

The Liberal Christian

Herald

UCA at Godalming

September 2013 No77

Christian Meditation

The Poetry of the Trinity



Members & Friends at the UCA Summer Meeting

Officers of the Unitarian Christian Association

The Rev Brian Cockroft - Honorary President
51 Lakeview Manor, Newtownards, Co. Down. BT23 4US
028 9180 0690 tworevs@hotmail.co.uk

The Rev Bob Pounder—Moderator
27 Marne Avenue, Ashton-under-Lyne OL6 9DW
0161 339 6740 bob.pounder@tesco.net

Denise Birks - Secretary
28 Sunningdale Close, Winsford, Cheshire CW7 2LD
01606 558424 denisegraham@talktalk.net

Catherine Fozard—Treasurer / Membership
20 Handforth Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 2LU
01625 533110 cathy@fozard.com

The Rev Alex Bradley - Chaplain
70 Springwood Avenue, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 8JA
01565 754465 alexknutsford@yahoo.co.uk

The Rev Jean Bradley - Retreats
70 Springwood Avenue, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 8JA
01565 754465 chattyministerjean@gmail.com

The Rev Jeff Gould - Events
4A Bulkeley Road, Handforth, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 3DJ.
01625 403509 jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com

***All copy for possible inclusion in
The Herald should be emailed or posted to***

Editor, Dr Brian Hick
146 Sedlescombe Gardens,
St Leonards on Sea, TN38 0YW

07905892103
bhick1066@gmail.com

Dear Friends

These are exciting times for the UCA, and certainly on the officer group there is a sense of renewed optimism, of excitement, and new possibilities for the resurgence of the Christian witness within the General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches.



Often we hear such words and know that at best they can be merely a palliative in the face of hopelessness and decline. Not so the present moment; we can rejoice in the good news that the future is bright and that is because of new confidence and new initiatives within the UCA leadership. Our events continue to attract increasing numbers. The Summer Meeting at Godalming was a perfect example of why this is and what the UCA has to offer. Don't take my word for it check out our new website www.unitarianchristian.org.uk and see some of the short video recordings!

When you go on to our website you can also follow the link to UCA Facebook; here we are providing a space for members and non-members alike to discuss events, issues, and our vision for the liberal Christian Church we want to see. Please use it if you can and encourage others.

Also, may I remind you that the closing date for contributions to our new book *Our Christian Faith: Unitarian & Free Christian Perspectives* will be at the end of September so please, if you have agreed to provide a written contribution for this very significant little book we will be delighted to receive your work as soon as possible.

Our next big event is the autumn meeting in Mansfield on Saturday August 26th. Our events officer, the Rev. Jeff Gould, is working hard to make this the success that it promises to be. Thanks also to Dr Brian Hick, our editor, for ensuring that once again we are able to enjoy the current issue of the *Liberal Christian Herald*.

Bob

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

Registered Charity No 101 777 1

JOIN THE UCA!

RENEW your subscription!

Individual membership £12; Joint membership £18

Concessions £8

Cheques payable to the Unitarian Christian Association should be sent to Catherine Fozard, 20 Handforth Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire SK9 2LU.



The Liberal Christian Herald September 2013 - No 77

Contents

3

Moderator's Letter

Bob Pounder

4

UCA Summer Meeting

Gavin Lloyd

Chris Edwards & Val Grist

6

Did Jesus take away the sins of the world?

Roger Booth

8

Christian Meditation

Raymond Lamb

11

Of Sheep and Shepherds

Brian Hick

13

The Poetry of the Trinity

Brinley Price

15

UCA Autumn Gathering

Covers: UCA at Meadrow, Godalming

UCA Summer Meeting

Meadrow Godalming

27 July 2013

On a pleasantly warm afternoon we met at Meadrow Unitarian Chapel for our Summer Gathering. The ample gardens and large shady trees provided a welcome space for the times between events when members and friends could chat and catch up, while the historic building itself was almost full with the forty-two gathered together to worship, learn and share. Three friends write about their own experiences of the day.



The annual Summer Gathering of the UCA took place at Meadrow Unitarian Chapel, Godalming on 27th July, preceded by an excellent buffet lunch. Contemplative worship, entitled *The Beatitudes: A Radical Manifesto* was superbly led by the Minister Sheena Gabriel, and supported by Meadrow's talented musicians Nick Morrice, piano and Adrienne Wilson, violin.

