

The Liberal Christian Herald



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

EASTER EDITION

Stained Glass Window, Old Chapel, Dukinfield, Jean-Baptiste Capronnier (1814-1891)

Issue 98, April 2020





QUIET DAY



Saturday, 1 August 2020

10 am – 4 pm

Dean Row Chapel, Chapel Road,
Wilmslow, Cheshire
SK9 2BX



“Be still and know that I am God.” Psalm 46.10

The Unitarian Christian Association, the World Community for Christian Meditation and Dean Row Chapel will jointly host a day of fellowship, worship and meditation in the setting of one of Cheshire’s peaceful 17th century Dissenting chapels.

Programme

- 10.00 am** --arrivals and coffee
- 10.30 am** – introduction to the day
- 10.45 am** – opening worship,
followed by a short talk leading into silence
- 11.15 am** – quiet period
- 12.15 pm** –Taizé worship in the chapel
- 1.00 pm** – lunch
- 2.00 pm** – short talk leading into silence
- 2.30 pm** – meditation, sharing session, closing worship
- 3.45 pm** – afternoon tea

There will be no charge for taking part in the day’s events.
Lunch will be served buffet-style

For catering purposes, please contact Jeff Gould, 01625 402952,
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www.christianmeditation.org.uk
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The Liberal Christian Herald

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Editorial

By Jeff Gould

This edition of the *Liberal Christian Herald* is being compiled mid-way through the season of Lent, at the point in the Coronavirus crisis that many churches and chapels are considering suspending worship services and activities until such time as the spread of the virus is no longer a major public health concern. As the advice from Government spokespersons alters daily in response to the severity of the situation, it is anticipated that a much more serious level of infection will be present by the time this issue is received by subscribers. It is at times such as this that religious bodies are required to demonstrate their concern not only for their own members but for the wellbeing of the wider community in which they operate.

Hoarding, stock-piling and black market sales of essential goods are not faith-based responses to a health crisis. Churches and chapels, temples, synagogues and gurdwaras are meant to be beacons of right behaviour and responsible stewardship of resources.

Whilst Sunday services and week-day activities may not be taking place, congregations can exercise care for their members and vulnerable citizens by maintaining regular contact by telephone and offering to conduct simple errands for the purchase of food and the collection of medications.



At one of the congregations I serve, a WhatsApp group was formed in order to ensure that communication is maintained through the crisis and vital information is shared effectively.

On the horizon lies the Christian festival of Easter, which is an affirmation of victory over death, loss and bereavement. The power of the resurrection is not limited to the gospel accounts of the disciples of Jesus, but is a present reality for all persons who have been affected by the current health sit-

uation. If our faith tells us anything, it is that from the depths of tragedy can be found the hope of new life and new possibilities. Lessons will have been learned from this global phenomenon, and medicine will have advanced in its ability to identify viral infections and respond appropriately. The early Christian community lived in the hope of the resurrection. May that same hope be known in our lives this year.

Easter Sermon

by Laura Dobson, March 2019

Legend has it that Mary Magdalene, a woman of means, influence, and courage, procured an invitation to dine at the court of the Emperor Tiberius Caesar in Rome soon after the crucifixion of Jesus. She went to Rome to protest Pilate's miscarriage of justice, and to announce the resurrection, bringing with her an egg as a symbol of new life, with the words, "Christ is Risen!" The emperor scoffed at her, saying, "Christ rose from the dead as surely as that egg in your hand will turn red!" The egg immediately turned blood red.

As a teenager I attended an evangelical church with my friend for a while. The people I found there were welcoming and sincere, and very secure in their faith. As a young person beset with doubts, to be honest I envied them their certainty. My heart desperately wanted to 'accept Jesus into my heart as my saviour' as they used to say. However, my head would not agree, no matter how hard I tried. Original sin, the virgin birth, the atonement, the resurrection – they made no rational sense to me.

When I left home to study Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Leeds I retained a sense of guilt about being unable to accept the mainstream Christian world-view. So it came as a relief to discover, in my biblical criticism classes, that bible stories of Jesus' death and resurrection were written down so long after the events that they were unverifiable by Jesus' contemporaries.

