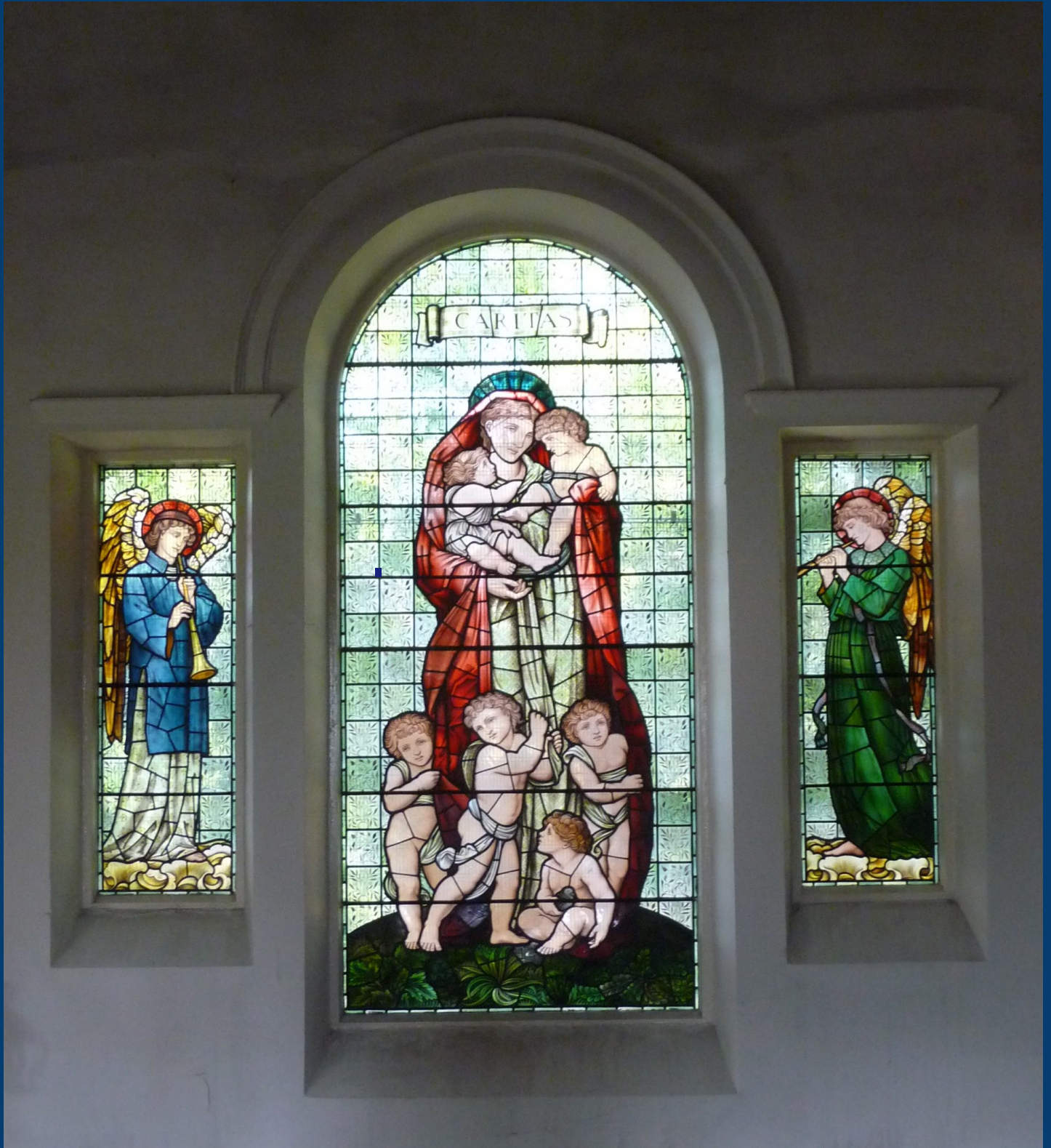


The Liberal Christian Herald



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



Issue 108 Summer Edition 2023



Hale Chapel and Sunday School 1860



A winter scene, Hale Chapel 1895



The Lych Gate, dating from the 1890s



Rev Wain with members of the congregation
1930s



Sunday School, late 1950s



The Liberal Christian Herald



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Unitarian Christian Association

The Unitarian Christian Association (UCA) was formed in 1991 to strengthen and revitalise the liberal Christian tradition within the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches in Britain. We aim to be that place where this tradition can be explored, while at the same time providing a resource for the denomination as a whole.

From the object of the General Assembly:

‘To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.’

Registered Charity No 101 777 1

Front Cover Picture: The Caritas Window by Edward Burne-Jones, Hale Chapel

Editorial - Alex Bradley

James Martineau, a prominent 19th Century Unitarian minister wrote: “I cannot rest contentedly on the past: I cannot take a step towards the future without its support”.

Our contributors to this edition of the Herald (my sincere thanks to all of you) reflect this two-way vision. Jeff Gould has written an account of the celebrations at Hale Chapel in Cheshire to mark 300 years of Christian witness there. Our liberal Christian tradition is vital to our denominational health, marking where we have come from, and where we might go next. Alan Dawson-Brown’s reflective piece reminds us of the importance of remembering as part of our spiritual life, to help us to be better people. Jacky Woodman reminds us of the wider Christian context in her account of her ‘ancestral spiritual links’ and their role in leading her to Unitarianism.



