to leave the church, whether there was an available spiritual home elsewhere or not. I read a critique of the New Testament from a Jewish perspective and it was a shattering experience. It suddenly struck me that centuries of antisemitism, culminating in the Holocaust, was the fruit of the New Testament. One couldn't have happened without the other. It was a dreadful realisation.

I'd been part of the church for over twenty years, as a church member, then as a theology student, minister and itinerant preacher, and it seemed like I'd been spreading a dangerous message.

I looked everywhere within Christianity for a theology that wasn't tinged with antisemitic implications, but found nothing. After two years of searching I finally, and forlornly accepted that it could not be done within mainstream, Trinitarian Christianity and so I left the church. I never, for a second, stopped believing in God, but I thought I had to ditch Jesus and the whole of the New Testament.

In theory I should have gone straight to the Unitarians at this point. After all, I'd come quickly to the conclusion that the only way my faith could survive this new awareness of Christian antisemitism was for it to be reformulated within a Unitarian framework. But my previous experience of Unitarianism had been so uninspiring that instead, I stayed away and volunteered for a charity that addresses antisemitism.

But faith and spirituality is not something you can or should keep to yourself, I had to find a faith community to be part of, even if it was virtually Godless. So I decided to give Unitarianism another try. As before, the people were very pleasant and friendly. My wife, and all my friends and family are humanists, so Unitarian humanists feel like my tribe, and it was hard to disagree with anything that was spoken or sung about in services. But it wasn't feeding me spiritually. And since my last foray into Unitarianism things seemed to have become overwhelmingly humanist - with only the faintest references to anything remotely Christian.

What a sad state of affairs this was. I couldn't go back to the mainstream church, so here I was, in the only place I could be, and I wasn't happy.

I asked myself whether Unitarianism confirmed the very worst evangelical suspicions of liberal Christianity - that it collapses when it breaks free. Is it just a phase that Christians go through on their way to losing their faith altogether? Are liberal Christians liberals first, and Christians second?

Or worse, they don't believe in God at all. The suspicion is that they just happen to find themselves in a vaguely Christian culture so use Christian language to support what is basically humanism. The only thing that keeps these liberal Christians from descending to pure humanism is that they stay in a church whose flavour is enhanced by genuine believers. The suspicion is that they just happen to find themselves in a vaguely Christian culture so use Christian

language to support what is basically humanism. The only thing that keeps these liberal Christians from descending to pure humanism is that they stay in a church whose flavour is enhanced by genuine believers.

Well, Unitarianism was the place to find out if this was true or not. The result? Often it is, but not always. While there are many Unitarians that have let their Christianity go completely, there is another path, and in Hale Barns a few weeks ago, I found a group of people leading the way down it. And I've since learned that the U.C.A speaks for many more than its membership. Through the U.C.A I discovered that a member of my local congregation is also a member of the U.C.A - and neither of us had any idea that the other was that way inclined at all. Last Sunday we came out to each other, (ironic, isn't it?) and talked about whether there could be a Bible study within the chapel. It's just an idea at the moment, but the people sitting next to us over tea and biscuits said to count them in, so who knows? We might be onto something. How encouraging this is, and in the same chapel that a few weeks ago seemed like a humanist desert.

All of which explains, I hope, why the Unitarian Christian Association was such a wonderful discovery for me. It speaks to me of liberal Christianity built on solid foundations. Unitarianism makes it easy to separate ourselves from our Christian roots, and this is what many of our Unitarian friends have done, but it also allows us liberal Christians to assert our Christian beliefs *positively*.

Within the mainstream church the liberal Christian is seen as watering down faith, tugging on the loose wool in the jumper so the whole thing can only unravel. Not so within Unitarianism.

When I shared a faith community with evangelicals I took belief in God and appreciation of the good things in scripture for granted. Now that I'm in fellowship with humanists I treasure all that is good in scripture, and want to make the case for God. It's a change I'm profoundly grateful for.

This is what I've found, that within the Unitarian and Free Christian tradition, Liberal Christian faith can be something built up not pulled down. God bless the Unitarian Christian Association. I feel like I've come home.

As Chair of the Unitarian Christian Association, I am pleased to endorse this years charity, 'Ullet Road Church Rebels'. It was agreed by all at the Association's AGM at Hale Barns Chapel on the 9th March this year, as a very worth while and exciting cause.

Rev Phil Waldron from Ullet Road Church teamed up with Chris Allen (who had been involved with the organisation Asylum Link Merseyside) in January last year and founded the football club. The members of the team are all refugees who have endured harrowing experiences that most of us would have difficulty imagining.