The service was an imaginative and instructive guide to the Beatitudes, an apt foretaste of the talk that followed entitled *An Introduction to Christian Meditation* offered by Raymond Lamb of the World Community for Christian Meditation. Raymond said that although this organisation was firmly within the Christian tradition of meditation it sought to reach beyond Christianity and to help drug addicts and the mentally ill. He spoke of the work of the Benedictine monk, John Main who wrote about 'the Spirit which dwells within the human heart and in silence speaks to us all'. Meditation was a way of faith and ideally its exponents should meditate alone twice daily for about thirty minutes and take part in group meditation once weekly. It was designed to allow God to work in the soul. Raymond then invited everyone to close their eyes lightly and sit still, remaining both relaxed and upright and repeating silently the mantra,

'Ma-ran-a-tha' with equal rhythm and length. The talk and demonstration was a most informative guide for those like me whose minds are of the grasshopper variety, leaping from one frivolous thought to the other.

Raymond was warmly thanked by both the Events Officer, Jeff Gould and the Moderator, Bob Pounder.

There then followed a colourful presentation by Nick Morrice on his support for medical education in Nepal. Nick appeared suitably attired in Nepalese dress and showed pictures of the people of Nepal and his visit there. He spoke of a people cheerfully struggling to seek education in the face of dire poverty and limited opportunity. I was struck by Nick's understated personal generosity, a timely reminder that there is a world out there beyond the confines of our particular cause.

All in all I was hugely impressed by this gathering, and warmest thanks are due to the excellent hosts of Meadrow Chapel for providing such a warm welcome and hospitality, and to the UCA officers. Once again the UCA has taken another step to get our denomination known beyond our ranks and to contribute to the greater world beyond, a job very well done.

Gavin Lloyd



This was our second UCA gathering, and it was lovely to renew acquaintances from the Brighton meeting, and talk with members we'd not previously met. Our experience of Unitarian Churches is limited, so it was a privilege to enjoy the shady garden and delightful eighteenth century building of Meadrow Chapel. At a time when Unitarianism faces issues around its relationship to or within Christianity, Rev. Sheena Gabriel's Service around alternative translations of the Beatitudes was uplifting. New wording for familiar passages prompts fresh insights. We were moved by the rituals of lighting a candle for each reading, and passing round a peace pebble to concentrate our thoughts and unite the congregation. Raymond Lamb's comprehensive explanation of the origins, philosophy and practical applications of Christian Meditation was fascinating. Most helpful for us was the idea that meditation is a way of faith which crosses religious boundaries, linking us to God in all religions; and that prayer is listening – you don't seek God but He finds you. Our period of shared meditation was a profound experience which encouraged us to explore further.

Nick Morrice's fascinating – and amusing! – account of supporting Nepalese orphans, perfectly exemplified the Unitarian conviction that our beliefs should be reflected in our actions. The Gathering had celebrated both the contemplative and the practical elements of Christianity

We thank Brian Hick, who kindly drove us to Godalming, Meadrow for hospitality, and all organisers and participants. We look forward to our next Gathering!

Chris Edwards and Val Grist - Hastings

***Have you visited
the new UCA website yet?***

- Video links to the meeting at Godalming
- Regular updates on UCA activities
- Contacts and information

www.unitarianchristian.org.uk

Did Jesus take away the sins of the world?

Roger Booth

Mainstream Christianity answers 'yes' to this question, and the belief is an important element in creeds and liturgies. He is said to have taken away the sins of the world in that he bore in place of mankind the punishment which mankind should have suffered as punishment for its sins. We consider here whether the evidence in the New Testament supports this assertion. From the time of his baptism Jesus had cause to believe that he had a special relationship to God. God then said, "Thou art my beloved Son; with thee I am well pleased." (Mark 1,11).

Jesus preached that the time was fulfilled, that the kingdom had drawn near, and that Israelites should repent. Like other boys Jesus had studied at the synagogue school, and the time he claimed to be fulfilled was the time for the coming of the scriptural Day of the Lord. On that Day, according to the prophets, Israel would be judged, and those judged sinful would suffer for their sins.

After that, the figure called the Son of Man would, as God's agent, bring in his kingdom (Zephaniah 1,11-17; Joel 2,1-3; Daniel 7,18;12,1) At Mark 13 Jesus predicts how that suffering would affect his disciples, and how after that tribulation the sun, moon and stars would fail. The Son of Man would then appear and rescue his elect.