Cathy Fozard gives us a flavour of our presence at the GA meetings, and the important work done by our chosen charity for this year, CSW, advocating for freedom of religion or belief (a key Unitarian tenet) while Bruce Bebington reviews the recently published book, “Cherishing the Earth- Nourishing the Spirit” on Unitarian responses to the huge challenges posed by climate change; perhaps the greatest challenge of all, threatening as it does, the very viability of life itself on our earth. Finally, my deepest thanks to Cathy Fozard and Paul Hubbard, without whose help, this magazine could not be published.

Tercentenary Celebrations at Hale Chapel *Jeff Gould, the minister at Hale Chapel*

The congregation of Hale Chapel, Hale Barns, Cheshire celebrated the tercentenary of its foundation in 1723 as a place of worship on the weekend of 15 and 16 July 2023. On the Saturday, an afternoon tea and concert were enjoyed by members of the congregation in the chapel garden. There was a special anniversary service on the Sunday at three o'clock in the afternoon, which was attended by members of local Unitarian congregations, representatives of various faith communities and civic dignitaries. Immediately following the service, a reception was held in the chapel garden, which featured two cakes that had been baked and decorated in a suitably commemorative manner. The two events that weekend were a tremendous affirmation of the faith and witness of the congregation over the span of three centuries.

A Sermon offered on the Occasion of the Tercentenary of Hale Chapel, Hale Barns, Sunday, 16 July 2023

***'I must go on boasting.'* [II Corinthians 12.1a]**

It has been my privilege to attend, and in some cases participate in anniversary services for quite a few congregations in my years of ministry. Whilst this has always been a pleasure, I have found that there are two tendencies that often colour such occasions. The first is to go on for far too long. I hope that I will not be guilty of such a failing today. The other is to impose the values and perspectives of the contemporary congregation onto the worshippers that originated that particular church, chapel, or other faith community.

Those Puritans who crossed the fields from Ringway three-hundred years ago and built this meeting-house were not Unitarians. They described themselves as, ***'Protestant subjects of the Presbyterian persuasion, dissenters from the Church of England.'*** Their faith was grounded in a respect for scripture that encouraged them to interpret the books of the Bible according to their conscience. They held an innate suspicion of both hierarchy and human authority that over-rode the integrity of the individual. Feisty, yes, sincere in their beliefs, yes. But what they did **not** want was to remain outside the Established Church forever. It was their goal eventually to re-unite with whatever form of Church the State would enact. They were, in effect, **reluctant** dissenters. Our ancestors would be surprised to find this building still standing, or at least still in use as a place of worship. Today, we mark three-hundred years of ongoing dissent, rooted in an allegiance to civil and religious freedom. We must forever be asking ourselves **from what** is it that we **now** dissent, and how to lead a life of faith that is honest and does not condemn others for being different.

What has characterised this congregation in each of its three centuries has been its ability to adapt to external changes, to embrace new information and to evolve in its outlook. From its Presbyterian origins, the chapel moved through Arminian and Arian views. It was towards the end of the 18th century that it adopted a Unitarian perspective, from which God be seen as so ineffable that it is impossible to limit the Almighty to human creeds. This set the worshippers apart from more mainstream Christians. It was with this identity that the chapel was enabled to achieve many 'firsts' that are worthy of our consideration today.

As with any other faith community, we have our ancestral influences and role models. Now the apostle Paul was a troubled soul. Whilst he felt called to preach a faith that revealed the love of God, he found himself mired in conflict with the Greek and Roman and Jewish cultures of his day and with his fellow-Christians. His surviving correspondence reveals a man who was profoundly transformed by his direct encounter with the Lord he went on to serve and one who was also called to defend his innovative ministry. We at Hale Chapel know this condition. In our history up to the present time, we have often found ourselves out of step with other religious traditions and some strands within our own liberal religious movement. Ours was the first house of **any** faith in this village and remained solo for about 150 years. As Hale Barns progressed into the wonderful multi-denominational and multi-faith community that it is today, the chapel consistently contributed to its well-being whilst at the same time was diminished in its own primacy. Actively **excluded** from ecumenical bodies and marginalised because of its seemingly out-of-the-way position, the chapel ceased to be the defining faith community it had once been.

But we can boast . . .

The first day school in the village was founded in 1740 on Hale Road in what we now call the John Clarke Room, appended to the schoolmaster's house, which is the oldest standing building in Hale Barns. It was established as a source of education for all children in need of instruction at a low cost and without the hindrance of religious

subscription. A proper Sunday school was erected on the chapel's grounds in 1788 and was followed by a more substantial building in 1880 on Hale Road that enjoyed extensions in 1886 and 1910. That building is used today for a variety of community activities and events, and brings no end of confusion to delivery men and women and guests at baptisms, weddings and funerals, who mistake the school house for this chapel. The fact that you came to the right building today is an achievement!

Very much like the apostle Paul, we are moved to boast of our achievements, the manifestations of our faith, even if we seek to remain humble in that proclamation. Before it was consigned to a peripheral position in the village, the chapel ran a Penny Bank, a library, a singing class, a Band of Hope, a cricket team, even a village club. It would not have been unusual for a young person to take part in some form of activity every day of the week in the schoolroom and then attend worship two or three times on a Sunday. The chapel's role in the life of the village was integral to its existence.