The idea of the football team is to encourage each member to integrate and give them a forward looking aspect to their lives. This for me is a Christian way of living, that to some degree or other, we all hope for in this world, to accept each other, no matter how different we may seem in looks or culture and to lovingly go forward together bringing cohesion and compassion to our future lives.

I strongly suggest that we as members of the Unitarian Christian Association support this worthy cause.

Yours in love, Jean Bradley

Letter to the Editor

By Lucy Harris (Ringwood)

Thank you very much for the latest Herald received a day or so ago. Just the briefest of notes in response to a couple of the articles.

Many thanks to Jim Stearn for the article on Mary of Magdala. Someone I once knew said a Jewish friend of his, having read the gospels for the first time said that a Jewish ASSUMPTION would be that - of course - Jesus was married. A Jewish man of approx 30 years old living in that context - it was unthinkable that he was not married! And as the early followers were all Jewish nothing needed to be said so nothing got handed down to the early Gentile followers on the matter. Seems about right and natural to me. The whole article made a lot of sense to me and I love Jim's highlighting that this is the only anointing we have - and it's by Mary. Thank you Jim.

Also, Bruce Bebbington might support my view that the practice of lectio divina as prescribed by the Order of Saint Benedict for many centuries is a fruitful path for some. Sacred reading is most definitely a word-framed mode of communion for some. The best book I have come across about it is "Reading with God" by David Foster, a Benedictine monk, but I was first alerted to the practice about 18 years ago by an American UU Susan Ritchie in an essay. Susan was one of the writers published in "Everyday Spiritual Practice" edited by Scott W Alexander, Skinner House Books 1999. One of my favourite Unitarian books I highly recommend for a balanced scan of the horizon for modes of finding God.

PRAYING DAYS

Introduction by Cathy Fozard

In April 2018, the UCA received an enquiry about the purchase of several copies of 'Daybreak and Eventide' from the Reverend Kate Dean, Minister of Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead.

Daybreak and Eventide (a book of daily devotions) was published by the UCA in 2007.

Kate explained that she was planning to run a spiritual development course for her congregation during the month of June. 'Daybreak and Eventide' would be used as an exploration into daily spiritual practice by undertaking to work with the daily readings and meeting weekly to discuss experiences.

Kate, very kindly, offered to send a report about the course for us to share with members at the AGM. This we did and it was suggested that the membership as a whole would be interested to hear about this course and to see an example of how the UCA is serving the movement as a helpful resource.

PRAYING DAYS REPORT, submitted by Rev Kate Dean

In June 2018, we chose to run a spiritual development course which I called Praying Days.

I co-led it with ministry student Michael Allured of Golders Green Unitarians. During the course, we explored the idea of developing a daily spiritual practice. We each committed to reading the morning and evening reflections from the book *Daybreak and Eventide*. Then we met on six Tuesday evenings to share our experiences. This was run along 'engagement group' principles as practiced at Hucklow Summer School and championed by Dr Jane Blackall among others.

We met on the last Tuesday of May, then began our daily readings and continued to meet weekly until the first Tuesday of July which was our closing session.

The sharing was very useful as some people came from very secular backgrounds and for others, the scripture passages were a return to the religion of their childhoods. Many people found the overtly Christian language 'challenging' but were glad to be opened up to the wealth of biblical teachings which were possible to apply to daily life

We would encourage other congregations who are looking for a simple tool to run a series of weekly sessions to consider using this book.

Did Jesus Take Away The Sins of the World

By Roger Booth

Mainstream Christianity answers 'yes' to this question, and the belief is an important element in creeds and liturgies. He is said to have taken away the sins of the world in that he bore in place of mankind the punishment which mankind should have suffered as punishment for its sins.

We consider here whether the evidence in the New Testament supports this assertion. From the time of his baptism Jesus had cause to believe that he had a special relationship to God. God then said, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." (Mark 1,11).

Jesus preached that the time was fulfilled, that the kingdom had drawn near, and that Israelites should repent. Like other boys Jesus had studied at the synagogue school, and the time he claimed to be fulfilled was the time for the coming of the scriptural Day of the Lord. On that Day, according to the prophets, Israel would be judged, and those judged sinful would suffer for their sins. After that, the figure called the Son of Man would, as God's agent, bring in his kingdom (Zephaniah 1,11-17; Joel 2,1-3; Daniel 7,18;12,1)

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A New Look at the Adam and Eve story.

By Barry Thomas

One of the best known creation texts is the story of Adam and Eve in Genesis, where the first two human beings are portrayed as being part of a flawless natural world enjoying a loving and fulfilling relationship with God. It's a poetic narrative about an ideal world where humankind, which was in perfect harmony with God and the universe, chose to go its own way. In Christian theology this is called 'The Fall' (and it opened up the blame game with different parties saying 'it's not my fault' - as the quip goes, Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the Serpent, and the Serpent hadn't got a leg to stand on).

