

THE HERALD

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Banner of The Guild of the Good Shepherd (see p. 19)

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Editor: The Revd Andrew James Brown MA

The Manse, 5 Emmanuel Road, Cambridge CB1 1JW

Email: mail@revajbrown.demon.co.uk Tel: 01223 576952

EDITORIAL

They are like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper”

(Psalm 1:3 NRSV).

In the past few months I have had one or two comments about the language of the UCA’s Declaration of Trust—especially its use of “Lord and Master” and “Christ.” It is clear that some can see these phrases as excluding and would like to see them dropped in favour of more ‘universally acceptable’ ones. The trouble is, of course, that one can only replace words with words and words that have no particularity, no earthy ‘dirtiness’, also have no ‘flavour’, no ‘bite’, or, as Jesus might have said, no ‘saltiness’. The philosopher Hegel noted that since the word ‘being’ applied to everything it also meant nothing! This is, ultimately the trouble with language which tries to be universally acceptable—in the end it can carry no real freight.

But the universalist position developed by our Unitarian and Free Christian tradition was achieved only because of the *particular* experiences and shared language of our people. Our community’s particularity is Christian, its normative text/language is the Bible and its experience and response to God is understood through a profound meditation upon, and imitation of, the life and teachings of Jesus. This is why we don’t believe we should kowtow to secular or political human power and why, instead of calling some priest, politician, king or dictator ‘Lord and Master’ or ‘Christ’ (i.e. God’s chosen), we in fact use these titles of a ‘powerless’ and crucified rabbi, carpenter and ‘poor criminal.’ The use of such titles is, therefore, profoundly subversive and helps direct us towards the only true source of power which is the One God.

As inheritors of a rational tradition we get terribly and, in my opinion, dysfunctionally hung up about words because we seem to experience only their limitations. However, if there is one great lesson to learn about being a human being, it is about coming to understand that we can only encounter the infinite through the finite—it is only through our limitation that we can intuit the limitless. In other words we need to learn to *look through* the words and phrases we inherit to the direct experience of God in just the same way an Orthodox

Christian looks through an icon of Christ to experience God. We need remember that, as the great Unitarian historian W. G. Tarrant wisely reminded us, “there are two notes to be found undeniably, if unequally, characteristic of Unitarianism. It is both rationalist and mystical” (Unitarianism, Lindsey Press 1912, p. 3). We are rationalists, yes, but we are also mystics rooted in the heart- and hand-orientated Anabaptist protestant mystical tradition—as anyone who has studied our ancestors, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century Polish Brethren, will have realised.

So my reply to criticisms about the UCA’s continued use of traditional language is to point out very strongly that, *looked through* and *mystically* interpreted, they are *precisely* what enabled us to develop a vision of God that is ultimately a radically inclusive universalistic one which can still challenge all partial and flawed visions of human power and control. The words we inherit do not set limits upon us but in fact help us open real doors to God.

It is becoming clearer and clearer, to me at least (!), that the more some contemporary Unitarians try to impose a minimal universally acceptable religious language the shallower and less grounded and effective our religious tradition becomes. If we wish to be a successful and confident Unitarian and Free Christian community then we need to secure ourselves once more in the *particularity* of our tradition with all its experiences and language and let that bring forth the fruits of goodness, truth and beauty which truly express the reality of God’s love for all people, regardless of particularities. Those who learn to do this will, as the Psalmist realised, become “like trees planted by streams of water, which yield their fruit in its season, and their leaves do not wither. In all that they do, they prosper.” (Psalm 1:3 NRSV).



UCA MODERATOR’S COMMENTS
by the Revd Chris Wilson

Dear Friends, “*Without God we cannot, without us God will not*” (St. Augustine). The UCA is back! Our corporate membership is up.

Our individual membership is up. Our profile has never been higher. We now have a Synod, serviced by a small Officer Group, of which I am Moderator (Chair). These developments arose out of our

last AGM (and first Synod), which unanimously—and enthusiastically— adopted and approved them. We have a new Constitution, a new Synod, a new Officer Group and, as our good friend, the Rev Cliff Reed observed in his recent report on the UCA in the *GA Zette*, a new —energetic and positive—attitude! And, all these changes arise from our renewed faith.