The study of early Christian texts in the context of the times in which they were written has led biblical scholars to conclude that there were various groups among the early followers of Jesus who interpreted his life and teachings in different ways and produced a variety of literature. Their thinking was influenced by the ideas of the time, for example Jewish apocalyptic thought, pagan myths of dying and rising gods, and mystery cults, whose initiates would die to their old selves and be reborn. The stories about Jesus are more likely to reflect the needs of the communities who shared them, rather than be an accurate historical portrait. By the time some of these stories were collected into the writings that we now know as the New Testament, the view of Jesus as Son of God and Saviour had prevailed.

Biblical scholar Burton Mack believes the resurrection stories originated in the congregations established by St Paul. He says that for the first followers of Jesus, the importance of him as the founder of their movement was directly related to the significance they attached to his teachings. What mattered most was what these teachings called for in terms of ideas, attitudes and behaviour, but as the Jesus movement spread, groups in different locations and circumstances began to think about the kind of life Jesus must have lived. Some began to think of him in the role of a sage, others as a prophet, or an exorcist come to rid the world of evil.

This shift from interest in Jesus' teachings to questions about Jesus' person, authority, and social role eventually produced a host of different mythologies. The mythology most familiar to Christians of today developed in northern Syria and Asia Minor. There Jesus' death was interpreted as a martyrdom and a miraculous event of crucifixion and resurrection.¹

Acknowledging that the stories of the empty tomb are myths freed me to consider alternative interpretations to the evangelical Christian view that the resurrection was historical fact and the crucifixion was atonement for original sin. I am using Richard Rohr's definition of myth here. As he says in his book, *The Universal Christ*, "Remember, myth does not mean "not true," which is the common misunderstanding; it actually refers to things that are always true!"²

The resurrection can be interpreted as a spiritual truth rather than literal truth – Jesus is experienced by his followers as Lord/God after his death – this is a view often expressed by liberal Christians.

The resurrection can be interpreted as a psychological truth – experiences of the risen Christ are an expression of the great love that his friends had for him, just as many people today experience the presence of loved ones after their deaths.

The resurrection can be interpreted as an archetypal or mystical truth – Jesus represents the dying and rising god motif, which tells cosmic truths about life and death, linking the dark unconscious with the light of consciousness, leading to wholeness – this view is influenced by Jungian psychology and often expressed by modern mystics.

Two liberal Christian writers who have influenced my understanding of the resurrection are Richard Rohr and Matthew Fox. They both understand the resurrection in terms of the 'Universal Christ' or 'Cosmic Christ.' Richard Rohr, in his book *The Universal Christ*, says:

"In the resurrection, Jesus Christ was revealed as the Everyman and Everywoman in their fulfilled state... The "Christ journey" is indeed another name for every thing... Resurrection is contagious, and free for the taking. It is everywhere visible and available for those who have learned how to see, how to rejoice, and how to neither hoard nor limit God's ubiquitous gift."³

Matthew Fox says in his Easter blog,

"The "paschal mystery" of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the rabbi is an archetypal reminder about how, as science now teaches us, all things in the cosmos live, die and resurrect... we leave something behind for further generations and that constitutes resurrection... Jesus left behind the gift of his teachings... That compassion and justice are what link us to the Divine and that we are to look for the Kingdom of God but within ourselves and among others in community for the love that is at once our love of neighbor and our love of God... We all die many times. Life does that to us with our losses, our betrayals, our own mistakes and emptying out. But we also resurrect on a regular basis as well. We forgive, we are forgiven, we bottom out, we move on, we give birth anew... The depths of the valley of death do not overcome the power of life which makes things new again."⁴

I am no longer struggling to accept Jesus' resurrection as a one-off historical event in one person's life. I now embrace the beauty of it as a cosmic truth or the archetypal pattern of every human life. One might say that my journey with the resurrection has been a journey from head to heart.

For me, the resurrection story is a myth (or universal truth) illustrating the transformative power of love. Jesus suffers and dies. He is healed and lives. Jesus is changed or 'transfigured' by his death and resurrection; the witnesses are changed by their experience of the presence of Jesus' spirit after his death. Just as we are all changed by suffering – by grief, betrayal, despair and shame – through love we heal and live anew. The message I take from it is that love is the most powerful force of all, stronger even than death. Christ is Risen! Rejoice!