Looking at the story of Adam and Eve as being primarily about the inherent sinfulness of humankind is not appealing to many Unitarians who usually prefer to focus on the inherent goodness of people, and how we can develop and sustain this goodness, rather than being weighed down by guilt about our manifold shortcomings. Do we therefore dismiss the story as having a misguided focus?

A careful look at Dürer's wonderful engraving of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, together with some modern insights, suggests a more helpful way of looking at the story.

Dürer presents us with an ideal. We see this in the physical perfection of the figures. Their forms reflect Dürer's ideal of beauty and his views on perfect proportions and measurements. (He wrote extensively on his conception of the ideal form). Man and woman are shown in harmony with each other, and with all of nature. They are balanced either side of the tree of knowledge, in nearly symmetrical idealized poses: each with the weight on one leg, the other leg bent, and each with one arm angled slightly upward from the elbow. It is a peaceful world without threat. Even the cat and the mouse, at the bottom of the picture, co-exist in harmony with each other.

There are other animals too, including a rabbit, an elk and an ox. These particular animals are symbols, which were commonly used at the time,

of the four 'humours'. Renaissance medicine adhered to the ancient belief that the bodily fluids, or 'humours' as they were called, gave rise to different personality types and different temperaments (choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic). Illness and personal temperament were the results of imbalance between these four 'humours'. Dürer's engraving represents a perfect balance of the four 'humours' using the animal symbols - the cat (choleric), the rabbit (sanguine), the ox (phlegmatic) and the elk (melancholic). All there, all in harmony.

The whole work depicts an ideal of balance and harmony. But this Divine harmony was shattered following 'The Fall'. There is now a fractured relationship between humankind and God. The oneness of everything has been compromised.

A modern version of this state of affairs is described by the American Philosopher, Francis Schaeffer, who talks about the *separation* between God and humankind. Humankind no longer has the communion with God. This idea has been taken up by Professor Tom McLeish FRS, a distinguished physicist who has written extensively on science and religion, who argues that there are four dimensions to this *separation* from the ideal state (as portrayed by Dürer): people being *separated* from God, from others, from themselves and from nature.

The *People-God separation* sets the tone for the other separations. It is the big picture, a disjunction in the oneness of everything.

Secondly there is the *People-People separation*. Christ said live with one another in unity, but when we think of the pain that humans inflict on one another it's clear that our relationships with other people are far from ideal. We see it in countless ways. For instance the ongoing seemingly intractable conflicts in the Middle-East appear to be too big a problem for anyone to solve. Or think of that great scourge of our time, Inequality, and the divisions that that causes between people. These are but two examples, which could be multiplied endlessly, of people-people separation. They represent a *collective* failure. We don't always live peaceably together.

The third kind of separation is *People – Themselves*. We are intended to be at peace internally - at peace with ourselves. This is an *individual* dimension. But we are not always at our best selves in the way we behave. And if we look at the levels of stress in the workplace and elsewhere and the incidence of mental illness it's clear that many people are not at ease with themselves.

Finally there is *People-Nature separation*. We are called on to love the creation around us and to treasure it but we often fail. Climate change, the treatment of animals, the degradation of the planet (for example by our misuse of plastic) and innumerable other forms of behaviour indicate that our relationship with nature is certainly not harmonious and respectful.

Perhaps the story of Adam and Eve doesn't resonate if we interpret as entirely about 'sin', and the notion that we are all fallen sinners. But if we remember that 'sin', as a biblical term, simply means the rejection of God, and if we read the story as about the ideal of a single interdependent universe and about our being *separated*, along various dimensions, from this ideal perhaps it is more appealing. It's an acknowledgement that, as Bishop Spong says, "we are still incomplete human beings who need to be *empowered* to become more fully human."

Where we are to derive such power from is a question to which we might all have our own answers. One very potent answer is to draw on the life and teaching of Jesus Christ as an exemplar of *non-separation* from God, others, ourselves and nature.



1. The image of Dürer's engraving is reproduced via the Open Access agreement of the Museum of Modern Art, New York.
2. See for example [David Hutchings](#) and [Tom McLeish](#), *Let There Be Science: Why God loves science, and science needs God*. Oxford: Lion Books. 2017.

At Mark 13 Jesus predicts how that suffering would affect his disciples, and how after that tribulation the sun, moon and stars would fail. The Son of Man would then appear and rescue his elect.

Jesus came to believe that the nature of his special relationship to God was that he was the Messiah (=the anointed one) in that he was anointed by God to assist in the bringing in of the kingdom, and he saw his healing works as an anticipation of the kingdom (Luke 11,20). In the synagogue he declares that he was the one foreseen by Isaiah as anointed by God to preach good news, proclaim release to the captives, and set at liberty the oppressed (Luke 4,18-21). At Luke 7,22 he tells those who enquire whether he was the Messiah, that they should judge by his miracles and teaching, and at Mark 8,30 he does not dispute Peter's identification of him as Messiah.