Jesus came to believe that the nature of his special relationship to God was that he was the Messiah (=the anointed one) in that he was anointed by God to assist in the bringing in of the kingdom, and he saw his healing works as an anticipation of the kingdom (Luke 11,20). In the synagogue he declares that he was the one foreseen by Isaiah as anointed by God to preach good news, proclaim release to the captives, and

set at liberty the oppressed (Luke 4,18-21). At Luke 7,22 he tells those who enquire whether he was the Messiah, that they should judge by his miracles and teaching, and at Mark 8,30 he does not dispute Peter's identification of him as Messiah.

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

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

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

The extent to which Jesus additionally saw himself as the Son of Man who would come as judge and bring in the kingdom, is difficult to assess. Sometimes the early Christians, believing Jesus to be that son of Man, have inserted the title 'Son of Man' where Jesus has simply said 'I'. Thus at Mark 10,45 Jesus clearly means himself when he declares that the Son of Man will give his life as a ransom for many. But Jesus' acceptance of the Suffering Servant role does not necessarily entail that he himself would be the Son of Man foretold at Daniel 7,13. Jesus at his trial told the High Priest that he would see that "Son of Man sitting at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of Heaven" There is, however, strong evidence that Jesus' intention was to accept the tribulation for sin in place of others in order to bring in the kingdom. But there is no evidence that his suffering and death achieved this result. It appears that

it is difficult to understand why a God who ... was both righteous and loving, should desire that an innocent man should die for the sins of others.

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

Moving from the attempted discernment of what Jesus intended by his suffering to the reality of what his death actually achieved, the view of his followers from early times was that by his death Jesus took away the sins of the world. At John 1,29 John the Baptist is said to exclaim, "Behold the lamb of God who takest away the sins of the world!" But in what way did Jesus take away the sins of the world?

Regarding sins committed prior to Jesus' death, the sins of those who had repented, had probably already been forgiven by God, (Numbers 14,38; Psalm 103,3), and there are many instances recorded in the Hebrew bible of God forgiving the sins of his people. A conspicuous example is God's forgiveness of David over Bathsheba (2 Samuel 12,13). The sinner also had reason to hope that current or recent sins would be forgiven, as is indicated by the petition in the Lord's prayer.

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

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

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

CHRISTIAN MEDITATION

Raymond Lamb

I've been a meditator for about 18 years or so now – having initially been introduced to the practice through a philosophy school in Guildford and being taught the Transcendental Meditation based method. At that school I came across many quotes from the Christian mystics and some of their writings, and this effectively 're-energised' my stalled Christianity. Eventually I sought out and joined a local Christian meditation group and have meditated weekly with that group over the last few years and continued the daily practice at home.

Today I should like to convey to you some of my understanding of Christian Meditation based on my own experience, but most importantly based on the teaching of John Main, and Laurence Freeman, and the organisation to which they gave birth – the World Community for Christian Meditation - the WCCM.

The World Community for Christian Meditation is a charity formed to advance the Christian Religion, particularly in promoting and teaching the Christian Tradition of Meditation and Prayer - as taught by John Main OSB - and in so doing restore the contemplative dimension of Christian faith in the life of the Church. In 2012 there were over 2,000 meditating groups spread throughout the world – in 52 countries, and if one includes individual meditators not in regular groups there is representation in over 100 countries. These weekly groups are in essence the 'bedrock' of the Community.

A series of seminars on the subject 'Meditation with and for Children', held over the last 10 years or so, have led to the development of DVDs, resources, booklets and training courses for teachers and for school children. Currently over 150 schools have introduced meditation into their classrooms in the UK and meditation

has been introduced into schools in 15 other countries.

Apart from those activities no organisation could really be seen to be serious about promoting its core activities without the customary Publications and Web Sites. The Community produces a quarterly UK newsletter and an 'International' newsletter, and these are sent free of charge to anyone interested, but we do ask for donations and these donations are the principal source of funding for these central costs.

We have two very full web sites which provide access to news, details of events, retreats and conferences, teaching materials and resources, weekly readings, and weekly teaching letters, audio and video clips of many of Fr Laurence's talks, etc. These individuals represent the inspiration and driving force behind the emergence and growth of Christian Meditation as a lay activity over the last 40 years or so.