References

1. Burton D Mack, *Lost Gospel: The Book of Q & Christian Origins* (Harper San Francisco 1993)
2. Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), p.171.
3. Richard Rohr, *The Universal Christ: How a Forgotten Reality Can Change Everything We See, Hope For, and Believe* (Convergent: 2019), pp.178 - 187.
4. <https://www.matthewfox.org/blog/tag/>

AGM at Liverpool

by Jeff Gould

Ullet Road Church, Liverpool was the setting for this year's Annual General Meeting of the Unitarian Christian Association. Owing to concerns related to the spread of the Coronavirus, only four members of the association attended the gathering, and four members of the Officer Group took part in the meeting. This meant that the worship element of the day was confined to opening and closing devotions, and the conduct of the actual business meeting was shorter than would have normally been the case. Positive matters shared at the meeting included the report that there are currently 154 members, the finances of the association are in good order, and a quiet day is scheduled to take place on Saturday, 1 August 2020 at Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow in Cheshire.

The Rev Phil Waldron expressed his thanks for the past year's support of the Ullet Road Rebels football team for immigrants and asylum seekers on Merseyside, and the designated charity for the coming year was agreed. It will be MaaChild, which is a grassroots charity that provides sustainable secondary education for Maasai students in Southern Kenya. This initiative arose from the concerns held by Christians in the UK who maintain a special relationship with that region of Africa.

The deaths of members who had died in the previous year were acknowledged. Tom Banham, Tony Cross and Marjorie Manley were recognised for their respective roles within the UCA. Special mention was made of the recent death of the former Moderator of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, the Rt. Rev. William McMillan.

The date of next year's meeting was scheduled for Saturday, 13 March 2021, at a venue yet to be determined.

'Open discussion on the way ways in which the UCA might facilitate contact between individuals and congregations with a liberal Christian identity'.

The following presentation was to have been offered at the AGM, by Francis Elliot- Wright. It is printed here in order to encourage discussion amongst the UCA membership.

I'm so disappointed not to be able to attend, not just because it means not being able to take part in this discussion. I'm sad to be missing out on the fellowship and spiritual refreshment that is so vital to those of us who are part of churches where a Christian voice is rarely expressed. For me, the U.C.A has made the difference between my feeling that there was nothing for me in Unitarianism, to increasingly active church membership and a sense of calling towards Unitarian ministry.

But it really isn't easy being a Unitarian Christian when this is not reflected in the churches in your district or region. I've discovered there are other Unitarians in Sheffield District who would love there to be more Christian content in the life of their church - but they are in a minority and they don't want to make a fuss. There are so many liberal Christians who could come to the same conclusion I did - that their liberal Christian faith could be set free in a Unitarian congregation - but why would they join a church that has quenched its Christian spirit?

So what I want to say today is that there are Unitarian Christians out there who are not lucky enough to be part of a congregation where they can express their Christian spirituality. We are isolated and often discouraged. We go under the radar, sometimes only finding out by accident that another Unitarian church member also values their Christian identity.

We need to be able to link up with Unitarian Christians elsewhere in a meaningful way. We need to 'come out' and find each other. There are more of us out there than are members of the U.C.A. but unless we can find each other for mutual support and fellowship we cannot progress. We certainly can't attract additional liberal Christians into our churches this way, and so the current situation in which we are a silent minority will be perpetuated.

Could I, therefore, ask you to consider the following suggestions?

Take advantage of the Unitarian Christian Facebook page where those of us who value our Christian identity can find online fellowship and support. Where face to face contact is impossible online fellowship can be a good substitute - and it can also *lead* to new real life fellowship as Unitarian Christians form relationships across districts and regions.

A Unitarian Christian Blog where ideas and reflections can be shared. It's hard for one person to regularly post content on a blog, and it's difficult to attract readers with just one voice. So what about a more open blog, where a range of people, ministers and church members, can post their thoughts and reflections? Some Unitarian Christian ministers and church members already have very good blogs. Could some of these do 'cross-posts' in which they allow the same article to be published on their own blog *and* on a shared Unitarian Christian blog?