These dramatic changes open a new chapter in our history. They mark the transition of the UCA from being a sometimes combative group of Unitarian and Free Christian *activists* to become a mature, settled, thoughtful and reflective *ecclesiastical society*. All key decisions will now be taken by our Synod, which will meet about three times per year, and to which *all* members are invited. These changes represent a radical empowerment of our membership, be it corporate or individual. Ours *is* a radical ecclesiology, where *all* members have equal rights and privileges; where the Officers may *advise*, but it is the Synod that will *decide*. And, with constitutionally-fixed terms for all Officers, no one may dominate our counsels. We will indeed be a *community* of believers. It is indeed true to say that all of these changes have received widespread acclaim.

I was also struck at the recent GA, both by the positive feedback on the *Herald*, but also by the large number who took our literature or who joined up on the spot. Such was the demand that we almost entirely ran out of literature. It is indeed evident that we do offer a resource that others find valuable.

But we must remember, *this is change for a purpose*. And that purpose is that we would be that place within our wider community of communities, where the Unitarian, Free and Liberal Christian tradition can be affirmed, explored and renewed. Christianity is not part of our past. It is our past, our present and our future. *Here*, we would be Church, seeking to practise our faith in an open, loving and liberal way. *Here*, we would show that an intelligent, progressive and inclusive liberal Christianity lives on, and has much to offer to our broader General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

We now, God willing, have much to do and lots to offer. And in all we do and offer, worship will be central with fellowship and fun the natural consequence.

This is our calling—to love God and one another.

This is our dream—to be Church.

This is our practice—to be liberal.

This is our faith—Unitarian and Free Christian.

We invite all who share in this vision to join us. With every good wish and blessing.

The Revd Chris Wilson is the Chair of the UCA and the Associate Minister of the Eastern Union of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches.



THE MYSTERIOUS JESUS
by the Revd Tom McCready

Editorial Comment: At this year's GA meetings Tom and I were talking about the language of the UCA declaration of trust (explored in the editorial of this edition) and I tried to express how I thought that language could be unfolded and interpreted. In response to this conversation Tom sent me this beautiful piece on his own understanding of Jesus. I have pleasure in printing it here.

What are we to say about this man from Nazareth: the carpenter king, the peasant prophet, the pale Galileean whose words, with their promise of love everlasting, continue to enrich and inspire two thousand years after his death?

If we say he was the only begotten Son of God, Born of the Father before time, who shall come to judge the living and the dead, then we place him on a pedestal of unapproachable and inaccessible divinity, we place him beyond all human reach.

If we merely bow down before him in adoration, we do not have to identify with him; and it is easy never to engage with what he says to us about our own humanity, it is easy to believe that we are following him, without ever even noticing that we are failing to engage with the profound and beautiful mystery of human personhood that he illuminates for us.

If we say he is just a man; albeit a man who was a supremely gifted prophet and teacher, but ultimately a man like any other man, then we risk being dazzled by the grace and poise of his words, by the beautiful music of his teaching, and the danger is that we stand back to admire them without ever realizing how simply and deeply we can take them into our hearts and let them change our lives forever.

If we say he is just a man, even if we say he is the best of men, then we need never really engage with what he has to say about God, with how he makes the divine accessible, with how he brings God within everyone's reach.

If we struggle to pin him too precisely into a single category, we imprison him in certainty, and we have lost him.

But if we have the courage and the wisdom to hold him in our hearts as a mystery, we breathe fresh life into him and he is with us forever.

In the closing of the mind around him as a certainty, we create a distance between him and ourselves that we cannot cross; but if we open our hearts to him as a mystery, then we are with him forever in the meeting of the personal and the universal, of the human and the divine.

He is a window through which we can look at God, and he is a mirror, in which we can look at ourselves; and, like a beautiful stained glass window, he is a portrait in which we can see displayed the drama and passion of all human possibilities. And shining in his living and his dying we can see the supreme reality of love and we can trace the eternally unbroken link between the love that blooms anew and every day in each human heart and the love that lit the stars.

The Jesus that we meet in the gospels is not asking us to bow down and worship him: he is asking us to walk alongside him and to bear witness with him to the presence of God in the beauty and mystery of the world and in the decency and dignity of human personhood.

The Jesus who speaks to us in the act of worship, the Jesus whom we meet in the serenity and grace of the worship space is not calling us to bear witness to his own glory; he is calling us to bear witness to the love of God at work in the extraordinary lives of ordinary people, to the presence of God within us all.