All of this history can sound far removed from our current existence and experience, but there is far more of which we can boast that is in our own lifetime. It was as recent as the 1960s, when a minister of the chapel arrived to serve the congregation along with his new wife, who was of Afro-American ethnicity. The rapid pace of change in British society was felt right here in Hale Barns. As other denominations struggled to come to terms with female ministry, this congregation called its first woman minister in the 1980s, The Rev Penelope Johnson (who is with us here today). There was some embarrassment that it had taken so long to call a woman as minister, because Unitarians had welcomed their first minister in Great Britain as far back as 1904. She was a naturalised British citizen from Germany, by the name of Getrude von Petzhold. At the end of the 1990s, the chapel took the bold step of inviting its first openly gay minister to fill its pulpit. Two years ago, the chapel was the first house of worship in the village to register as a place in which to solemnise a marriage between two persons of the same sex, and has proudly done so on two occasions to date.

In 2015 there were celebrations held to mark 500 years of Christian worship on the site of the original chapel at Ringway. Those celebrations were the collaboration of the Parish Church in Hale Barns, our own Hale Chapel, and the Seventh-Day Adventist congregation that meets in a newer building that was erected on the site of the old chapel. I think that it would be safe to say that never before in history have Anglicans, Adventists and Unitarians worked and worshipped together so intentionally. What would our founders have thought of such an event? I daresay they would have been proud. Our past defines our future, in that this place housed a group of people who had the courage to dissent from the established forms of worship and beliefs of their day, and witnesses **today** to an ongoing quest for freedom, not just for the congregation that meets here, but for all persons with whom it shares this wider community.

Will there be a future to this congregation? Social trends indicate that church and chapel attendance is in rapid decline and different faith groups **other than** liberal Christianity are increasing in membership. There will always be a need for persons who dissent from the *status quo* or the majority *Zeitgeist* to find a welcome and a home. In the United States of America, the largest Unitarian Universalist congregations are to be found in that part of the country commonly-referred to as 'The Bible Belt', as those of a liberal outlook feel the need to **meet** with, **worship** with and **act** in building the kingdom of God with similarly-minded folk. Three hundred years of liberal religious witness are a clue as to what future there might be for this place and the people who meet here. We can boast of great accomplishments in the past. We are called to ensure that there is a future witness to offer those who follow us.

In that spirit, let us join once more in prayer:

[words written by the Rev Andrew Brown and the Rev John Morgan, **Daybreak and Eventide**, Unitarian Christian Association, 2007]

God of eternal and universal inspiration, we give thanks today for your promise that you will pour out your spirit upon all people. May we have wisdom to know that, in the moment we mark the founding of our Christian community of faith, we do not also mark the end of your work amongst us. From the beginning of time to this hour, your spirit continues to inspire young and old, Christian and Jew, Muslim and Buddhist, Hindu and Jain [and those of faiths not yet mentioned and those of no faith]. May we keep alive to the many voices of your holy spirit and always celebrate the life-giving flame of your presence among all humankind. AMEN. *added by the preacher*

ANCESTRAL SPIRITUAL LINKS *Jacky Woodman*

Psalm 36:7: *'How precious is your unfailing love, O God! All humanity finds shelter in the shadow of your wings'*

On a warm and balmy day in February this year, I took a trip out with my husband and parents to visit a newly-built chapel just north of Cape Town, nestled in the Slanghoek (Snake Corner) mountains. On a farm just off the R43 a very special place of worship has been designed by South African-born Coetzee Steyn of the London based Steyn Studio. Drawing poetic inspiration from Psalm 36:7, the crisp white form is conceived as a lightweight, dynamic structure which appears to float within the valley. This scriptural theme is carried through to the surrounding gardens with flora mentioned in the Bible such as fig, citrus, pomegranate and apple trees. Its serene sculptural form emulates the silhouette of the surrounding mountain ranges, paying tribute to the historic Cape Dutch gables dotting the rural landscapes of the Western Cape.

A reflective pond emphasises the apparent weightlessness of the structure. An open embrace which invites in, the chapel is also a space that extends outwards into the valley and mountains beyond, raising the awareness of God's creation in the immediate environment.



Bosjes Chapel, 2023. Photograph by J Woodman

Inspired by the simplicity of the Moravian Mission Stations established on Cape Dutch farms in the 18th Century, the chapel lacks a spire – relinquishing a sense of significance in relation to its impressive natural surroundings. It is in stark contrast to the typical Dutch Reformed Churches and many others, who built houses of worship upon high ground with impressive spires that could be viewed from miles around. The social and political messages emanating from such spires were crystal clear for the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape when Christianity arrived on their shores.

When Unitarians ask me where I come from, the answer is usually expected to be geographical. But I have ethnic ancestral roots through my Khoisan heritage and Christian spiritual antecedents through the Moravian missionaries who first brought Christianity to the Khoisan tribes of the Cape Peninsula and its hinterland during the 18th century, even though neither myself nor my family ever belonged to the Moravian denomination.