Fr. John Main was a Benedictine monk who re-discovered the Christian roots of the meditative or contemplative tradition and re-established Christian Meditation as a lay practice, founding groups in both Montreal and London. He encouraged people who wanted to learn to meditate and to keep on meditating to cultivate the gifts of community that grow among those who share the journey of prayer.

The WCCM has been led by Fr Laurence Freeman from its beginnings over 30 years ago. He seems to be constantly on the move giving talks, speaking at conferences, retreats and seminars all over the world. He writes regularly for *The Tablet*, for our own WCCM and *Meditatio* quarterly magazines, and is the



The Oblate community in Montreal became a sign that these monastic values were relevant to people in many walks of life.

The new monasticism would be primarily a lay monasticism. The practice of Christian Meditation was the distillation of the essential monastic spirit.

In meditating every day, twice a day, people could share in the heart of what the monastic movement, which began in the fourth century, was all about - the search for God.

author of several books on prayer, meditation, and Christian teachings.

In 1975 John Main opened the first Christian Meditation Centre at his monastery in London. A few years later, in 1977, he received an invitation from the Archbishop of Montreal, to found a monastic priory there based around meditation. Laurence Freeman, who was later a part of the laymen community and subsequently novice at the monastery, was to be his companion in the foundation.

There he was able to experiment with his vision of a new monasticism; where laypeople and monks could meditate together. Monasticism was from its beginnings with the Desert Fathers and Mothers, a movement of lay people, an alternative lifestyle based on values of silence, stillness and simplicity.

The teaching of Christian Meditation became John Main's principle work. The early monks had transmitted their wisdom by word of mouth. John Main took his place within this oral tradition, through the weekly meditation groups at the priory, through his retreats on Meditation in England, Ireland and the U.S. and through the tape recordings of his talks distributed to a growing meditating community.

The other ancient Christian form of communication was the letter and John Main began his quarterly newsletter. He was pleased that technology and telecommunications could help the spiritual path. But he always reminded his readers and listeners that the important thing was commitment. What began as a small seed has grown into a tree, with meditation groups, retreats and seminars all over the world. That seed was the life and teaching of John Main.

Fr Laurence Freeman has talked about the difficulties we might encounter.

The first is *Acedia* - a warning sign. When *acedia* happens, our initial enthusiasm diminishes and we begin to see the problems. We see the challenges. Spiritually speaking, the Desert Fathers described *acedia* as a feeling of discouragement. The energy that led us in the first stage of enthusiasm seems to run out. The prayer just becomes hard and dry.

St John of the Cross describes it as the dark night of the soul. You have to persevere through those times of discouragement. The grass looks greener on the other side; you look for some other activity or some other place to go.

You have to persevere through those times of discouragement.

The next stage you come to is *apatheia*. *Apatheia* is another Greek word that means literally beyond passion. It's not the same at all as apathy, which is a negative state. For the Desert tradition, the word passion meant dis-order, problems, hang-ups, anxieties, neuroses. So passions meant those states of mind, that we call the seven deadly sins; Pride, anger, gluttony, despair and so on.

Those were passions. So to be without passion, to be free from these disordered states, was to be in harmony. So they called *apatheia*, the health of the soul.

This is when you are working in a beautiful, synchronised way. Your body, your mind, your spirit, your work, your inner life are together, and everything is going smoothly, and you feel energy. The state of *Apatheia* is a healthy other-centred energy. You're no

longer collapsed into yourself in loneliness, depression and egotism. But you're energised to turn away from yourself to other people; ... you love the service that you can give to other people.

So *apatheia* is a natural result that will come just as the sun will eventually shine after a day of rain. It is a natural stage in the cycle.

The child of *apatheia* is *agape*. *Agape* is the word most frequently used in the New Testament and translated as love. There are other words for love – *eros*, *filia*, friendship – but *agape* is the love of God, a love that knows no bounds. The love that shines on good and bad alike, it is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked. This is the love with which Jesus tells us we should be loving each other – in the same way that God loves us, with this boundless love.

Fr Laurence said: the child of *apatheia* is not just a little private, spiritual bliss like I was experiencing at the beginning of my journey, that little bit of private enlightenment that you kind of hang on to for yourself. The goal of it is *agape*, which is the natural effusion of God's love within you outwards, bathing you and bathing everyone that you meet as well.