THE UNITARIAN TRADITION: ROOTS AND BOUNDARIES

A personal view by Cliff Reed

The roots of our Unitarian and Free Christian tradition are in a liberal understanding and interpretation of the Judaeo-Christian tradition. According to my understanding, this comprises affirmation of the following: God as the Divine Unity; the ethical teachings and personal example of our brother Jesus; the freedom to believe according to conscience; the role of reason in testing and refining faith; the role of the Spirit, the breath of God, in sustaining us and guiding us into truth - both individually and as a community of faith. This tradition has come down to us from the days of the Reformation in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It began as an attempt to purify Christianity of what were seen as alien doctrines derived from Graeco-Roman Pagan philosophy, and which the major Reformers (Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc.) left more or less intact. The persecution suffered by Unitarian pioneers (Michael Servetus, Faustus Socinus, Francis David, John Biddle, etc.) stimulated a dedication to religious freedom and to tolerance as a strong and dynamic spiritual value, firmly based on the life and teachings of Jesus. We have upheld this stance ever since.

A liberal, questioning and scholarly approach to scripture transformed our understanding of the Bible during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. No longer an unquestioned authority, it nevertheless remained our foundation document, an indispensable source of myth and parable, spiritual insight, sacred history and ethical teaching. It rooted us in the wider Judaeo-Christian culture that prevailed in the West until its decay in the late twentieth century. The Bible is still used in our worship, but no longer universally. There is, sadly, a growing neglect and ignorance of the Bible amongst us. This reflects the influence of the rootless and shallow secularism now prevailing in the wider society.

The nineteenth century move away from the absolute authority of scripture—although not yet from the use of the Bible itself—led towards an emphasis on the direct encounter with God and on the individual conscience as the ‘seat of authority’ in religion. Inward spiritual experience and the apprehension of the divine in Nature

brought a new quality to Unitarian thought and worship. However, the likes of William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Theodore Parker and James Martineau still saw themselves and their Unitarian faith as Christian. They were moving Christianity on, not abandoning it.

In the later nineteenth century some Unitarians became convinced that ‘mainstream’ Christianity in general was a lost cause as far as reform was concerned, and they moved to dissociate from it. Most remained Theists, but no longer called themselves Christians, in effect accepting orthodox definitions of Christianity and then placing themselves outside those boundaries. As Beatrix Potter put it, ‘We are not Christians in the commonly accepted sense of the term’ (‘Journal’, 23rd February 1896). Others, while retaining the ethical basis provided by liberal Christianity, wanted a religion that was natural rather than supernatural. They saw religion in purely human terms and this world as the sole arena for our activity and spiritual striving. Out of this grew religious humanism, which saw itself as taking Unitarianism further along the road dictated by rationalism and scientific discovery. This tendency became dominant in American Unitarianism in the twentieth century, and it existed here too. It has increasingly run out of steam, though, in the face of a growing desire for spiritual depth and reconnection with the Ultimate.

Another important nineteenth and twentieth century development was the growing knowledge and appreciation of faiths other than Christianity. This made Unitarians active in the inter-faith movement from its beginnings, and also led to the incorporation of the insights of non-Christian faiths into Unitarian thought and worship. When knowledgeable, insightful and respectful of boundaries, this has been a very positive thing and most certainly remains so. The danger lies in an ill-informed and essentially disrespectful plundering of other traditions. This can involve a ‘cherry picking’ approach to their scriptures, using extracts without sufficient understanding of their meaning and significance. Worse perhaps, is the appropriation of other faiths’ customs and practices, taking them out of their true context in the tradition that really owns them. When this goes hand in hand with the abandonment of our own inherited scriptures, customs

and practices, then the result is incoherence, even what someone has recently called a ‘joke religion’!

Our tradition embraces the following inter-related elements: liberal Christianity in a variety of forms; a truly religious humanism; the recognition and appreciation of the sacredness and divine origins of the natural world; an openness to the truth and insights contained in all humanity’s faith traditions. But are there boundaries? What can’t we embrace (for we are not obliged to embrace everything!)? What, for instance, are the downsides of these elements of our tradition?

Clearly our tradition cannot embrace illiberal, rigid, intolerant, narrow, dogmatic and ‘fundamentalist’ Christianity. This is what we escaped from long ago as liberal Christians and Rational Dissenters. We still offer a much-needed alternative to that. But neither can we embrace the hard-line atheism and ideological secularism that often claim a monopoly on the word ‘humanism’ these days. This is just another form of fundamentalism: closed-minded, contemptuous of other views and convinced of its own infallibility. It is clearly incompatible with the liberal faith we profess.