So, why is this modern architectural chapel so important for me in recognising and paying tribute to my ancestral spiritual links. Recently, I had a great deal of opportunity on reflecting on my own religious journey and how I have been encouraged by people, books, discussions, sermons and serendipitous meetings to think about why my faith, as I engage with it today, is meaningful to me.

I was recently inaugurated as LDPA president and ruminated on how I regarded the Rev Ashley Hills – who sadly died in 2022 – and who was LDPA President in my early years as Chair of the LDPA, as a spiritual mentor and role model. I recently spoke with my sister about our great-grandfather, a founding member of one of the many Pentecostal churches that still flourish in Southern Africa. He was a product of Western missionaries (this time from the United States) and was instrumental in propagating Protestant Christianity to a discriminated and deprived community. My sister and I agreed that our personalities have been shaped in positive ways by the strong spiritual grounding that church life established by our forebears have afforded us in Apartheid South Africa. At a recent interfaith dinner hosted in the trendsetting Open Mosque, Cape Town earlier this year, I paid tribute to the many free-thinkers of all faith denominations, who have taken the first progressive steps in their respective traditions to reach out to others in a spirit of common humanity. The rich and bountifully varied interfaith life that I live and have come to cherish, is firmly grounded in a forward-looking and non-conformist Christianity with its deep religious roots deep in the Cape. There is little doubt that this free-thinking, anti-authoritarian and socially progressive faith tradition started with the Moravian missions in Southern Africa.

The name Moravian identifies the fact that this historic church has its origin in ancient Bohemia and Moravia in what is the present-day Czech Republic. In the mid-ninth century, this region converted to Christianity chiefly through the influence of Greek Orthodox missionaries who translated the Bible into the native language and introduced a national

church ritual. In the centuries that followed, Bohemia and Moravia gradually fell under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Rome, but some of the Czech people resisted. The foremost of these Czech reformers, John Hus (1369-1415) was a professor of philosophy and rector of the University in Prague. The Bethlehem Chapel in Prague, where Hus preached, became a rallying place for the Czech reformation. Gaining support from students and the laity, he led a protest movement against many practices of the Roman Catholic clergy and hierarchy. Hus was accused of heresy, and was burned at the stake in 1415.

Fortunately, the reformist spirit did not die with Hus. The Moravian Church, or *Unitas Fratrum* (Unity of Brethren), as it has been officially known since 1457, arose as followers of Hus gathered in the village of Kunvald, about 100 miles east of Prague, in eastern Bohemia, to lay the foundations of a new church. This was 60 years before Martin Luther began his reformation and 100 years before the establishment of the Anglican Church.

A bitter persecution, which broke out in 1547, led to the spread of the Brethren's Church to Poland where it grew rapidly. The Thirty Years War (1618-1648) brought further persecution to the Brethren's Church. But under the exceptional leadership of Bishop John Amos Comenius (1592-1670) the church and its head became world-renowned for progressive views on education. Comenius, lived most of his life in exile in England and in Holland where he died. His prayer was that someday the "hidden seed" of his beloved *Unitas Fratrum* might once again spring to new life.

The eighteenth century saw the renewal of the Moravian Church through the patronage of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a pietist nobleman in Saxony. Some Moravian families fleeing persecution found refuge on Zinzendorf's estate in 1722 and built the community of Herrnhut. Count Zinzendorf had a visionary experience in 1727 which sparked a global missionary effort and a huge spiritual renewal for the Moravian Church. The early Moravian missionaries were among the first large-scale Protestant missionary endeavours. They funded the initial missionaries when there were only 300 inhabitants in Herrnhut. They were also the first to send lay people (rather than clergy) as missionaries, and more critically, were the first Protestant denomination to minister to slaves, and usually the first Protestant presence in many lands with a new European presence. It is claimed that the Moravian Mission was probably responsible for more than half of the Protestant overseas missionary activities of the eighteenth century.

Bartholomäus Ziegenbalg, a Lutheran missionary to India, while travelling back home to Germany had to stop at the Cape halfway through his journey. There he witnessed the Dutch settlers' treatment of the indigenous *Khoikhoi people as lesser beings. Count Zinzendorf came to hear about this and in 1737, Georg Schmidt who, as a result of his protestant faith had previously spent six years in prison in the Catholic region of Austria, was sent to South Africa. Thus, the Moravian Church were the first missionaries amongst the original inhabitants of the Cape. The European (Dutch) settlers who had arrived in the Cape in 1652 had little interest in spreading Christianity or educating to the Khoikhoi as this would undermine the supremacist ideology that maintained the hegemonic racist status quo.

George Schmidt set up the first mission station with a small group of Khoikhoi at Genadendal (Valley of Mercy) in 1738. Schmidt taught his followers to read the Bible, to write and grow vegetables. The Dutch Reformed Church did not take kindly to Schmidt's missionary work (especially as he taught the Khoikhoi, who served as servants and labourers on the farms, to become literate). Unsurprisingly, he was forced to leave the country a few years later.

