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The communion set from the Renshaw Street Chapel still in regular use at Ullet Road Church, Sefton Park. It was used for the Eucharist at the AGM, Saturday 10th March 2018.

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Front cover

*Resurrection window from
Ullet Road Church,,
Liverpool*



From the Editor

EDITORIAL

One of the most lamentable tendencies of many Unitarian and Free Christian communities since the end of the Second World War has been the disengagement from the wider world of Christian intellectual, liturgical, and Social Gospel advances. This intentional removal of Unitarians from the ecumenical ‘conversation’ has denied our own congregations from the benefits of progressive renewal movements and academic discourse, which often take place across denominational boundaries. The result of this severing of communication with the other branches of the Church Universal has often led to the exclusion of Unitarians from local and national ecumenical instruments, such as Churches Together in Britain and Ireland.

It has been my privilege, in the course of three decades of ministry, to have served in areas where Unitarians have been actively welcomed into ecumenical circles. My own congregation of Dean Row Chapel in Wilmslow, Cheshire, has for many years been an integral member of the town’s expression of Churches Together. For the past two years, I have served as the Chair of this body, and this year, Dean Row Chapel hosted the annual observance of the Women’s World Day of Prayer. The congregation has also this year welcomed members and friends of all the Christian communities in the town to a weekly Lenten Lunch, held each Tuesday in the chapel hall. A simple meal of soup, bread, cheese and fruit was offered towards the goal of raising money for Christian Aid. UCA Treasurer and Membership Secretary, Cathy Fozard, is the town’s Co-ordinator for this annual act of public witness in support of an organisation that our own General Assembly helped to found in the wake of WWI. It is helpful to be reminded that the spirit of inclusion and a willingness to participate in the life of the wider Church still exists in some parts of the country. This is a helpful message to share as we approach the most important Christian festival, Easter Sunday. It is a date in the religious calendar that reminds us that the greatest surprises can emerge from the darkest tragedies of our lives, and that God’s offer of hope amidst despair is ever-present. May the joys of Easter be yours this season.

Jeff Gould, Editor



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Contents

- 4
A Palm Sunday Meditation
- 7
Ephesians = Unitarians?
- 9
In Defence of Pharisees
- 11
An Appreciation of the Life and Work of Rev. Dr. Arthur Long
- 15
Liverpool welcome the UCA

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Catherine Fozard (*see opposite page*)

Back cover photos, clockwise from top :-

The Rev Jo James speaking

Guests enjoying lunch

Afternoon tea at the end

The congregation singing in the communion service

A Palm Sunday Meditation

The requirement to commit our lives in a certain direction by the Rev. Andrew James Brown, Minister Memorial Church Cambridge.

Palm Sunday is the day when Christians reflect upon the (almost certainly fictional) story found in all four of the canonical gospels concerning an event that the later Christian tradition called “Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem.”

Although the original author and later redactors of the story make Jesus’ entry into Jerusalem a triumphal one, by the end of the week the welcoming crowd has turned into one bellying for Jesus’ execution and the release of the criminal Barrabas. The crowd and its behaviour towards Jesus comes to play a powerful didactic part in the yearly re-telling of Christian story as a reminder of the fickle nature of human support and faithfulness to Jesus who, for believing Christians don’t forget, is the incarnation of God himself. To illustrate this kind of teaching in the contemporary Christian context here are some lines quoted verbatim from a homily by Deacon Greg Kendra who serves the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, New York. (Just to note that, although I disagree with the position expressed here by Deacon Kendra, I do not quote him to belittle or mock, but simply so I have a benchmark against which it is possible to measure my own understanding of one of the lessons we might learn from the to Palm Sunday story):

‘But before we get too caught up in next Sunday, we need this Sunday. We need to remember. Remember that the crowd that cheered Jesus also condemned him. Remember that the voices praising him also called for his death. Remember that those who loved him and promised loyalty also abandoned him, denied him, and betrayed him. And if you want to know who did that, just look at the palm branches in our hands. We are guilty’

Source <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/deaconsbench/2012/03/homily-for-april-1->

Now, if you grew up in a church-going Christian context as I did, homilies of this kind can still, on occasions, catch me by surprise and be surprisingly powerful. This is because they serve to remind me of how I have most definitely not remained loyal to the Christian Church’s teaching about Jesus as being in some way the second person of the Holy Trinity and, therefore, also very God of very God. I may continue to value aspects of the human Jesus’ teaching and example but, since I utterly reject the supernatural claim that he is the incarnation of God — and indeed reject the idea that the God of theism even exists — from the Church’s perspective, I am indeed part of the fickle crowd who, having praised Jesus with hosannas in my innocent childhood and early teens, now knowingly ‘betrays’ him in my sceptical adulthood.

But the truth is that today (to quote from James W. Woelfel) ‘in my own ongoing struggle to make sense of the Christian context of life- and world-interpretation I find basic elements of that context which I simply cannot render coherent any longer, and I earnestly wonder how other persons manage to’ (*The Death of God: A Belated Personal Postscript* — <http://www.religion-online.org/article/the-death-of-god-a-belated-personal-postscript/>). Given this, I have no choice but to ‘betray’ the Jesus of orthodox Christian understanding.