Could more be done to publicise to Unitarian Christians which churches feature strong Christian content in their services? At the moment I'm finding out this information by word of mouth. Knowing where the beacons of Unitarian Christianity are would be very helpful. Even if it's too far to join those churches, there's a lot to be gained by visiting for spiritual refreshment and making new contacts.

Are there steps that could be taken to nurture Unitarian Christian worship leaders? Many of us will have had the experience of repressing the Christian content of our services so as not to offend humanists and other non-Christians. It would be hugely encouraging and helpful if we could find opportunities to occasionally lead worship in churches where Christian content is more acceptable. This might include travelling further than is usual, as some of us live some distance from suitable churches but I think it would be worth it.

Would it be possible to have some sort of email newsletter that reports on Christian activity within Unitarian congregations? Perhaps this would be a way in which some of the previous suggestions could be delivered?

I'm not saying that I have all the solutions. These suggestions are just to contribute to a discussion. In particular I'm conscious of a digital divide between generations that needs to be taken into account. If anyone wants to discuss these ideas, to collaborate, refine or challenge, I'd love to hear from you.

The Unitarian Christian Facebook group is administered by the Rev. Lewis Rees. A Unitarian Christian Blog would be relatively simple to set up and administer. Ideally, someone with deeper roots in the movement than me would be able to do this, but if no one else can do this then I'm willing to.

By Francis Elliot-Wright

MaaChild Charity Commitment

2020

by Cathy Fozard

In the early 2000's, Therese Green, founder of MaaChild was visiting south Kenya regularly on field trips and became closely involved with the Maasai people and their children. She witnessed how rapid development in Kenya impacted the daily lives of the Maasai community, presenting them with many challenges.

In 2003 the state of Kenya introduced free primary education, which is having a positive impact on the Maasai communities. However many of the schools are overcrowded and under-equipped and some of the children have to walk miles everyday across dangerous bush land to attend school. This does not deter the children who are very keen to learn and to achieve high standards.

Recently, the Kenyan government have begun to support secondary schools financially but this support does not cover the full cost of the fees and the additional costs for uniform, equipment etc. The majority of Maasai children will not have access to secondary education because of this and will not be able to continue their studies.

In 2010, after sharing ideas with Maasai and UK friends, Therese founded the charity MaaChild (Maa being the language of the Maasai) based in Lancashire. The objective of the charity is to provide sustainable secondary education for Maasai students in southern Kenya. It is run entirely by volunteers and supports education, health and community projects that benefit Maasai children.

The Maasai are a semi-nomadic people occupying South Kenya and North Tanzania. Traditionally they raise cattle on arid and semi-arid land which necessitates them finding adequate grazing and water. They are community minded people with great pride and passion regarding their customs and heritage.

Maasai culture is strongly patriarchal, yet the people are collaborative in their daily life-styles, routines and community practice. A typical Maasai house is built by the women of the tribe using mud, sticks, cow dung and cow's urine. The women are also responsible for cooking, collection of firewood, milking and water gathering. The male role is predominantly that of shepherding and protection of the tribe or community. Culture and tradition are important to the Maasi people. However with the introduction of modern-day values and Christian influence, outside factors are becoming more dominant within Maasi society. There is a new understanding of the importance of education and the role of the Maasi women in particular.

MaaChild guarantees support for selected Maasai children who have completed primary education but would be unable to continue into secondary education because of their families' poverty. MaaChild provides a four-year sustainable educational bursary allowing them to complete their secondary education and become a vehicle for change in their community. There are three dedicated Maasai people who are MaaChild representatives in Kenya. They work voluntarily to select the children for sponsorship, making recommendations using certain qualifying criteria. Also, they oversee the relationship with the sponsored pupils, their families, community and the secondary schools. A commitment to sponsor a child will only be undertaken if the funds are in place to cover their entire time at secondary school. The funds are 'ring fenced' in a UK bank account until the annual fees are due. The cost of four years education is £1500. In 2019 MaaChild have supported fifty students in secondary education and have twenty-two graduates since the charity was founded in 2010. This is a story of one of MaaChild's successes.

“George is an orphan having lost his father in his second year of secondary education. He struggled with his loss and even ran away from several times.

We refused to give up on George and, with the full support of the Principal and MaaChild, he has successfully completed his final year with one of the best sets of results among our boys. George even found the courage to stand up in front of the whole school to read a final prayer at the leaving ceremony.”