Almost 50 years after Schmidt's departure, the work was resumed in 1792 when three other missionaries, Marsveld, Kühnel and Schwinn were sent out to Genadendal. When they arrived at the mission station, they found the ruins of Schmidt's house. Near a pear tree that had been planted by Schmidt decades ago, they encountered an old Khoikhoi woman, Lena, one of Schmidt's converts who, although virtually blind, still regularly held church services for the congregation under the pear tree by praying and reading from the Bible. She handed the missionaries a pocket Bible in a small leather bag which Schmidt had given it to her years before. Soon thereafter, the mission station was on its way to revival. At some stage new opposition was encountered, this time from the Stellenbosch Dutch Reformed Church. Among other things, it prohibited the ringing of the Moravian church bell because – so they said – the ringing disturbed their Stellenbosch congregants over 50 miles away! Some of the uneducated Dutch farmers also interfered with the work of the Moravian Church. They resented the loss of former farm labourers now employed as independent artisans at the mission station and begrudged the KhoiKhoi the privilege of being educated.

Some of the issues that many contemporary Christians grapple with today stems from the imperial and neo-imperial colonial past in which certain Christian denominations have played the role of oppressor and persecutor. In criticising Christianity, many take a broad and non-discerning brush to the 2000 years of Christian Church history. By seeking and finding these historic accumulations they view the religion of Jesus both unpalatable and indefensible. However, in many of the discussions that I find myself, it seems impossible to move on from this dense and disturbing historical baggage without a basic understanding of the complex history of a global faith that is as varied and as intricate as the threads on a colourful Turkish carpet. I have come to a better understanding of my own Christian heritage when I am able to set it within the context of a worldwide tradition that includes the Chinese Christians of Xian, the Ethiopian Christians, the ancient Syriacs, the Nestorians, the Malabar Christians as well as the Moravian missions to my ancestral people, the Khoikhoi.

From my ethnic Khoikhoi ancestry, my Christian roots are firmly non-conformist, anti-authoritarian and justice-orientated with a worship style that places spontaneity and spiritual expressiveness above liturgy and creed. All of these religious links, from Moravian missionaries to American pentecostalists, have led me to Unitarianism and, I am occasionally at a loss for words when I feel I have to defend my own Christian faith against others from my own denomination.

It was the Moravian missionaries who brought their socially progressive faith to the dispossessed and socially-excluded populations at the Southernmost tip of Africa. Today most of these people have a continued loyalty to Christianity. With its outward looking approach and the strong strands of liberty, the Moravian Church publicly and actively support the pioneering interfaith work of the Open Mosque in Cape Town, built by my husband ten years ago, that advances a progressive and pluralistic Islam. When I look to my side and see who stands besides me as a Unitarian Christian, and when I glance behind me and see the complex and beautiful web of Christian traditions that make up my spiritual ancestry, I am not at all astonished to find myself agreeing with the motto of the Moravian Church: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; and in all things, love".



Jacky Woodman (forefront) and husband, Imam Dr Taj Hargey (2nd from left) with Pastor Ursula October (far left) and our hosts, Sandra and James Urian, council members from the Moravian Mission Church, Grabouw, Western Cape, South Africa.

*The word "Khoisan" is the collective name given to describe two separate indigenous groups of the South Western regions of Africa, namely the KhoiKhoi who were herders and the San who were hunter-gatherers. If you would like to know more about the origins of non-conformist Christianity amongst the KhoiKhoi in the Cape: <https://www.genadendal.info/the-khoikhoi/>

Dr Jacqueline Woodman is a Consultant Obstetrician and Gynaecologist at University Hospital Coventry and Warwickshire and Associate Clinical Professor at Warwick Medical School. She is Chair of the Worship Group at the Chapel Society who meet at Harris Manchester College, Oxford.



Bosjes Chapel, 2023.
Photographed by
J. Woodman

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

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Memories of a Quiet Time

Alan Dawson-Brown

Last Sunday, in a special service, we dedicated a plaque to the memory of Granville Leather. The theme of that service was memories. That evening, my mind went back to a memory of my own, which has stayed with me over the years, and I would like to share it with you on this page.

I walked into the empty church, and sat quietly in a pew, letting the atmosphere of that holy place surround me. I felt at peace in this quietness, not silence; I could hear a bird singing outside, but a peace which comes from being in the presence of God.

I did not feel the need to pray, I just sat quietly and closed my eyes, and inhaled the sweet fragrance of the flowers, lovingly arranged for worship the following day, and I was immediately taken back to a time when I was around 11 or 12 years old. I was walking with my grandfather through his garden to the fields behind his house, and he was naming the butterflies which were hovering round us, and explaining to me all about the plants and crops in the adjoining fields. Then, in my mind, I heard a cock crow, and my thoughts jumped back to when I was 4 years old, and I saw a hen lay an egg for the first and only time in my life. I marvelled at the many joys of nature which are all around us every day but rarely noticed as we go through our daily lives. My mind started to bring back memories

of other churches where I had been, and images of people I had known there, clearly seen in my mind's eye, but beyond my ability to name. My thoughts turned to the services I had played

for, and the many preachers I had heard over the years, and I thanked God for giving me my musical ability and the opportunity to put that skill to His service.

All good things come to an end far too soon of course, and my reverie was broken by the siren of a passing ambulance, and suddenly I was back in the real world again, but that short time of contemplation has stayed with me and now forms part of my

memory, and I thank God that he has given me this ability to remember, and hopefully learn from the messages which past memories evoke, and help to make me a better person to live out my time in this world.