Jesus at first thought that the tribulation for sin and the coming of the Son of Man would happen very soon. On sending his disciples out on mission, he told them that the tribulation would occur, and the Son of Man would arrive, before they had gone through all the towns of Israel (Matthew 10,23). These things did not happen. Jesus later was convinced that the Son of Man would arrive during the lifetime of some of his contemporaries (Mark 13,30).

But the delay continued, and Jesus came to connect it with the failure of the Israelites to repent. He bewails the fate of unrepentant Chorazin, Bethsaida, Capernaum and Jerusalem (Luke 10,13-15; 13,34).

Jesus decided at this stage that in place of the Israelites as a body suffering for their sins, he would have to accept the tribulation personally. He saw himself not only as the Messiah of God but also as the Suffering Servant prophesied by the second Isaiah, notably in Chapter 53. At v.6 there "the Lord has laid on him (the Servant) the iniquity of us all", and at v.10 "he makes himself an offering for sin". Jesus impliedly identifies himself as the Suffering Servant at Mark 9,12 and Luke 22,37. At the Last Supper Jesus refers to his body as given 'for you', and at Mark 10,45 describes the Son of Man as giving his life 'as a ransom for many'. His consciousness of the necessity of his suffering is expressed at Luke 12,50 - "I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how I am constrained until it is accomplished!"

The extent to which Jesus additionally saw himself as the Son of Man who would come as judge and bring in the kingdom, is difficult to assess. Sometimes the early Christians, believing Jesus to be that son of Man, have inserted the title 'Son of Man' where Jesus has simply said 'I'. Thus at Mark 10,45 Jesus clearly means himself when he declares that the Son of Man will give his life as a ransom for many. But Jesus' acceptance of the Suffering Servant role does not necessarily entail that he himself would be the Son of Man foretold at Daniel 7,13. Jesus at his trial told the High Priest that he would see that "Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven"

There is, however, strong evidence that Jesus' intention was to accept the tribulation for sin in place of others in order to bring in the kingdom. But there is no evidence that his suffering and death achieved this result.

It appears that Jesus was mistaken in thinking that his Father wanted him to die for this purpose. Whether or not Jesus was divine, as a human being he was capable of mistake, as his assurances concerning the early arrival of the kingdom and his own second coming illustrate.

Moving from the attempted discernment of what Jesus intended by his suffering to the reality of what his death actually achieved, the view of his followers from early times was that by his death Jesus took away the sins of the world. At John 1,29 John the Baptist is said to exclaim, "Behold the lamb of God who taketh away the sins of the world!" But in what way did Jesus take away the sins of the world? Regarding sins committed prior to Jesus' death, the sins of those who had repented, had probably already been forgiven by God. (Numbers 14,38; Psalm 103,3), and there are many instances recorded in the Hebrew bible of God forgiving the sins of his people. A conspicuous example is God's forgiveness of David over Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 12,13). The sinner also had reason to hope that current or recent sins would be forgiven, as is indicated by the petition in the Lord's prayer.

As regards future sins, there was reasonable hope that God would continue his willingness to forgive where there was genuine repentance. Jesus in his parable of the Prodigal Son showed the Father as being a loving God, ready to forgive his children. So there was no need for Jesus to die in order to take away the sins of mankind, for his Father had already granted the forgiveness. Indeed, it is difficult to understand why a God who, as the Hebrew bible avers, was both righteous and loving, should desire that an innocent man should die for the sins of others

Since Jesus' intent in dying was to suffer the tribulation and thus enable the kingdom to arrive, it seems unlikely that he had the double intent of taking away the sins of the world. And the Christian interpretation of his death as taking away these sins can hardly stand when God's pre-existent mercy had already answered the desire for forgiveness. We accordingly suggest that Jesus did not intend by his death to take away the sins of the world, and that his death in reality did not have this result.

We suggest that the pointer to the true effect of his suffering is shown by his prayer at Mark 14,36, "Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee; remove this cup from me; yet not what I will, but what thou wilt." Because his suffering was undertaken voluntarily and in obedience to what he (albeit mistakenly) conceived to be the will of his Father, he demonstrated standards of self-sacrificial love of neighbour, and obedience, which would inspire and sustain his followers in their striving to imitate him.



Remember To Support Maternal Health in Sierra Leone.

Alex Bradley acknowledges his gift
on retiring as an officer of the UCA.





L-R, Secretary, Chair, Treasurer prepare
for the AGM.



Participants of the AGM, 2019