Whilst the main priority of the charity is to provide secondary educational bursaries, there is involvement in other aspects of education. Two years ago, the charity was approached to help build a nursery. The project is in the final stages of completion and to comply with ethics, safeguarding policy and capacity building strategy, the charity’s local Maasai representatives are now in the process of registering the nursery with the government and employing a full-time nursery teacher. The long-term goal for this nursery is that it will be run independently and be facilitated by the local community it serves.

Another project the charity has undertaken is in their partner primary schools. The bunk bed project grew out of discussions with the schools’ Head Teachers. The results of final year exams had revealed a real problem with pupils, especially girls dropping out of school in years 7 and 8. Factors such as the very long walk from home to school across dangerous bush land, lack of food and water and the value of an extra pair of teenage hands on the homestead were contributing to the problem. MaaChild have supported one school by providing 21 bunk beds. This has enabled year 8 students to stay in school during the week and revise for their final exams. There is one dormitory exclusively for girls and the school has provided a ‘matron’ to care for the girls. Parental consent is needed for weekly boarding and priority is given to children living over a mile away; parents pay for food and bedding. The project has been very successful. Attendance has automatically improved. Extra tuition and revision have improved results. For the girls especially, there has been a positive impact as the risk of arranged marriages and FGM is greatly reduced.

Other projects that MaaChild supports are the provision of solar lanterns for all the students and provision of water supplies for schools and health centres.

Solar lanterns enable the children to study in the evenings as there is no mains electricity in many areas and families are not able to afford paraffin for non-solar lanterns. The cost of a lantern is £10.00 and they are sourced in Kenya to support the local economy. Once charged, the lanterns give up to 8 hours of light enabling the children to complete their homework.

Clean, running water is taken for granted here in the UK but in many parts of Kenya water supply is a real problem and many areas are affected by long periods of drought. A way around this is the provision of 10,000 litre water tanks; the cost is £700 per tank. MaaChild has provided tanks for a health centre and a primary school. More recently tanks have been installed at the new nursery facility funded by MaaChild.

The officers of the Unitarian Christian Association have decided to recommend to the AGM that we support MaaChild as our 2020 Charity Commitment. We would like to commit to raising £1500, which would support the education of a Maasai child through secondary school.

We are asking our members to support us in this endeavor by arranging fund raising activities such as cake sales, coffee mornings, raffles etc. or by sending donations. Perhaps as a member of a congregation you could suggest to your minister to look at the theme of light in one of their sermons. The use of solar could be included and part of the collection donated to UCA MaaChild fund raising. In order to get the ball rolling the UCA officers have agreed to donate £200. If you would like any more information or materials to support your efforts, please contact Cathy Fozard, email: cathy@fozard.com or phone: 01625533110

Into The Future?

by Jean Bradley

I wonder how many of us are fortunate enough to be able to forget, or get mixed up, about the places we have visited on holiday because we have been to so many? My husband and I have a dog, so instead of taking holidays abroad or staying in English hotels, we usually rent a cottage and spend our time walking and enjoying the beautiful countryside. After a while, the details about the various cottages tend to blur in my memory as we have rented so many over the years. Sometimes, it might seem that the only ones we remember are the dreadful ones! But that's another story.

Yet we both remember very clearly certain people and places over the years. I think they often stand out in our minds because there has been a lesson in it for us, whether it be educational or spiritual; certainly a lesson that may be useful at a future date.

Once we stayed just outside a small town (in an unremembered place!) We walked into the town and as we strolled along the streets, I noticed a charming little shop which sold all sorts of craft items; fabric, knitting wool and so on. It had big banners across both windows proclaiming 'closing down sale'. I have always been very interested in craft skills and so I asked my husband to 'hold the dog' so I could go inside the shop.

The owner was a very charming and knowledgeable lady and I said how sad it must be for the town that she had decided to close her shop, quite expecting her to say that she was retiring. She responded in a very emotional way, both sad, yet angry. She explained that she hadn't had enough customers over the last few years to make it financially viable to keep the shop open. However, once the closing down sale signs were placed in the windows, it seemed that most of the townspeople had come in the shop to say how sorry they were that she was closing. It seemed to her that everyone liked the idea of the 'sweet little craft shop' in the town but hardly anyone came in to it to support it!