However, as I sat down to pen this address I realised I can only be guilty in the way Deacon Kendra thinks I am if I allow myself to be seduced into thinking that the phenomenon of being in a real, actual existent crowd in our actually unfolding world is the same as being, once a year as a Christian believer imaginatively in the crowd in the fixed, fictional world of the gospels. But they are not the same, far, far from it.

Imaginatively being in the crowd once a year in the fixed fictional world of the gospels as a Christian believer is to be in a situation in which you are seduced into thinking it is possible always-already to live knowing the beginning, middle and the end of some single, master narrative in which you are playing a part. It is to stand by the roadside already 'knowing' this person passing before you is the Christ, born of a virgin and who is the saviour of the world, God with Us, Emmanuel. It is also already 'to know' that, although Christ will be executed at the end of the week, three days later he will be resurrected in order later to ascend into glory to sit at the right hand of the Father from whence, forever more, he shall judge the quick and the dead. In short, imaginatively to be in the crowd as a Christian believer is to be a person who believes it is possible to understand and view the world from some God like vantage. But, as I hope you realise, such a vantage point (were it to exist, which I personally doubt) is always inaccessible to human kind. But it is precisely from this viewpoint that the Church believes it is able to preach a Palm Sunday lesson to us about commitment, loyalty and betrayal. Hmmm.

But now imagine yourself in an actual crowd in the world as it always-already actually unfolds for us welcoming some new political or religious person promoting this or that new political or religious programme and doing this — i.e. when (as is always the case) we neither know the beginning nor the end of the story, nor even if there might emerge from it all any single, simple, master narrative that can be told in years to come.

Standing in such a crowd, let's begin to draw upon the words we heard earlier from Roberto Unger. Unger points out that a major

'... characteristic of religion is that the imperative of life, rooted in a vision of the world, responsive to the incurable defects in our existence, requires us to commit our lives in a certain direction.'

Unger, and I guess most of us here, knows that a life lived without making some such conscious commitment to living a life in a certain political and religious direction is deeply unsatisfactory and empty in some profound way. I have no doubt that this was something also recognised by those in the crowd on the first Palm Sunday. All of us, then and now and in our own very different ways, are always on the lookout for that religious or political wheel against which we feel confident enough for us willingly to put our shoulder and push with full commitment and without any doubts. After all, that's why we are in a church today, isn't it? In this existential situation of knowing we need to commit our lives in a certain direction, we are wholly kith and kin with members of the crowd mentioned in the gospels.

But we know that now, as then, we have far from complete information about the person and/or religious and political programme in question. Sure, we might have heard some attractive and intriguing stories about them but then we have heard many similar stories told about many other such people and programmes. But, you may say to yourself, 'You never know, perhaps this is the real thing and the movement behind which I can get fully behind' and so you join the crowd at some event or other in your home town. Perhaps, on the day, you even find yourself getting caught up in the event and its immediate sense of enthusiasm and general hope and find yourself enthusiastically waving the modern equivalent of a palm branch — it's likely to be a placard — and shouting a modern version of 'Hosanna!' Perhaps you get a copy of the manifesto, buy the tee-shirt and the button badge too. You might, on the other hand, be minded to be a bit more circumspect and keep an open and sceptical mind and simply watch and listen from a safe distance — let's say in your own home via a live-stream or a website. Perhaps, after seeing the launch event, you might decide straightaway that, actually, they're just another blowhard and their programme is, in fact, highly problematic and flawed.

Then, as now, all of these interpretations of the person and their programme, and many more besides, are all perfectly possible and the truth is that the interpretation you hold today is one you may decide to reject tomorrow.

But the point I want to stress is that standing there in the crowd — any crowd — ‘on the day’ — you do not have enough information to decide in any fully rational and fully evidenced -based way whether or not you are going to commit to them and their programme and, what is more important, you will never have enough information to choose securely — not then in the crowd that welcomed Jesus, not today in another crowd welcoming someone else.

But please be clear, standing in the crowd trying to decide whether to get behind this or that person and/or this or that religious, social or political programme — then or now — is never merely an abstract question because it always concerns the matter of how you are going authentically to live the only life you have. As Unger points out, if it were simply an abstract question then ‘we might be able to take no position at all’ but, he goes on to say

‘. . . it is not merely cognitive; it goes to our need to form an attitude, implicit and unelaborated if not explicit and fully formed, to the most disturbing and perplexing aspects of our condition. We will have an attitude, whether we want to or not and whether or not we are fully conscious of the ideas informing it. In arriving at such an attitude, however, we are condemned to cognitive overreach: we must stake the course of our lives on suppositions whose grounds fail to do justice to the gravity of their implications and to the scope of their claims.’

However, Deacon Greg Kendra — and Christian preaching on this day in general — seems not to understand that there can exist no simple guilty/innocent binary choice when it comes to deciding (in their terms or yours, then as now) whether to be loyal to Jesus or to betray him (then or now).