One aspect of the spiritual hunger of our times is the attempt to reach back to the supposed beliefs and practices of our remote pagan ancestors. However fanciful the results (and they are often very fanciful indeed!), people are, of course, perfectly free to pursue this road. But should they do it in a Unitarian context, rather than in one of the many neo-pagan groups that now exist? Of course, there is absolutely no problem with exploring the old mythologies, telling their stories or with using them poetically. All mythologies are part of the common human heritage. But could it really be part of our tradition actually to worship or ‘honour’ the deities of the ancient Celtic, Teutonic, Egyptian, Graeco-Roman and other ancient pantheons? Could it really be part of our tradition to practise rites and rituals supposedly meant to invoke or appease them? Obviously not! Bearing in mind the true nature of ancient paganism and its practices, we must be wary of reviving it! But playing at it won’t do either, and this is the danger. Re-establishing a wholesome relationship with the earth is a very important, indeed, a crucial spiritual priority, but our own tradition offers better ways to do it than a confused return to

polytheism and animism!

As something of an aside, it is worth noting in this respect, that a key element in the development of Unitarianism in the Khasi Hills of North East India in the late nineteenth century was its founder, Hajom Kissor Singh's, rejection of the quasi-polytheistic and animist elements in the area's traditional religion. He retained its basic monotheism, however, recognising that there is only 'One living God'. He had also rejected elements of the orthodox Christianity brought to the area by Calvinist missionaries, and to which he had been a convert until his own thought and Bible study took a Unitarian turn! The Unitarian faith that he developed was, in effect, a fusion of liberal Unitarian Christianity and Khasi monotheism, stripped of what might be called its pagan elements. One element of Khasi Unitarian theology that he did derive from the traditional religion and which speaks to a spiritual need much felt in the West these days, is the affirmation that the 'One living God' is both our Father and our Mother. Hajom Kissor Singh laid great emphasis on this, seeing it as complementary to the Christian belief in God as 'Abba, Father' (Mark 14:36). Otherwise, though, Khasi Unitarianism is quite distinct from the traditional 'Pagan' religion still practised by many Khasis, and doesn't mingle the two.*

But to return to my main theme, the Unitarian openness to other faiths has a downside already mentioned earlier, namely an approach that fails to do justice to the distinctiveness and depth of any faith by claiming to embrace them all.

A living faith tradition (meaning, something that is handed on or passed down) must continue to grow spiritually and intellectually, and this is particularly so in our case! However, we grow from our roots and there must be continuity—not necessarily identity—with what our forbears affirmed if we are truly to be a tradition. If we accept into our midst things that are essentially at variance with our tradition, then we cease to be what we have been and become something else entirely. The result can only be disintegration, for ultimately there is a limit to what we can include and yet remain one community of faith, however liberal and open. There must be more to hold us together than a mere word, emptied of meaning! Parting in love may be

preferable to a descent into animosity.

I don't want anyone who truly values our Unitarian and Free Christian tradition to be forced out of it through intolerance and bigotry. That would be a betrayal of all we stand for. It's up to all of us, though, to make sure that what we say and do as Unitarians and Free Christians does indeed connect with that tradition. And if some would genuinely be more at home in some other setting, then there is no disgrace to anyone if they seek it out. That, after all, is why we have a diversity of denominations and faith traditions!

* See, 'Unitarian Theology in India', by Plielad Lyngdoh, in, 'A Global Conversation: Unitarian / Universalism at the Dawn of the 21st Century', eds. Andrew M. Hill, Jill K. McAllister and Clifford M. Reed. International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, 2002.

The Rev. Clifford M. Reed is minister at the Unitarian Meeting House in Ipswich.



IN MEMORY OF REV DR WERNER PELZ

by Dr Phillip Ablett

Editorial Comment: Dr Ablett sent *The Herald* this piece because during the 1960's Pelz had been quite influential upon a number of Unitarian ministers. Pelz's theology and life will still, I think, resonate with many of us today. He seems to be a man whose thought we might valuably re-explore.

Dr Werner Pelz (b. 25 September 1921, Berlin—d. 14 May 2006, Melbourne) was a German-Jewish refugee from the Nazi regime, prisoner of war, Anglican priest, newspaper columnist, popular theologian, BBC broadcaster and lecturer in Sociology at La Trobe University in Melbourne, Australia.