After buying something from the shop and giving her my best wishes for the future, I returned to my husband who had been patiently waiting for me and we talked about the lady's sad story. We agreed with the saying, 'If you don't use it, you lose it'.

Now you may wonder what my holiday story has got to do with the Unitarian Christian Association. I believe that little craft shop in my story could be a good analogy for the plight that many organisations, clubs and small groups go through.

The members can be so happy that their organisation exists, but they don't always think or realise that active support is needed. This isn't a question of fault: many committees carry on without asking for help and try to manage as they are, but then unfortunately, like the little craft shop, they subsequently have to close, through lack of people to manage or administer them.

As Chair of the Officer Group for the UCA, I can see that we need new people to join our group. For various reasons, we have lost some members and their places need to be filled. Although we are now a slightly smaller group, we are still able to organise events and produce the Herald, but if any one of us was unable to play their part, we would find ourselves, like the lady with the shop, facing an uncertain future.

Being a member of the Officer Group, isn't arduous: we meet three times a year, organise an AGM at one of our member churches or chapels, and we also visit another member church during the summer months. We produce the Herald and liaise with Essex Hall regarding our representation at the General Assembly meetings. (We try to have one representative attend) All travel and other expenses are paid for and I can say with absolute sincerity that we are a very friendly and welcoming group of people.

I urge you, dear reader, to reflect on how important our Unitarian Christian Association is within Unitarianism and to consider the possibility that one day, like the craft shop in my story, we will have to close because the UCA cannot find enough members to be part of the Officer Group.

We don't want to wait until we are struggling so we are asking for help now while we are working well.

Please ask yourselves, can I help? If you think you can, please email me on

chattyministerjean@gmail.com

Tell me something about yourself, where you live, what your interests are and so on.

I would be delighted to hear from you.

‘Down to Earth: Thoughts of a Free Christian’ By Roger P Booth

Review by Alex Bradley

Church attendance, in both the UK and Europe in general, has been in decline for decades, and in very many cases is now in freefall. In response to this situation there is a tendency among churches to either reduce the level of their message to little more than greeting-card platitudes or conversely to insist on acceptance of an increasingly rigid doctrinal framework.

W B Yeats put it well in his poem, ‘The Second Coming’:

*‘Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold...
The best lack all conviction, while the worst
Are full of passionate intensity.’*

The book’s cover depicts a young person in modern informal dress kneeling, with a mobile phone pressed to his left ear, while the sun seems to be breaking out above him. He is seemingly open to enlightenment but his chosen means of communication is through modern technology. It is perhaps an appropriate image for our times. The church seems irrelevant to so many for whom Google and Wikipedia are the new Delphic oracles.

This book may have an appeal to those people who may have retained something of their Christian faith but who have misgivings about the role of the Church and others who may have been alienated by the many failings and misdeeds of individual Christians and churches but still feel an affinity to the person and teaching of Jesus. Dr Booth looks at the message of Jesus with a close attention to the biblical evidence, while focussing in later sections on the churches that have variously called themselves Presbyterian, Unitarian or Free Christian.

The author explains that the book is a collection of some of his articles and sermons which he has revised for publication. It is a scholarly work, and tackles several difficult issues regarding beliefs concerning the person of Jesus, the role of the supernatural and miracles. He asserts that while belief in a divine power implies limitless ability to perform miracles (his own position) the “surrounding circumstances” may lead us to doubt that such actions contrary to the laws of nature actually took place.

The central doctrine of ‘orthodox’ Christianity, the incarnation and the full divinity of Jesus, is not only a stumbling block to many would-be Christians but also presents a barrier to greater co-operation between Jews and Christians. Booth’s view approximates to that of a ‘moral’ union with the Father; as “someone especially close to God in spirit...able to reveal God’s nature and His will.” Thus, he concludes, “inability to accept the doctrine of the Incarnation should, therefore, not deter seekers from following Jesus and joining ...an inclusive Christian Church”. The concluding chapters of the book, on ‘Unitarian Christianity’ and ‘Free Christianity’, 7 and 8 respectively, along with the interesting summaries, at the end of Chapter 6, of the life and work of two pioneers J.M. Campbell, and (Bishop) Colenso, will perhaps be of greater immediate interest to the general reader and also to people who have links with the many loose networks of liberal Christian groups and, most particularly, any who are either members of, or have had contact with, Unitarian or Free Christian congregations.