The Rev Andrew Brown.

The Christian viewpoint does not allow us to see the deeply anomalous and contingent nature of our world that could never make Jesus, or the Christian church’s view of Jesus, something self-evidently simple and eternal to which you must either always be either fully loyal or which you choose to betray.

From where I’m standing in the crowd the lesson to learn from Palm Sunday is not the simple, “Ladybird Book of Holy Week and Easter” which speaks of either being loyal to Jesus or betraying him — that’s a deeply unhelpful, unhealthy and wholly false binary choice. Instead, for me, the truer lesson of the day seems to be, firstly, about learning humbly to acknowledge that, although we can never know with anything approaching absolute certainty that the religious and political commitments we do get behind are truly good and of lasting worth, we still have to make them if we are to have anything approaching an authentic and fulfilled life and secondly that, whatever we choose, ‘we will have an attitude, whether we want to or not and whether or not we are fully conscious of the ideas informing it.’

This unsettling thought is surely a worthy question upon which to ponder during Holy Week and the run-up to Easter and especially during a time in history when the false binary of ‘you are either loyal to us or a betrayer’ is becoming disturbingly popular once again. It never was, nor ever will be, that simple.

Ephesians = Unitarians?

By Jeremy Goring

Last summer I led a pilgrimage to Patmos, the small Greek island off the Turkish coast that is only accessible by sea. We had an audience with the abbot of the great hilltop monastery that dominates the island and attended an early morning service in the cave where St John the Divine is said to have written the Book of Revelation.

That book, as is well known, begins with the letters the saint wrote to the 'seven churches of Asia' – Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia and Laodicea. They are an important source of information about Christianity in Asia Minor towards the end of the first century AD, but I believe that 'what the Spirit said to the churches' still has significance today. The 'seven churches of Asia' are archetypes: their distinctive strengths and weaknesses continue to characterise the differing denominations of Christendom.

Taking them in reverse order, Laodicea, which is 'neither hot nor cold' and materially prosperous, may not unfairly be likened to the Church of England. It was in fact an Elizabethan puritan who first coined the adjective 'Laodicean' and applied it to the current Anglican establishment. These days, although there are many spirited people within its ranks, there is still something 'lukewarm' about the institutional life of a church to which so many of the rich and powerful formally belong.

Philadelphia, whose people are said to have 'little power', are praised for their good works and their obedience to the laws of God, may be equated with the Quakers, whose influence for good in the world is out of all proportion to their numbers. It is no accident that the pioneer Quaker, William Penn, gave the name 'Philadelphia' ('brotherly love') to the town he established in America.

Sardis, which has 'the name of being alive' but is in fact 'dead' and is almost totally deficient in good works, may be said to stand for the Orthodox Church, which sometimes seems to be so preoccupied with ikons and other memorials to the dead that it neglects the needs of the living.

But a distinction needs to be drawn between the Greek Orthodox church, the piety and generosity of whose members so impressed us on Patmos, and its offshoots in Serbia, Romania and Russia, whose collusion with worldly power has had such dire consequences.

Thyatira, which is noted for its 'love and faith and service' may represent the Roman Catholic Church, whose Social Teaching is of a high order and, in the person of Pope Francis, has set a fine example of Christian good practice. But St John's complaint that church members have been too tolerant of 'Jezebel' (that outrageous Biblical exemplar of immorality) may find some echoes in our own day, when cardinals have been condemned for their failure to deal effectively with corruption and child abuse.

Pergamum was praised for its faithfulness to the gospel but criticised for embracing 'some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans'. No-one knows much about the Nicolaitans but they were evidently an 'antinomian' sect who held the heretical belief that the moral law was not binding upon Christians. They may bear some resemblance to contemporary evangelical groups who, like Luther, so emphasise the importance of faith that they tend to deny the value of good works.

Smyrna, noted for its material poverty and for being slandered and persecuted by its enemies, may be said to represent sects such as the Jehovah's Witnesses that draw their support mainly from the poorer, humbler, less educated section of the community and whose excessive zeal often invites hostility.

Finally we come to Ephesus, the church that the writer named first and the one that, since he himself had belonged to it, he probably knew best. 'I know your works', he wrote, 'your toil and your patient endurance, and how you cannot bear evil men but have tested those who call themselves apostles but are not, and have found them to be false.' And he also praised them because, like him, they hated 'the works of the Nicolaitans'. 'But,' he went on, 'I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.'

If for 'lampstand' we read 'flaming chalice', we will have no doubts about the identity of the Ephesians. Who else but the Unitarians have worked so hard at their faith? Who else have had such a nose for false prophets. Who else, apart from the Quakers, have such a proud record of good works? Who else have had such a distaste for the latter day Nicolaitans who deny the importance of such works?