Now is the moment to move from listening to doing.

We are going to spend the next thirty minutes or so putting into practise the way of meditation which Fr John Main and Fr Laurence Freeman have shown us and which so many throughout the world have found to be of deep personal value to their spiritual lives and spiritual development.

Edited from Raymond Lamb's presentation to the UCA Summer Meeting at Godalming

Of sheep and shepherds

Brian Hick



I can hardly claim to have a collection of walking sticks, more a small number which are good for specific types of hikes. But until a week ago I did not have a shepherd's crook; by which I mean a real one, not one those nicely shaped walking sticks which look the part but would be pretty useless if you actually had to deal with live sheep. The shepherd's crook I've now acquired is a Sussex crook, not just because I've lived in Sussex for over thirty years, but because its design is made to hook round the legs of a sheep or lamb, rather than round their necks. This makes it safer for the sheep and easier for the shepherd.

You might think from this that I have strong rural leanings but it would not be honest to claim so. Certainly my family worked on the land for five of the last six centuries, my grand-father was a ploughman and a great uncle a shepherd, responsible for some prize winning Lincolnshire long-wools; but this alone would not account for an interest in things pastoral.

However, I have always found it easier to think, to meditate, to pray while walking, and the freedom of the South Downs has always been

important to me and my spiritual life. The rougher the weather the better I find, for battling with the elements concentrates the mind far more easily than the calmer but often confused, if not chaotic, surroundings of home. Even better, walking in areas which have little or no mobile phone signal and even less broadband coverage!

I expect many of you watched Kate Humble's short series on sheep-keeping in remote areas. Apart from being fascinating in itself, I felt it highlighted just how far we have moved away from any real understanding of raising flocks and depending upon them. The most interesting region, I thought, was the first when she was in Afghanistan, high up in the mountains and far away from anything we might consider to be civilization. Life today is still hard for these people but their sense of contentment, of acceptance of the need to work with the world rather than against it, was very telling. They were also very close to their flocks – not sentimentally so, but with a respect for them because of their value as individuals. No sheep can simply be discounted as merely a number. Every sheep matters.



Prize winning Lincolnshire Long-wools !

How different the vast sheep farm in Australia, about the size of Kent, where the sheep were seen as numbers and however well cared for, had no sense of individual identity or value.

There is a mass of teaching about *Good Shepherds* in the Bible and I don't want to dwell on that here as I expect readers have heard more than enough sermons on the subject. What is possibly more interesting is the corollary of the *Good Shepherd* – the hireling, the man who abandons his flock at the first sign of trouble.



There is a surprising amount of Biblical comment, in both Old and New Testaments, on the danger of hired hands who have no love or concern for the sheep. Though often essential to the farmer or shepherd, they are seen as unreliable, putting themselves before the herd, whereas the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep, often literally so in remote areas where the flocks attract wolves or mountain lions.

Maybe it is these self-centred individuals who Jeremiah and Ezekiel are thinking of in their attacks on the Shepherds of Israel? Ezekiel in particular is called to prophecy against the Shepherds of Israel who are not doing their job and only too aware that if the Shepherd leaves, the sheep are scattered.

Amos was himself a shepherd and turns on the priests who he sees leading the people astray by their own lifestyles, not setting a correct example or leading the sheep towards God.

Yet alongside this we are aware that Luke recalls that Shepherds were among the first to hear of the birth of Jesus, called away from their flocks to worship. The poorest, often most despised individuals caught up from the start in the revolution which was to be Jesus' calling.

And what of the sheep themselves? I first came across Phillip Keller's book *A Shepherd looks at the 23rd Psalm* many years ago but re-reading it recently I found more than a few parallels with my own situation within the church and my reflections on events around me, both locally and further afield.

One story which he tells struck me particularly. As a good shepherd he took exceptional care of his sheep. He provided the best pasture for them; he ensured they were healthy and well fed. He did everything he could to make sure their lives were happy and secure. The farm next to his was not well looked after. The animals were in poor condition and the land was scrubby and incapable of supporting livestock. However, one of his ewes, despite have everything provided for her, insisted on making a break for the barren fields next door. She would roam the hedges and fences until she found a break and escaped to feed off of the far worse fare in the next field. No matter what the shepherd did, she kept escaping. Moreover, when she had lambs herself she taught them to escape until eventually he had no choice but to put her down. No matter what he had done to support her, to make her life as easy as possible, she had refused to accept what was obviously in her own best interests and had also led others astray.