Much of the material in Chapter 8 will be familiar to those with a detailed knowledge of the development of modern Unitarianism and its Free Christian tradition. Nevertheless, its description of the process is one of the best I have read and clarifies an extraordinarily complex and often confusing history with reference to some key figures, events and groups. Some people (even some Unitarians who should know better) mistakenly think that the present dual title of the denomination, ‘the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches’, denotes a division between non-Christian and Christian tendencies: the most cursory reading of Dr Booth’s text will squash this false history once and for all. I have only one quibble with this section, where he refers to the “separate development” of the Freethinking Christian sect in the early 19th Century.

This tiny group, unlike Martineau's followers or present-day free Christians like Booth, seem to have had very little of the truly liberal Free Christian or Unitarian devotional spirit and were more akin to a radical pressure group. Harry Lismer Short notes that they not only had no public prayer but also speaks of their 'intemperate agitation' which hindered rather than helped the liberal cause.

Dr Booth concludes with a plea for retaining the dual title 'Unitarian and Free Christian' in our denominational name, to preserve the open spirit of our liberal dissenting pioneers and martyrs. The book ends with an appendix containing a simple communion service: perhaps the most potent symbol of unity and peace for which a truly Free Christian Church should strive..

BERLIN CHURCH MOURNS DEATH OF ITS PASTOR *by Jeff Gould*

The Unitarian Church in Berlin, Germany is bereaved through the death of its minister, Pfarrer Martin Schröder, who had served the congregation faithfully since 1977. The congregation was founded in the middle of the Berlin Airlift in 1948 by the East Prussian minister, Hans-Georg Remus. Martin Schröder assumed leadership of the church on the retirement of its first minister, and quickly became involved in the ecumenical and inter-faith scenes of the city. He often spoke on German radio and facilitated at conferences that sought to encourage dialogue and understanding of religious bodies that experienced a divided city in the period of the Cold War and weathered the challenges of German re-unification from 1990 onwards. In addition to his ministry, Martin had taught History and Music in the Berlin school system, most notably at the Beethoven Ober-Schule (a secondary school that specialises in the performing arts and languages).

Martin, along with his wife, Gisela, and their children, Katharina and Nikolas, often travelled to Great Britain for their summer holidays. They attended the Annual Meetings of the General Assembly Of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in Reading in 1990, when Martin addressed a plenary session on the history and witness of the Berlin congregation. The funeral service for Martin took place in the Lichterfelde Cemetery in the South of Berlin on Tuesday, 25 February 2020. It was my honour to have officiated at the ceremony in the cemetery chapel and at the graveside for the act of committal. Martin was born on 24 March 1947 and died on 15 February 2020.

The congregation of Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow, Cheshire has a special connection with the church in Berlin, as the Schröder Family had worshipped there in the course of their visits to the UK, and sixteen members of Dean Row visited Berlin to join in the 70th anniversary celebrations of the church in October 2018. Martin's death will bring many challenges to the Unitarian witness in Berlin, as the congregation will be required to consider its future without his vision and leadership.



***'Das einzig Wichtige im Leben
sind sie Spuren der Liebe,
die wir hinterlassen, wenn wir gehen'***

Albert Schweitzer

*['The only important things in life
are the traces of love
that we leave behind when we go.']*

Brexit, Nationalism and Christianity

By Bruce Bebington

There are arguments in favour of and against Brexit which are essentially political. Christians are brought up on the story of Jesus who, when asked whether tribute should be paid to Rome, examined a contemporary coin and said that this coinage should be paid to Caesar from the image on it. This biblical passage is a large support to Christianity's frequent endorsement of a state separated from religion. Are the arguments around Brexit simply those appertaining to this separate secular state? This article suggests that there is an area which impinges on religion.