Alan Dawson-Brown is organist at Ansdell Unitarian Church. He also serves as Church Secretary and one of the Trustees. Alan is a Fellow of the Society of Crematorium Organists.



UCA stall at the Annual Meetings, Staverton Park, 2023

The UCA at the GA

Cathy Fozard

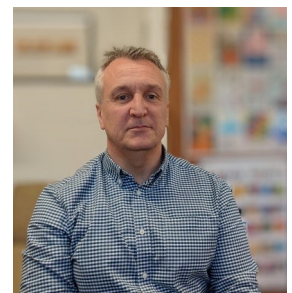
It is a few years since the UCA was able to attend the Annual Meetings. This year we decided we would do it properly and fly the UCA flag by staffing the usual stall and organising an event.

The stall was well-received and apart from the usual merchandise, we highlighted the work of our chosen charity CSW (Christian Solidarity Worldwide), the Sunday online worship and the Bible discussion group. The stall was further enhanced by the second-hand book area kindly provided by UCA officer, Sheena Gabriel. Sheena had been having a good clear out and her selection of interesting and diverse titles attracted a lot of interest. We were happy to welcome two new members at the stall, which made our presence at the Annual meeting very worthwhile. All proceeds from our sales of merchandise and second-hand books were donated to CSW.

The officers had decided that it would be appropriate to ask our chosen charity, CSW to speak at the event. The charity was very happy to send a speaker to describe how CSW worked in supporting freedom of belief for all. Just as a recap on the work of CSW, see their mission statement below:

CSW is a human rights organisation advocating for freedom of religion or belief. We stand with everyone facing injustice because of their religion or belief. Everyone has the right to practise a religion or belief of their choice.

The event was held on Wednesday afternoon. Before lunch, flyers had been distributed on the tables in the restaurant advertising the event, the Sunday online worship and the Bible discussion group. Neil Corner, the CSW speaker, arrived well in advance of our one-hour slot. It was very interesting to speak to him about the charity and his role.



CSW speaker, Neil Corner at the UCA event at the Annual Meetings

Neil had prepared a PowerPoint about the work of CSW. It was impressive that he had taken the time to research the Unitarian website and found a comparable statement that matched the view of CSW:



. *We are committed to approaching all of the world's religions and belief systems with an attitude of tolerance, open-mindedness and respect.*



"Our vision is a world free from religious persecution, where everyone can practise a religion or belief of their choice."

The interesting presentation detailing the work of the charity ended with a lively question and answers session. The attendance was good and attracted many non- UCA members. It was a very positive occasion and we hope to hold further events to support this very important charity.

On a personal note, the highlight of my two nights at the GA was to catch up with members whom I haven't seen for a long time and meet new members! We had a UCA get- together in the bar on Tuesday evening, which was a lovely relaxing time. Great to see you all and thanks for coming!

Cathy Fozard is Treasurer and Membership Secretary of the UCA.

"Cherishing the Earth- Nourishing the Spirit" edited by Maria Curtis and published by Lindsey Press. Book Review by Bruce Bebbington

This new book has come out of our denomination and is edited by Maria Curtis, a retired minister. It is, in fact, a series of essays written by various ministers and other members in our movement which has been compiled by her. The topics are the menace of climate change and its relevance to Unitarianism. MC has divided the book into five parts: Prophetic Voices, Honouring the Earth, Changing Hearts and Minds, Active Hope and Young Voices.

Additionally, the book has some short pieces of poetry and prayers all linked naturally around the issue of climate change. It has guides to personal transformation and conducting a funeral, again a page each in length. The book has periodically detailed as to what Unitarians are said to stand for and even prints the objectives of our General Assembly and the principles of the US Unitarian/Universalist church. Finally, the book prints some responses from children dismayed at what is happening to Earth with increased temperatures and other human activity in the section: "Young Voices".

The book's objectives are to make a coherent and wide response to climate change and to show that our movement has something central to offer to aid this response. To achieve these aims, Maria has divided the book into the first four above parts but this division does not work because the objectives are not thereby set out in logical way. This division is dubiously workable and a more logical division would be to deal with the problem of climate change, set out its causes, propose a theology to confront the problem and then describe some practical actions that could be done on a personal, community, state and international level.

Maria defines the problem well assisted by a very intelligent introduction by the Quaker and environmental activist, Alistair McIntosh. He quotes from the report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2019, that predicts that world temperatures will rise by 1.5C from pre-industrial levels in this or the next decade. These eminent scientists point out the dire consequences of such a temperature rise creating submergence of some places currently inhabited by humans, extreme weather conditions

causing droughts and floods, loss of habitats for some insect and animal species and reductions in the world food supply.

Problems of logical comprehension begin when the book turns to the causes of climate change. One would hope that the part, "Prophetic Voices", would address this problem and, to some extent, it does with essays by Stephen Lingwood and Winnie Gordon on this matter and, up to a point, Robert Oulton but Robert also writes about his life in the Extinction Rebellion movement [to which this article returns later]. One finds that the cause of climate change is referred to again as the main theme in essays by Bob Janis and Judy Ryde under "Changing Hearts and Minds" in the book later on. It would be better if all contributions on the causes of climate change were grouped together.