You can, perhaps, see how my mind roams when walking on the South Downs, up above the Sussex villages, remote from motor-ways and super-markets. Yet there is no simple, romantic image, no Wordsworthian vision as I walk. All the contradictions inherent even in the simple life of sheep are only too obvious, and the connections between my own spiritual life and that of a world which appears from the outside to be placid, a rural idyll, but is as complex in its symbolism as anything I might come across in town, serve to stir me up, even as I am battered by a late summer wind, cutting across Firle Beacon, straight off of the Atlantic.

The Poetry of the Trinity

Brinley Price

In a previous article on the Trinity (*The Liberal Christian Herald*, Autumn and Winter, 2012) I drew on Augustine of Hippo's psychological analogy: knowing, understanding and willing. A human person, having a "rational soul" in God's image, is, knows that she is, understands that she is and wills that she is or, as he further developed it, loves that she is. Knowing "begets" understanding and, from knowing and understanding, "proceeds" will or love. The medieval scholastics later developed this analogy even further: the three "persons" (L. *personae*: actor's masks) are the divine Power, Wisdom and Love at work in the world.

Augustine, a fifth-century philosopher, was bringing a philosophical understanding to bear on the Trinity. As an enthusiastic scribbler, if not poet, I have recently brought to bear a poetical understanding: I have seen an analogy between the Trinity and the creative process involved in composing poems. Since in the Christian tradition God is the Creator and Ruler of the Universe, rather than, in the Classical philosophical tradition to which Augustine also belonged, pure Intelligence, I believe my poetical analogy may perhaps be more apt.

My experience of poetic creativity is of a spontaneous "welling up from below", a generous proliferation of "raw material" which is, simultaneously, shaped, selected and organised into the finished poem. It is of a dual process in which the non-rational and rational, unconscious and conscious, are balanced, interrelated and interacting.

This poetic process involves both spontaneity and technique, self-expression and communication, inspiration and perspiration... This dual nature of the poetic process is reflected in the opposition, in poetic theory, between the Romantic and

Classical, the Dionysian and Apollonian. This dual creative process seems to reflect Nature itself. It can be related to biological evolution in which there is both natural variation through random and unpredictable mutations and natural selection through suitability for existence. Life forms also exist within an organised and ordered Ecosphere, also subject to random and unpredictable events. This dual process, which may extend even further backwards into cosmological history, corresponds to the randomness and unpredictability involved in the spontaneous generation of raw material" and the conscious rational organisation of that material that comprise the poetic experience.

This dual creative process can also be shown by Physics. Nature is ordered and intelligible, if not intelligent. The physicist Albert Einstein said that the only unintelligible thing about the Universe is its intelligibility. The Cosmos is ordered by laws, is mathematical in nature and may eventually be explained, as Einstein believed, by a "unifying theory of everything". The converse is the randomness and unpredictability at the sub-atomic level and the phenomena described by Chaos Theory. Brought into being every moment by this dual process the world is, in a sense, "organised chaos".

According to Romantic poet and once Unitarian, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, the "poetic faculty" is imagination. Imagination is the mind's power to generate images apart from sensory input. Yet it is also, Coleridge wrote in his *Biographia Literaria*, the mental action of dissolving and uniting images, and uniting apparent opposites, to create a new and original work of art. These two aspects of imagination seem synonymous with the non-rational and rational, unconscious and conscious facets of the poetic process I have experienced. Imagination is essentially the dual poetic process itself.

The Romantic poet and Christian mystic William Blake called God “the Divine Imagination”. Perhaps it is preferable to see God as a creative artist instead of an engineer and/or machine-operator. Even better, perhaps, to see Her, at least in Her immanent and knowable aspects, as the Creative Process of Being Itself. Like Blake I see in the world, as well as in my own mind, the workings of Imagination: Nature’s generative power is the Father and its shaping unifying intelligence is the Son “begotten” by the Father. The generative power is called the Father because it is potency but one could call it the Mother, fecundity. But there are so far only two “persons” in sight: what about the third, the Holy Spirit?