The article only touches on elements to Brexit's propaganda which are plainly xenophobic. One thinks of the poster which in 2016 depicted a packed crowd waiting for entry at some immigration gate. This poster was coupled with a call "to take back our borders". Its genus can be traced back to a Nazi poster showing a similar crowd allegedly waiting at Germany's gate in the 1930s. The truth is that the vast majority of Brexiteers disowned this poster and such xenophobia was owned by a small minority of their adherents. This disownment can be further observed in the attitude of advocates of leaving and remaining in the EU regarding the acceptance of Syrian refugees into this country. Of course, it was such refugees who formed the queue in this poster and actually there was no unanimity on the acceptance of a sizeable number of these refugees in either camp.

One is more concerned with the general tenor of Brexiteer propaganda which talked about "taking back control" or "we can survive and thrive as never before" or "British laws can then be made in our Parliament again".

The direction of these messages are essentially nostalgic, looking back to an age when Britain was entirely independent without a need to collaborate with foreign powers and implying that this historic Britain was better in some ways. [One leaves aside whether this historic Britain was actually more socially calm or equal]. There is essentially an idea being generated here that Britain is better than the foreign powers which seek a uniformity of some of their laws and regulations with Britain through the EU. This idea is based on the promotion of a sense of national consciousness exalting one nation above all others and placing primary emphasis on the development of its culture and interests as opposed to those of other nations. This idea is known as nationalism.

The propaganda also embraces a culture that encourages a view of the primacy of British identity and society over others. This culture is essentially exclusivist. As Edward Said writes, such culture involves "thinking of it as somehow divorced from, because transcending, the everyday world.... Culture conceived in this way can become a protective enclosure."

Irrespective of other propositions for Brexit, the above propaganda raises the question of whether such nationalism is compatible with Christianity. This question is not confined to Britain but appertains to Hungary where the Orban government bars refugees from entry in the name of preserving Hungarian national identity. Nor is this question limited to the compatibility with the religion of Christianity when India under Prime Minister Modi insists that Indian national identity is bound up with the Hindu religion.

The apparent incompatibility arises from the call for Christians to love in the widest sense from their families to strangers to their enemies. At immediate comprehension, there is a conflict between that love and exalting one's nation over another as nationalism inherently demands.

Some apologists for this nationalist thinking say that the underlying thought can embrace a different type of approach. They write of some concept which they call patriotism which involves a national consciousness which glories in its nation but does not exalt it above other nations. They may start from a thinking which Edmund Burke excellently expresses in his "Reflections on the French Revolution":

"To be attached to the subdivision, to love the little platoon we belong to in society, is the first principle (the germ as it were) of public affections. It is the first link in the series by which we proceed towards a love to our country, and to mankind"

One such writer is Marc Li Vecche whose article appears on the topic of Nationalism and Christianity in a 2017 edition of Providence. He argues that "one cannot, indeed really should not, love in a general way. To love God is to love what is worthy of love or not at all". It therefore follows that firstly one loves immediately the good people around your life, secondly the local community and finally one's nation and to expect a wider love for humankind overall is unrealistic. According to this thinking, humans cannot generate a love for humankind overall without going through the three stages from loving those around them to loving their nation. Alternatively, they are wrong to move their feelings directly to a love for the whole of humanity without considering a love for any other smaller group first.

The difficulty with Li Vecche's view is that it *is* possible to love in a general way and also desirable. This desirability is the basis of many works by charities. For example, Amnesty International does not distinguish its prisoners of conscience based on their nationality before helping them.

Another approach by the apologists of a synthesis between Christianity and nationalism is the proposition that one does not exalt the nation of one's identity as people or for its actions but rather for its underlying values. So Britain might be exalted for its freedom of expression, thought and worship and tolerance of differing groups in its borders. However other countries have the same merits so there is no logic to preferring British values over others.

So there is a negative conclusion of a link existing between nationalism and Christianity in this article and indeed the writer doubts if a link exists between nationalism and any other religion. This negativity is not to say that good reasons do not exist to tie individuals to their country. A diplomat enters a contract where s/he pledges in good faith to uphold the interests of the country s/he serves. A soldier defends by force, if ordered, the country from its apparent enemies. However these reasons do not arise from any religious imperative but rather from secular contracts into which the persons have rightly entered.

The truth is that God only has one nation : the human nation.

As we are no longer able to meet for worship in our churches and chapels, there will be worship material in the form of extracts from Daybreak and Eventide available on the News section of the website



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