Stephen Lingwood starts from a proposition that humanity cannot expect the world economy to grow for ever. He writes: *"Infinite growth is not possible on a finite planet"*

The writer of this article does not agree, at least as far as the current generation is concerned and can only point to the fact that the world economy is growing currently and suggests that it is purposeless to conjecture what will happen to that economy when the next twenty years have passed. The problem is not that the economy is growing but that it is growing partly in a way that is ecologically bad. Stephen also writes that the harmful growth in the economy is caused by "powers" who are beyond our control. Hopefully, the term "powers" can be summarised by defining them as the political leaders of nations or the heads of industrial international cartels. The politicians have to respond to public opinion in a democratic setting and so eventually do autocratic political leaders like Orban in Hungary or Erdogan in Turkiye. The only politicians impervious to public opinion are dictators like Kim Jung Un who create myths instead of the factual situation and enforce belief of these myths on the populations they govern. Stephen is completely right that our task is to bring the facts of climate change to the undeniable attention of the public. After all and surely, our movement believes in government following the will of the people or, if not, it is impossible see how it reconciles an authoritarian government with a liberal faith.

Winnie Gordon believes that the climate change has been engineered by Western powers and peoples who have ruthlessly exploited the earth's resources and left the countries outside this group to bear the brunt of the repercussions. Winnie connects this responsibility to an inherent and also historic racism by these white people towards peoples of other ethnicities. This theme is taken up by Judy Ryde. The theory of western economic dominance today is losing validity as non-western countries develop their economies dramatically. Particularly, one thinks of India, the fifth largest economy in the world now, and China, the second.

Further, Winnie Gordon writes that the indigenous peoples are to be praised for their communion with nature from whom they receive all their resources locally and how they act towards these resources in a sustainable way. However, it is pointed out that many of these peoples live shortened lives through preventable diseases and suffer hardships when the climate acts adversely depriving them of their hunter/gatherer needs. There is much to be said for giving these people a choice whether to assimilate into the modern lifestyles of their neighbours or not, although this choice may not be advisable for presently uncontacted tribes. The height of this rationale of denying indigenous people the benefits of our lifestyle is reached by Judy Ryde who implies that it may be bad to bring electricity to humans now off the grid.

The next explanation comes from Robert Oulton who champions the cause of Extinction Rebellion. He

writes correctly that the placing of the scientific facts around climate change has failed to move most politicians to effective or sufficient action to address the problem. In these circumstances, he says that people should protest which is a very reasonable response. He says that this protest should include law breaking where the type of protest is non-violent and likely to lead to more publicity than, for example, a lawful march around central London. He puts up an argument that laws can be flouted in the cause of something of vital importance to humanity. He does not explain how such law breaking is likely to have an effect of changing actions by governments or changing the amount of pressure that the public will exert for such action on climate change.

Bob Janis believes that consumerism is to blame largely for the economic circumstances leading to climate change. We simply demand more goods of a different type or amount when we already have sufficient leading to a demand which can only be met by using up Earth's resources in a non-sustainable way. We shall return to the issue of economic growth and its effect on climate change.

However, the writer suggests a further causes of climate change. This is the pressure on developing economies. The rulers of these economies want to raise the living standards of their populations who often live in terrible poverty but the main success stories are India and China in this regard. India has an economy growing at 7% approximately since 2000 and analysts agree that living standards there have improved as a result. Yet, it has grown the economy at the price of increasing pollution of the atmosphere dramatically. Carbon dioxide emissions have risen from 0.3 million metric tons in 1970 to 1.8 million in 2020. There is no other model currently for developing countries to become richer but the "Indian" way. The advanced economic nations are setting up a fund to compensate some of these nations for the effect of climate change on their populations but, at best, this fund will only restore the status quo before the effect of climate change wrought havoc. The fund will not create means to grow their economies or thence improve the population's living standards.

The commonly held concept of a God in heaven and us, apart, on Earth does not fit well with the theology of these contributors even allowing for interplay between us and God. Penelope Guest speaks for all the contributors when she writes of

"The interconnectness and interdependence of all life on earth"

Any God has to have a place in this life. Jo James provides an answer when he writes that we should;

"Exchange with preoccupation with immortality for a new religion with a sensibility which sees the Earth as the ground of being, the body of the transient and immanent god from which we arise and to which we return"

Indeed, Jo has an interesting development on the idea of the God inside us and around us everywhere which the reader is left to learn by reading his contribution to the book.

Central to all the contributors is the idea that we have a unity with the Earth's nature and this unity has been lost with economic advancement. This advancement has decoupled us from the rhythms and cycles of nature.

Ann Peart provides a development to the conception of a God over-arching the natural world and us within it. She argues that there is a connection between this conception and feminism. The connection arises because Western thought is based on a dualism between body and spirit, she writes. She adds that

if we accept body and spirit as a unity, then we must consider the sexes as a unity and hence, in this writer's words, equally entitled in rights. She says that Western thought is based on a duality between various objects including body and spirit starting with Greek philosophers and continuing with Descartes and onwards to now. One can accept this duality in Descartes but Western philosophy is too wide to be tagged with this generalisation. Indeed, on revisiting the greatest Greek philosopher, Aristotle, one finds no duality. He treats humans as a single identity and writes at length about various ways in which our perception of the outside world happens. Ann says that not only is there a duality between body and spirit in Western thought, but the same thinking gives a duality between man and woman. The writer cannot accept an identity of the thought process in these two alleged dualities between body and spirit and woman and man.