The Holy Spirit is what the Father and the Son have in common and what “proceeds” from both or, in the original Greek formulation, from Father through Son. Augustine saw what they had in common was spiritual nature expressed in the love they have for each other and which “proceeds” from both to us. So what relation does the Holy Spirit have to Cosmic Creative Process?

To give something being and to unite all beings is, to quote one of my poems, “Something like love”, though not love in a human sense exactly, not kissing one’s partner on one’s anniversary or helping an old person across a road.

But since humans are the products of a Cosmic Process, the highest product of which we yet know (?), such “love” is the foundation and prototype of human love. It is analogous to the poet’s orientation towards her work: to bring a poem into being and give it shape shows a kind of love. We might say that God’s orientation towards Her Poem the Universe is such. So God’s generative power “begets” Her shaping unifying intelligence and from Her generative power and (or through) Her shaping intelligence “proceeds” the divine Poet’s love for Her Creation. This view of the Trinity accords with the medieval scholastic interpretation of it as Power, Wisdom

and Love or, one inspired perhaps by the Gospel and first Letter of John, as Life, Light and Love.

But in what sense can Jesus of Nazareth be “the Son of God”, “the Word made flesh”? Because he is, if not the law-giver, the fulfiller of the Law of Life; because his Law of Love is founded on an understanding of the unity of all beings and is a unifying intelligence; because he is the apex of the Cosmic Process and reveals the divine intelligence (Logos) that shapes and unifies; because he manifests in his birth, death and (however one interprets it) resurrection the unity, pattern and law by which all things are born, die and are resurrected: shadow and sunlight, sowing and harvest, night and day, winter and summer, supernova and star condensed from star dust.

When I recently gazed up at a clear night sky, a vast ocean of darkness sprinkled with lights, these words (I admit not exactly Unitarian) came to my lips: “Holy, holy, holy, holy Lord God of hosts. Heaven and earth are filled with Thy Glory. Glory be to Thee O Lord most high.” I experienced that infinite power, in Romantic terms the Sublime, towards which our only response may be awe. I knew that order, symmetry, intelligibility (even intelligence), that beauty to which our only answer is joy. And I felt at home in the Universe, at one with it, in love with it and loved by it.

The power, wisdom and goodness we may behold in the world are what the medieval philosopher Thomas Aquinas called “Creative Nature” as distinct from “created nature”, the world.

These three “persons” pervading everything are the active and revealed aspects of the one ineffable and transcendent Godhead. Father, Son and Holy Spirit are the three facets of the one eternal Creator, three facets of the one Creative Process we may see within the Universe and as, in the sense that poem is itself process, the Universe itself...



The Unitarian Christian Association

Autumn Gathering Saturday, 26 October 2013

The autumn gathering of the UCA will this year take place at the Old Meeting House in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire on Saturday, 26 October, beginning at one o'clock in the afternoon. All participants are invited to benefit from a buffet-style lunch, for which there is no charge, but donations towards the cost of providing the meal would be gratefully received. It is hoped that no one would be prevented from attending the meal for financial reasons.

A worship service will be held at two o'clock, led by the officers of the UCA and involving the choir of the Mansfield congregation. The afternoon's focus will be on introducing those who attend to the work and witness of the Unitarian Christian Association and to make available specific resources that would be particularly useful for congregational worship, workshops and discussion groups.

A presentation will be made on the study group sessions that have been devised by the North American theologian, priest and scholar, Marcus Borg, entitled, '*Embracing An Adult Faith: What It Means to be a Christian*'. This will offer a 'taste' of what the full course offers to its participants. The UCA has purchased this resource for congregational use at no charge. The afternoon's proceedings will end at about 4.30 p.m. with a generous afternoon tea. If you would like to take part in the day, please contact the UCA Events Officer, Jeff Gould, for catering purposes: email, jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com; telephone, 01625 403509. There is no charge made for taking part in any or all of the day's events.

EMBRACING AN ADULT FAITH

The Old Meeting House
off Stockwell Gate, Mansfield, Nottinghamshire, NG18 1LG

www.ukunitarians.org.uk/mansfield

PROGRAMME

1.00 pm	Buffet Lunch
2.00 pm	Worship
3.00 pm	Introduction to the UCA and Marcus Borg's Study Course, 'What It Means to be a Christian'
4.30 pm	Afternoon Tea

For catering purposes, please contact the UCA Events Officer, Jeff Gould:
email, jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com; telephone, 01625 403509.