As readers of Raymond Holt's, *The Unitarian Contribution to Social Progress in England*, will be aware, the denomination has been in the forefront of movements for the relief of poverty, the improvement of working conditions, the advancement of education and the reform of local government. In our own day, Unitarians have continued to be distinguished by their emphasis on what their forbears called 'practical Christianity'. They have taken seriously Christ's injunction, 'Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'. They cannot be accused of abandoning the 'love they had at first', if this refers to brotherly and sisterly love. But it might be argued that, while faithfully keeping the second Great Commandment, they have virtually abandoned the First; 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength.'

The abandonment of the 'love of God' refers not merely to a change in language but to something much more fundamental – a change of feeling about the nature of reality. An earlier less sceptical generation believed that the power that guided and sustained the Universe was that of Divine Love. For them, God was not a theological proposition but One in whom they put their whole trust. An entire section of *Hymns of Worship Revised* (1962) was devoted to hymns expressing 'Trust in God', but only two of these 29 hymns were retained by the compilers of *Hymns for Living* (1985). All that survived were a revised and truncated version of 'O God our help in ages past' (essential for Remembrance Sunday) and 'God moves in a mysterious way' (which no one dared exclude or alter). At one time, when people sang Cowper's great hymn, one of the finest in the English language, they felt the force of its words in every fibre of their being: 'grace' and 'providence' were not abstract notions but truths of experience.

Today it is customary to dismiss such things as wishful thinking. It is felt that there is no purpose in the Universe apart from what human beings, by an effort of the will, choose to put into it.

This outlook on life is well represented in a hymn by the American humanist, Kenneth Patton, rejected by the compilers of *HWR* but gladly accepted by those of the book that replaced it. The hymn begins with the affirmation that 'we are the earth, upright and proud' and goes on to proclaim that the human mind will find the answers to all the world's problems. The fruits of such hubris are everywhere apparent – in industries that pollute the atmosphere, in agricultural practices that devastate the earth, in 'scientific' experiments that inflict torture on animals, in medicine that treats minds and bodies as machines. The world is in need of a spiritual movement that accepts the limitations of our human understanding, recognises the connectedness of all created things and, with reverence and humility, acknowledges the grandeur and majesty of the Whole (the Holy) of which we are a part. Let those who have an ear hear what the Spirit is saying to the Ephesians!

Dr Jeremy Goring, a former Unitarian minister, is the co-author with his wife Rosemary of *The Unitarians* (Christian Denominations Series, 1984). Those who went on the pilgrimage to Patmos were members of Christ's Universal Spiritual School of Practical Christianity.



St John's Monastery

In Defence of Pharisees

By Bruce Bebbington, UCA member, from a talk given to Anglican clergy and lay leaders.

Colloquially, Pharisees are depicted today usually as religious hypocrites who feign devoutness in the outward signs of piety while doing the venal opposite. Also, they are normally said to like the trappings of status associated with a religious hierarchy. When this descriptor, Pharisee, is applied to people, those using the label take their authority for it from Jesus's statements in the gospels. As to hypocrisy, Jesus states: "Now do ye Pharisees make clean the outside of the cup and platter but your inward part is full of ravening and wickedness" [1] {He, of course, refers to Jewish laws of hygiene in this quotation when drinking and eating.} As to enjoying status, Jesus says of the Pharisee: "For ye love the uppermost seats in the synagogues and greeting in the markets". [2]

However, one has to ask if this is an accurate picture of Pharisees in the time of Jesus. In trying to answer this question, there are three issues: "Can the gospel accounts be relied upon? and to what religious group is Jesus referring? and What literature or other historical evidence exists upon which a judgment can be made?" I will attempt to deal with the issues in turn.

Also, there arises the point whether in finding out the accurate picture, the exercise gives a moral guidance to us today.

The gospels are not contemporaneous with the broadcast words of Jesus but were written at least 50 years after his death. For example, the gospel of my quotations, Luke's, was written between 80 and 110AD and it follows that what is quoted as a saying of Jesus must be a report at least third-hand, as 50-odd years have elapsed since the conversation. This passage of time alone suggests questionable reliability in the exact words said. More profoundly, the gospels are not intended to be a scholastic précis of the sayings of Jesus but are written as a *tendenz*. *Tendenz* means a writing used primarily both as an attempt to convey conscientiously the purport of the person quoted therein but also to shape his or her words to the motive and propaganda aims of the person actually writing down the reported speech.

At the time Luke wrote the account of Jesus, the church had abandoned the aim of promulgating its message among the Jews. It had found a receptive audience among the gentiles but at the same time, this largely Greek speaking audience were concerned that by embracing Christianity, they would not incur the ire of the Roman emperor and his governors. The Jews were also "persona non grata" after they had risen in 70AD in a liberation war, which ended very bloodily in their defeat and expulsion from Palestine. So it suited the *tendenz* to be derogatory towards the Jews and especially their main religious group, the Pharisees.