Werner first gained notoriety as a priest-theologian in the Anglican Diocese of ("*Honest to God*") Bishop John A.T. Robinson in the 1950's and 60's, when he began writing articles for the UK's *Guardian* and the *Listener*. His first book in 1959, "*Irreligious Reflections on the Church*", expressed the initial questioning of thinking believers in the post Holocaust age and anticipated the radical theologies of the next decade. This was followed by two more controversial books, "*God is No More*" (1963) and "*True Deceivers*" (1966), co-written with his first wife Lotte Hensl, a fellow Jewish refugee. His works had the blessing of Bishop Robinson, who saw them as part of the movement he advocated towards a more mature and intellectually honest

Christianity that didn't require of its believers to accept the mythopoetic aspects of scripture as empirical facts. They certainly were of this ilk but Werner wanted to go much further.

Werner had come to Christianity as a stranger from a secular Jewish background in Weimar and then Nazi Germany. In his autobiographical work *"Distant Strains of Triumph"* (1964), Werner said his family did not think of itself as Jewish until Hitler's rise to power. His father was a decorated German war veteran but such honours made no difference to the Nazis and all of Werner's family was sent to Auschwitz, where his parents soon perished. Werner only just escaped a similar fate by being sent to Britain as a guest worker in 1939. When the war started, he was incarcerated as a "friendly enemy alien" but elected to do labouring work in Australia. Werner then worked in internment camps in the Australian outback before being released in 1942 and returned to Britain.

After the war, when the unimaginable scale and horror of the Shoah was revealed, Werner was looking for a faith to make sense of life. At the time, there only seemed to be two alternatives, Nihilism or Christianity. He chose the latter but not through any conventional route. Werner's entry into the Church was the result of a profound existential encounter with the words of the first-century, Rabbi-prophet, Jesus of Nazareth. This began with his reading the Bible in the solitude of the Australian outback. In Jesus' words, as presented in the New Testament, Werner experienced a disturbing urgency and power, calling those who heard them out of all our conventional, "civilized" and rationally-ordered structures of division, exploitation and indifference. Werner insisted that the words of Jesus still had an immediacy and potential to speak to everybody, whereas the terms "Word of God" or "Word of Christ" were no longer intelligible or recoverable for most people in contemporary society. As he would later write: "Today we could be met by the simple, 'naked', 'untheologized' words of Jesus, and if we are lucky they will disturb and frighten us—as life itself" (1963:12).

While Werner had no difficulty affirming Jesus as Messiah, he worried that the label had been used to stifle Jesus, preventing readers of the gospels from meeting Jesus in the fullness of his possibilities and

theirs. He and Lotte invited people to share their experience of Jesus as neighbour, Jesus as poet, Jesus as artist, Jesus as rebel and law-breaker, Jesus as artisan of a new humanity, Jesus the Jew and Jesus as prophet, to name only the most obvious.

The words of Jesus, for Werner, demanded a response, envisioning a new life of radical egalitarian communality, a communality in which we become “responsive to each other’s needs, take responsibility on our shoulders and help others recognize theirs”. To this end, Werner joined the Church of England and was ordained in 1952.

In 1963, Werner and Lotte published their most influential theological work, “*God Is No More*” (whose provocative title is a line from a William Blake poem). Here they tried to free Jesus’ voice from dogma and ecclesiastical encrustation, emphasizing the radical, this-worldly character of his message and its intrinsic appeal.

The authority of the words of Jesus—if any—resides in themselves. Unless they convince and convict me, nothing in heaven or earth can compel me to accept them, or convince me of their truth or usefulness—certainly not a belief that Jesus was ‘God’ or the ‘Son of God’. This is their freedom and their power... *I do not believe in the truth of the words of Jesus because I believe that he lives. I believe that he lives when I am persuaded to believe in the truth of his words* (Pelz and Pelz, 1963:14).

Werner was not unmindful of critical Biblical scholarship concerning the authenticity of the words attributed to Jesus, a question re-visited most recently by the *Jesus Seminar*. While Werner found such inquiries fascinating, they were largely beside the point for his purposes. The words of Jesus, he maintained, formed a poetic unity “full of pathos, irony, humour and a unique, sympathetic passion”, and that was their validity.