However, we view God as an entity or do not view God at all, we are left with the need for a strategy to combat climate change. Usefully, Michael Allured believes that an education would help that is based less on acquiring work-based skills and more on appreciating the natural world and humanity's part in it. Nevertheless, the general concentration is that humans should change their lifestyles in an eco-friendly way. Very little is written on what governments or international governmental organisations should do in practical terms. The clue to this inadequate coverage is a general antipathy towards industrialisation. Maria Curtis writes:

"With imperialistic zeal, we have trampled roughshod over the earth, greedy for her resources"

Would we feel comfortable repeating these words to a British single parent with two young children on a low income? He or she might tell us that the washing machine, the refrigerator, the television and the boiler were some of the few blessings in life and all the products of industrialisation.

Industrialisation is often a boon to humankind although, sometimes, one needs to ask what environmental damage is concurrently occurring. No writers mention in depth the possibility of technological changes to manufacturing which will cut carbon emissions. For example, one cites the use of hydrogen as a carbon neutral fuel instead of natural gas and coal. Admittedly, a lot of work will have to be done to make hydrogen economically viable in some machines such as heating boilers for one example. There is no reason why technology cannot provide part of the answer to climate change although we still require cuts in destructive industrial processes as well. Technology has often allowed humans to advance in the past. For instance, drudgery of cutting corn with scythes has been replaced by mechanical harvesters.

So, where does this book have value for what goes on in our churches? The writers all call for us to reconnect in our lives with nature including in our faith and worship. Penelope Guest says: *"We have largely lost our sense of connection with the natural world....in our increasingly industrialised and technological modern world"*.

She lays out a ritual by which one finds a tree and walks round it several times and see if the tree communicates with one. She wants to bring this sense of connection with the natural world into our worship as well as in the woods. Claire McDonald develops this idea in the fourth part of the book talking about "active hope". By these words, she means that we should treat the world as sacred, perceive God as within this material world and participate in a connected ecology. This part of the book contains three examples of this concept of active hope working out in very practical ways.

Of course, respect and taking deep interest in nature are part of any valuable faith. It is also praiseworthy

to carry out projects to reflect this part of a faith, from the basic task of making a garden in the church grounds if practical, to general projects to raise the quality of the locality in an ecological way. However, religion consists of more than the achieving of a deeper relationship with nature or what Claire calls active hope. God is not only perceived by religion in the material world or, contrary to Claire's beliefs, perceived as outside the material world but as having some relationship with humans. [Jewish religion sees God as having made a covenant with the Israeli nation but leaving the Israelis to obey the covenant or not, for example.] There is a bulk of sacred literature and liturgical words that any religion uses to bolster a fuller relationship with God however that religion conceives God. These texts are handed down from generation to generation and enhanced or changed to fit the needs of the generation involved. Further every religion has a community which practices its beliefs together and, usually, a place and administrative structure to provide a practical framework in which the beliefs and accompanying texts can be carried out.

The book might well attract people to our movement in the belief that we are an ecological action group seeking a deeper communion with nature only. They will find out quickly that there are more practices involved in our churches than this belief suggests or they may not make this discovery due to a breakdown of communication between the church and the individual involved. Further, if these additional practices are to have weight, they have to be based on sacred texts which are handed down to us in the writer's view. There is not enough substance in simply using contemporary writers and meditational or prayer material to explain our reason for existence. The necessity for a religious depth leads most of us to a religion which springs out of the teachings and actions of Jesus.

In fairness, the book does quote our objects and Maria Curtis gives an explanation of the essence of our movement in the foreword. However, these items are not the main thrust of the book. The book's contributors are entitled to dwell on the themes that they think to be important to explain the connection between ecological action and our church. One must say that this explanation is defective most of the time in its intent of properly explaining what our faith has to offer. The frequent lack of this full explanation does not say everything that our churches have to offer to the public and thus this partial explanation is unlikely to attract new adherents whatever their level of concern about climate change. There are considerable interesting ideas in the book. Ultimately though, it fails in its task of offering a full way forward to address climate change or to provide a complete reason to join our movement.

Bruce Bebington joined the Unitarian movement in 1999 and is a long-standing member of Effra Road Chapel, Brixton. He also served for two periods on the LDPA Council. He was Secretary of his local Churches Together, and is currently convenor/secretary of South London Inter-Faith Group.

I believe that nothing in life is unimportant – that every moment can be a beginning, and is a time for decision, taken against the constant background of one's faith. Each word and gesture, whether from strength or weakness, may change the course of our life, or the lives of others. — Roger Bannister





Saturday afternoon tea



Jeff Gould with Gisela Schroeder-Fink, Chair of the Berlin congregation



IsabelleTurner , Andrea Murray and Oliver Turner offering Ave Maria (Gounod) at the Tercentenary Service



Tercentenary Service



Celebration cakes



Mayor of Trafford with Nancy aged 99 , the oldest member of the congregation



Hale Chapel, Summer 2021. Original artwork by Charlotte Eve Turner.

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