The Pharisees are always distinguished from the Sadducees in the gospels but are sometimes lumped with other contemporaneous groups. The Sadducees believed primarily that the Jewish testament was the complete authority for the Judaic faith, whereas the Pharisees added to the doctrinal faith citing Jewish tradition. The Sadducees died out rapidly after the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem in 70AD, as they controlled the administration of that temple until the Jewish revolt, which preceded its destruction but had very limited support in the Jewish population. However, this distinction is not the only one to which "Pharisees" may have been applied by the gospel writers. There was a group known as the Havurot at the time of Jesus, who were extreme aesthetes and very obsessed with purification when performing personal or religious tasks. I believe that the gospel writers converged the practices of the Havurot with those of the Pharisees.

As to what the Pharisees believed or practised, there is no written contemporaneous literature. The earliest literature dates mainly from the third century after Christ. Here the rabbis wrote down the articles of faith which, together with the Jewish scriptures, form the Torah. These cite Jewish traditions which separately form the Mishnah. The rabbis came into being after the destruction of the second temple, being teachers of the Jewish faith after the possibility of a Jewish priesthood ended with the lack of the temple as a central authority for this priesthood. From the nature of the Mishnah, it should be clear that the rabbinic authors did not create the original text but wrote down what their predecessors had said, and those predecessors must have been primarily the Pharisees, as they were the

predominant religious group before the razing of the temple. Indeed, the Talmud specifically refers to the teaching of Hillel and Shammai, who were the leading Pharisees at the time Jesus lived.

The essential role of the Pharisees was as exegetes and administrators of the Torah. Did they carry out this role in a hypocritical or self-seeking manner? Naturally some Pharisees may have done so. Yet in no other literature save the gospels are the Pharisees disparaged. The Roman historian, Josephus, wrote in 90AD that they had “entire virtuous conduct” for example. They are lauded by the third-century rabbis who wrote the Mishnah as examples of piety and religious sagacity. It is very difficult to believe that the same majority of Pharisees as expanded the 10 Mosaic commandments to make them entirely relevant to the first century AD are the same persons who have wickedness in their hearts.

Indeed there are parallels in the theology and methodology of the Pharisees and Jesus which indicate a common line of thought.

Firstly there is the use of parables, metaphors and similes as an aide to the bringing into focus of moral and spiritual doctrines. In fact, the Torah is full of stories which are paralleled by the use of parables with which Jesus chose to explain his doctrines for living. This story-telling features particularly in third century AD writings by Rabbis, as they partly take up the sayings of their predecessors, including the Pharisees. Similarly, metaphor abounds in the Torah. One example is where the gospel speaks that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven”. This same metaphor appears in these Rabbinical writings save that an elephant is the substitute animal for a camel.

Indeed the gospel passages, where pharisaic ideas are denounced, are often unfair on the Pharisees, as they wrongly attach views to that group. Jesus attacks the Pharisees, as they criticise him for healing the sick on the Sabbath in one passage. However, the reality is that nowhere in the Torah is it prohibited to heal on the Sabbath. Actually, one commentary on Exodus 31.3 specifically allows healing to continue on the Sabbath [Mekhita Shabbata 1].

Similarly, there is no prohibition on eating with the sinful or insistence on washing cups, plates or hands before a communal meal as a religious duty. This washing was put forward at the time primarily as a matter of good manners and hygiene. Again some religious groups insisted upon the washing as religious observance. Particularly there are passages requiring the washing in the writings of the Essenes contained in the Dead Sea scrolls.

Rather there is a marked similarity between the tenets of the Pharisees and Jesus and nowhere is this clearer than in the idea which underlines the whole teachings. This idea is expressed by Jesus: “Therefore all things whatever ye would that men do to you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets” [3]. The same idea is expressed in the negative by his contemporary, the Pharisee Hillel, “that which is hateful to you, do not do to your neighbour. That is the whole Torah; the rest is commentary. Go and study it!” Further, Jesus essentially built on Judaic law. He is quoted, “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat; all therefore whatever they bid, you observe but do not ye do after their works; for they say and they do not”[4]. Some Christian theologians have tried to argue that Jesus supplanted the law of Moses as in the Torah, rather than adding to that law saying that he substituted a new law of love for the law of Moses. However, this argument cannot hold up against the last quotation and several others attributed to Jesus.

Actually, Jesus faced the same problem as the Pharisees, in that the Jewish scripture was not sufficient to reach the needs of the age. The Pharisees solved this problem by recording the traditions of teachers in the Judaic faith. Jesus branched out to new insights uniquely understanding what underpinned Judaic faith. This problem of making the message relevant reoccurs with each generation and is the reason Christian spokesmen refer to their religion as a “living faith”.

Nowhere did the problem of modernising the existing religion arise more than in the attitude towards gentiles. Around 500BC, there had been a seismic shift from the Jews simply viewing Jehovah as theirs alone. This shift is echoed in the book of Isaiah, as the second writer begins his script at chapter 40. When he writes:

“Keep ye judgment and do justice; for my salvation is near to come and my righteousness be revealed. Blessed is the man who doeth this” [5], there is an ambiguity whether God’s command is universal or just for Jews. By the time of Jesus, this ambiguity had been removed in that there was an expectation and a responsibility for Jews to behave virtuously to gentiles and gentiles to behave in a like way to Jews. For it is written in the Mishnah “Now let not the foreigner who joined the Lord say that the Lord will surely separate me from his people”. This passage does not mean, of course, that Judaism does not prescribe the delineation of the Jews as a blessed race from God. It means that God will bless any person who follows its will.