The Jesus of the New Testament that Werner encountered was also utterly Semitic and heir to the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Bible. He felt that glorification of Jesus by the Christian Church had diminished and tamed this integral feature of his abiding significance. The disruptive but life-affirming understanding conveyed in prophetic utterance, calling us back into compassionate and just communality, remained a source of hope-filled critique for Werner even after he left the church.

The Old Hebrew prophets dealt in the market place, with burning social, political issues...radically critical of the government of his day and of its legitimators, the priests. He spoke in images, in poetry, to make his words unforgettable, to make them haunt those who would like to forget them. Gradually, to protect themselves from the living prophets, the rulers turned the messages of the dead ones into liturgy, their socio-political urgency into ritual repetition. The words of the very men who had urged the people to grasp their responsibility were used for 'the domestication of the masses' (Pelz, 1975: 2).

Gradually and with sadness, Werner parted company in the mid-1960's with the church but without renouncing his ordination.

In 1964, Werner travelled to Israel making a documentary for the BBC and lived on a Kibbutz for a short time. At the time, he was impressed by the experiments in communal living, although in later years he expressed his disillusionment and alarm at what Israel had become in its systemic persecution of the Palestinians. Always a friend of oppressed peoples everywhere he supported two states as the only way to a just peace. In his final broadcasts series "Rumours of Hope" for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1987, he surprised listeners by saying that Mohammed clearly stood in the same prophetic tradition as Jesus and Moses: "He too calls people out of their former lives and divisions into a radically new communality"

(<http://www.abc.net.au/rn/talks/8.30/relrpt/stories/s1651651.htm>.)

In the late 1960's, Werner continued working as a radio and television broadcaster. He also participated in various social movements, which included being a spokesperson for the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament. He and Lotte separated in 1970.

At the age of 50, Werner returned to study at the University of Bristol, completing a doctorate in sociology. Werner hoped to find in sociology a new idiom for continuing the vital, prophetic task of social critique. That critique would increasingly focus on those aspects of Western rationalism that diminished social life by treating it exclusively as a set of objects, subject to fatalistic "laws" and technical control. He taught us that the purpose of rationality was to serve life but that we modern Westerners had reversed this relationship to our great detriment.

In his plea for a broader and more humane understanding of our

social world, Werner would also look beyond the rationalist tradition of the West and ask what the poets, artists, mystics and revolutionaries of all cultures might have to contribute? This quest resulted in the publication of Werner's doctorate by Routledge as "*The Scope of Understanding in Sociology*" (1974). On the strength of this pioneering work in sociological hermeneutics, Werner was offered a lectureship in sociology at La Trobe University in Australia. Werner also married Mary Zobel in 1973.

In retirement, Werner and Mary moved to Healesville, where he continued to write and give the occasional guest lectures. Despite his disillusionment with organised religion and politics, the theme of hope remained a continuing thread in Werner's concerns. This was not, as he put it, the shallow "hope of Pandora's box which consoles over a miserable present". Rather it was "the hope of the prophets who saw the possible future judging the present ...the philosopher's hope which makes them think and write, the scientist's hope which makes them work, the revolutionary's hope which makes them rebel, the lover's hope which gives the courage to woo" (Pelz, 1974: 176-7).

This hope, for Werner, was a dynamic part of our ever-changing human condition, which would find new forms in our struggles for meaning, justice and peace. In his own life, this hope moved from theology to social theory and then into more poetic and meditative forms of expression. In his last years Werner published little, except for a first translation into English—in rhyming couplets—of *The Wanderer: Epigrams of a European Mystic* (2001) a collection of aphoristic prayers by a 17th century German priest, Johann Scheffler, better known as Angelus Silesius. This painstaking work in retrieving an obscure piece of poetry from oblivion was undoubtedly consistent with his conviction that dissent from the dominant worldview (global capitalism and imperial violence) would continue even when the outward signs of it were not in public view. Werner continued in these twilight years to share his insight and intellect with many past students and colleagues who visited and corresponded with him and through locally organised discussion groups whose members treasured his participation.

Dr Phillip Ablett is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore 4558, Queensland, Australia.