Jesus went a step further than the Pharisees by not only opening up the principles of the Jewish faith to gentiles but also putting the gentiles on an equal footing before God. At the same time, he added to the doctrines of that faith. Later Christian thinkers further expanded the teachings of Jesus and diverged the teachings more from Judaism, starting with the writings of St Paul.

It can be seen that Christians owe a massive debt to the Jewish prophets and religious teachers who guided Jesus to reach his monumental conclusions. If one fails to recognise this debt, it distorts the understanding of his message. One misunderstanding is the frequent subservience of anything in the Old Testament to the messages in the New Testament. There are passages in the Old Testament which add to one’s understanding of Christianity in themselves. Not least is the story of Exodus as to how God stood by the Hebrew slaves and not the self-deified Pharaoh.

The gospel writers did a dis-service to our understanding of the teaching of Jesus by exaggerating or wrongly ascribing faults to the Pharisees despite the writers’ irreplaceable work in bringing the words and acts of Jesus to all posterity. Today we sometimes exaggerate or wrongly ascribe faults to other religious groups than our own and by doing so, only make our faith the poorer.

[1]. Luke 11.43. [2]. Luke 11.39. [3]. Matthew 7.12 [4]. Matthew 23. 1 & 2. [5]. Isaiah 56.31.

An Appreciation of the Life and Work of Rev. Dr. Arthur Long **Unitarian Christian Association** **Meeting 15 July 2017**

The life of the Rev. Dr. Arthur Long, or Arthur, as he was happy to be called, spanned much of the twentieth century and six years into the present one. Born in 1920, he was called to his first ministry in London in 1945 and he concluded a distinguished ministerial career as Principal of the Unitarian College here in Manchester. I came to know him in the last decade and a half of his life, when I became more closely involved with the Unitarian Christian Association and worked alongside him as Secretary. He chaired the Association and acted as editor of the Herald. My personal memories of him are largely based on phone calls, letters and e-mails, and the experience of driving him down to UCA Council meetings, which in later years were usually held at Hinckley. (Arthur continued driving until his wife Margaret became increasingly concerned about the risks that might ensue from his driving long distances) During such journeys I would share the conversation with him and Anne Wilson, the UCA Treasurer of many years standing. His conversation was gently humorous, yet contained much insight and wisdom as well. To put it in plain and simple terms, he came across as the man he was, a thoroughly nice, kind, and good man.

There are some people whose personal lives are largely separate and discrete from their professional callings. Not so Arthur, whose life and character was all of a piece with his work. His personality was infused with his profound religious convictions, and his theological writings reflect the breadth and warmth of his personality. In this talk, I will occasionally use some words from some of his published writings, which I hope will serve to illustrate something of his personality, in both its breadth and in its depth.

He had the advantage of a sonorous and mellifluous voice, in which he delivered ‘bon mots’, stories and personal anecdotes, of which he had a plentiful store, and passing comments on issues of the day.

Many people commented that he could have been a bishop and certainly in outward appearance, along with a wry smile, a droll sense of humour and an understated but acute intelligence, he would have been well cast for the role, either as an actor or as the real thing. However, although he might have been well suited to embrace a career in the established church, rather like a latter-day F. W. Maurice (the distinguished 19th Century Anglican theologian and academic), the similarity ended there. Like Maurice, Arthur was a born and bred Unitarian, a son of the manse, his father being the Rev. Walter Long. Unlike Maurice, he remained close to his dissenting roots and his intellectual and spiritual life were firmly grounded in a Unitarian Christian milieu.

He was, therefore, intellectually and theologically, a convinced Unitarian, but his was a wider Unitarianism, that, in sociological terms, following the typology of Ernst Troeltsch, belonged to the church type, rather than the sect type. He maintained a wide interest in current trends in theology, both Unitarian and in the wider Christian community. When I first became involved in Unitarianism in the 1980s, he wrote a fairly frequent column in *The Inquirer*, called 'Sounding the Mainstream'. The title of those articles, I realised in retrospect, was deeply significant, a pointer to the fact that he remained true to the grounding of his liberal Christian roots. He was always open to the insights of the broader Christian Church, albeit he was sometimes trenchant, though always courteous, in his critique of some of its conclusions. This openness and his appreciation of the wider Christian tradition gave his theology an extra dimension.

Anyone who met him for the first time, would soon realise that here was someone with an acute and fine mind. He had an extraordinarily capacious and accurate memory for quotations, and he would make frequent reference to scholars and theologians, usually it has to be said, of a generation or two previous, like C.J. Cadoux, of whom he wrote "as a great hero of mine in my student days, whose *Case for Evangelical Modernism* ...still seems to me despite the fact that has always denied that he was really a Unitarian, one of the best defences of Unitarian Christianity ever written.", to name only two.

In his well-regarded Anniversary Sermon, preached to the Unitarian General Assembly in Lampeter in 1982, he quoted the great Victorian churchman: J.B. Lightfoot: "I find that my faith suffers nothing by leaving a thousand questions open, so long as I am convinced on two or three main lines." The words are Lightfoot's but I think they equally reflected Arthur's thoughts as well.

Arthur's gentle understated humour came up even in otherwise serious theological contexts, when he would quote funny sayings or recount humorous stories. I once heard him say something like "Some Unitarians would die rather than think – and some of them do." Years later, I came across a version of this quotation, in his survey of British and Irish Unitarianism, *Current Trends in British Unitarianism* published in 1997, which says, "Most Englishmen would rather die than think- and many of them do." There was however, nothing humorous about his commitment to the tradition of rational thought in Unitarianism. Arthur was thoroughly rational, without being a dry Rationalist. He was fully supportive of the role of feeling in religious life, but was concerned that thought was in danger of being supplanted by a vague and misty position that allowed for anything and everything to come under the wide umbrella of Unitarianism. In *Current Trends*, he wrote: "Intuition and imagination are tremendously important, but Unitarians must always remain faithful to the traditions of the Enlightenment. Any concentration on the irrational at the expense of the rational is always highly dangerous. New Age concerns within Unitarianism do, unfortunately, sometime furnish examples of the woolly superficial thinking which so often plagues us... for some of us, it is not immediately obvious that Pagan mythology is inherently superior to Christian mythology" However, as always, he sought with courtesy and candour to be fair to all sides. Arthur readily commended a "legitimate concern for Green Issues". He also quoted the journalist Clifford Longley approvingly: "Only those who have never been guilty of car-worship are entitled to point a finger at tree-worship".

In his Anniversary Sermon, Arthur embraced the notion of 'Radical Christianity', which as he pointed out, meant a going back to the roots. He argued that we should be both socially and theologically radical, as we were in the

18th and 19th centuries.

If we proclaimed radical Christianity as our ideal, this might give us new life: “Could this”, he asked, “be the way out of our identity crisis?” (*Look unto the Rock – ‘LR’* 9-10). However, Arthur stayed true to his Unitarian liberalism, even when most fervently proclaiming his faith as here. Such a faith, though fervent, should be tentative, spurn dogmatism and admit uncertainty. Perhaps, he said, we need a “Christian Agnosticism” (*LR* 11). He quoted Bishop John Robinson: “The radical cannot claim to have the whole truth. To remember that should keep him humble...” (*LR*11).

It is that last word that I want to focus on here, because it goes to the heart of one of Arthur Long’s most endearing and engaging attributes, namely his humility. Here was a profound scholar, someone with a length and depth of experience in ministry, both London and one of our great Northern towns, Bolton, and yet I never heard him boast about any of his achievements or qualifications, neither have I ever met anyone who heard him do so. He was a minister and scholar of great stature, yet one who, in the great Dissenting tradition out of which he came, treated everyone equally with friendship, respect and courtesy. There are people who will parade their knowledge at the drop of a hat. Arthur displayed his knowledge, when appropriate, with modesty and self-effacement. In this way, he lived out in his ministry the great Reformation principle (and a fundamental Biblical principle as well) of the ministry of all believers, and the Unitarian tradition (at its best) of respect for all, regardless of their rank or status.

This leads me on to another, one of the greatest aspects of Arthur’s life and labours, his work at Unitarian College here in Manchester, first as tutor and later as College Principal. Arthur took over as Principal when the college was still in Daisy Bank Road. He was largely instrumental in bringing about the entry of UCM into what was then called the Northern Federation for Training in Ministry, along with Northern College (URC, Congregational and Moravian) who came in at the same time. I suspect it took all of Arthur’s considerable diplomatic skills and tact to reconcile doubters, both Unitarian and those in other colleges, to the prospect of this joint work of ministerial training and formation. The strength of his Unitarian convictions never detracted from his commitment to ecumenical co-operation.

He had chaired the local Free Church Council during his ministry in Bolton and he displayed the same commitment to working together with other Christians in his time at Unitarian College. He had intended to retire in 1986, but the college committee persuaded him to stay for another two years, while the college adapted to its new situation here at Luther King House. The two years then became three, and he finally retired in 1989. Even then, his involvement with the college continued, including a stint as Tutor -in-Charge in the spring term of 1991, until a new Principal started in April.

Arthur’s scholarship extended over much of the period of his ministry before his time as Principal. In 1963, his book, “*Faith and Understanding*” was published, a collection of “*Critical Essays in Christian Doctrine*” to quote its subtitle. It comes the closest to a more systematic approach to theology in his thought. These short essays contain a wealth of insight, sympathetic observation and critique, even on some unlikely topics for certain Unitarians, such as ‘the Communion of Saints’, as well as more traditional Unitarian themes, such as ‘Salvation by Character’.

His greatest memorial lies, first and foremost, in the effect he left on others, both in his ministry and in the students who worked with him. Only this morning, I had an email from the Rev. Ernest Baker, who recalls his “homiletics” sessions, and the “very good practical advice he gave... which I followed to good effect, I think”. Ernest also mentions a feature of Arthur’s life and work, namely his fondness for quotations. This again, I think, shows another aspect of his character: not only his deep and capacious learning but his openness to new ideas, and insights from others.

His fundamental courtesy, his respect for other people, whatever their label, be it Christian, neo-Pagan, Humanist, those of all faiths, and those with none, his manner of putting any criticism in terms that neither diminished nor derided the views of the other person: all these stemmed from his own deep confidence in the faith of his upbringing and the faith of his free choice as an adult.

It was a faith in the God whom Jesus proclaimed, an attachment to the human Jesus, ‘the author and perfecter of our faith’, and a belief in the essential goodness of humankind, due to its having been made in the image of the Creator.

By the time I came to Unitarian College in 2009, there were no staff left who still remembered him personally. Nonetheless, I have heard many stories over the years of the affection and respect that students and staff (both academic and domestic) felt for him. It seems he took a great part in some Christmas parties! As he was so fond of quotes, I will end with ‘a quote from a quote’. It comes from his book, *Faith and Understanding*, concerning the essence of the Christian Church: ‘a group of people, ...brought together through a common devotion to the person, teaching and example of Jesus, and seeking to promote through worship, instruction and fellowship, the realization of the ideals for which he stood, the only valid test for legitimacy being that which Jesus himself laid down: “By their fruits, [you] shall know them”’ (*Faith & Understanding* 68). We have gathered here today to celebrate and give thanks for the fruits that Arthur brought forth. By them we knew him, and for them we remember him with respect and affection.

Alex Bradley 15 July 2017



The Rev Alex Bradley

FUTURE EVENTS

The Unitarian Christian Association
In collaboration with
The World Community for Christian Meditation

www.wccm.org

Will host a
Quiet Day

At

Dean Row Chapel

www.deanrowchapel.co.uk

Chapel Road, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 2BX

On

Saturday, 23 June 2018

10am until 4pm

Come for a day of peace, silence, gentle fellowship, guided meditations, Taizé worship, buffet lunch and afternoon tea—all offered in the beautiful surroundings of a 17th-century Dissenting chapel, garden and well-appointed hall.

There will be no charge for participating in the day’s events, but it would be helpful to have some idea of numbers, for catering and practical purposes. Please contact the Secretary of the Unitarian Christian Association, the Rev Jeff Gould, on 01625 402952 or via jeffrey-lanegould1959@talktalk.net, to indicate your wish to take part.



INTERFAITH MEDITATION FOR PEACE

A day to celebrate unity and pray for peace

At Manchester Cathedral, Victoria Street, Manchester, M3 1SX

Friday 25 May 2018 10.00 am – 4.00 pm

Join a gathering of people from all backgrounds in a silent meditation of unity – with people from different faiths or none. We will celebrate and strengthen the powerful spirit of community in Manchester which followed the tragic event of 22 May 2017.

Key note speaker: Laurence Freeman OSB

For further enquiries and to book please contact Pat Higgins
E: patricia_higgins@hotmail.com or T: 0161 962 8661

All welcome



Members and friends of the UCA meeting at Ullet Road Church, Liverpool for the Annual General Meeting.

LIVERPOOL WELCOMED THE UCA

The twenty-sixth Annual General Meeting of the Unitarian Christian Association took place on Saturday, 10 March 2018 at Ullet Road Church in Liverpool. It was appropriate that the UCA hold its formal business meeting in this splendid ‘cathedral of Unitarianism’, as it has hosted several UCA events and gatherings in the past, and the *Art Nouveau* grandeur of the building served as the ideal inspiration for a report on the past year and an anticipation of things to come.

The minister of Ullet Road Church, the Rev Philip Waldron, welcomed the UCA members and friends to the Grade-I, listed building in which he exercises his ministry, and gathered the assembly in a service of Holy Communion. Phil preached on the Christian virtue of self-sacrifice, which was magnificently expressed in the central stained-glass window in the chancel of the church (designed by William Morris and Edward Burne-Jones), where the figure of Christ is depicted as the personification of Love, and makes self-referencing gestures to a communion chalice and a grapevine. The worship benefitted from the contribution

of members of Ullet Road Church’s choir, who offered a sung benediction following the sacrament.

Following the official business meeting, the Rev Jo James, minister of Mill Hill Chapel, Leeds, gave an illustrated presentation on the history of the congregation he serves, with special reference to its engagement with social action in its home city. He introduced the meeting to the chapel-based charity, The Conversation Club, which seeks to aid refugees and asylum seekers in assimilation to life in the United Kingdom. The meeting unanimously chose to designate The Conversation Club as its charitable cause for the 2018/19 year, and will seek to raise funds throughout the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

The afternoon’s event was begun and ended with a buffet lunch and afternoon tea, respectively. The officers of the UCA were thanked for their hard work in the course of the previous year, and were re-elected to serve in their current roles for another two years.

Jeff Gould, UCA Secretary