REPORT ON THE UCA'S
THEOLOGICAL COLLOQUIUM AT TRINITY COLLEGE



Left to right: Jeff Gould, Alan Kennedy, Chris Wilson, Cathy Fozard,
Joe Bord, Cliff Reed, Andrew Brown, Jim Corrigan, Orlando Fernandez,
David Burton and Alex Bradley

On the 7th April eleven people gathered at Trinity College, Cambridge to explore key aspects of the Unitarian Christian tradition in order to see how it might be revived in the context of the twenty-first century. Three papers had been pre-circulated: Joe Bord's *Canon and Community* (exploring how an engagement with the Biblical canon could function as a liberal religious community's primary locus of authority in the absence of credal statements), Andrew Brown's *God, Jesus, Christ and Holy Spirit* (exploring ideas central to the Christian canon and how they might be interpreted in a contemporary Unitarian Christian context) and Chris Wilson's *Towards a Unitarian Christian Ecclesiology* (exploring how these ideas could be translated into community). Each of the writers briefly introduced their work before inviting comments and debate. The debate was passionate but good-humoured and although a variety of different views were expressed it was gratifying for the participants to

discover they shared a deep passion for the revival of classic Unitarianism (theistic and/or Christ centred) which could effectively counter some of the recent post-modern-influenced relativistic developments within sections of both European and US culture.

Joe Bord and Andrew Brown are currently writing a book to be called *Canon and Community* which will offer up some of their reflections on the themes of the conference.

Copies of the colloquium papers will be put on the web as soon as possible, but if anyone wants copies immediately then please contact the editor.



REVIEW: *Finding Sanctuary – monastic steps for everyday life* by Abbot Christopher Jamison (Orion Books, Weidenfeld & Nicolson) £10 h/b.

By Jim Corrigan

The author of ‘Finding Sanctuary’ is Abbot of the Benedictine monastery at Worth in Sussex that featured in the BBC-2 TV series ‘The Monastery’ in 2005. The three-part programme was about a group of five modern laymen who spent 40 days and nights living the monastic life, and the effect this had on them.

Abbot Christopher Jamison writes not so much about the TV series, but about how men and women from all walks of life can find sanctuary in everyday life. It is a powerful and inspiring book, full of humility and deep insights, likely to be valuable for both Christians and non-Christians. Abbot Christopher deals with complex and difficult issues in a simple, lucid style.

Early on he reflects on why he became a monk. He admits he is no longer sure of the answer: “... because the reason I joined is not the reason I stayed. I joined thinking I could save the world by becoming a monk; I stayed because the monastery became the place where I discovered my own need to be saved. Before I could offer sanctuary, I had to find it.”

What he offers the reader is not just his own insights based on a 30-year search for inner sanctuary, but also the 1,500-year-old wisdom of the Benedictines, which originates in the Rule of Benedict, who drew his own inspiration from the Desert Fathers, often called the world’s

first psychologists.

The author's criticisms of the 'busy-ness' and alienation of the modern world will not be new to most Unitarians, but his exploration of 'Monastic steps for living', is likely to be. He offers: Silence, Contemplation, Obedience, Humility, Community, Spirituality and Hope. He explores how these largely unfashionable concepts and practices may still have much to teach us.

Abbot Christopher makes clear that sanctuary is more than a refuge, it also offers, he says, 'sacred space'—a place where you can confront yourself ('Rid your heart of all deceit' as Benedict put it). Essentially, the journey to sacred space is a moral quest; the recognition—often so hard for Unitarians!—of the evil (as well as the good) within us all.

"If you want to find sacred space in your life, then you must 'walk without blemish'. You will of course fail—but failing is quite different from not even trying," he writes.

Not surprisingly for a Benedictine monk, Father Christopher's personal belief is that ultimately we find our sanctuary in God. Despite this, he welcomes aspects of modern 'spirituality without religion' saying this often leads to people learning about the religions of the world, opening up 'the bigger picture of life's meaning'.

However, he goes on to warn against the contemporary 'pick-and-mix' attitude to religion, of becoming what he calls a 'spirituality shopper', a person who chooses whatever 'takes their fancy' from encounters with different religions.

"At some point, one has to choose either a whole religion or no religion. Constructing one's own spirituality is a possible outcome of this learning, but it does not deal with the fundamental challenge of the wayward desires of the heart."

This is a warning that should speak to us all.

Jim Corrigan is a member of the UCA and a BBC journalist.



CREATURES OF LIGHT

A meditation by Sabrina Lewins

Friends, some of you will all know I have had an unexpected stay in hospital recently and came very close to dying of a pulmonary embolism. This experience has focussed my mind—there's no surprise in that!

When I was stable and moved into a small ward, I saw some of the women in beds around me watching the evening soaps on television. Then they told those who hadn't watched, what had happened in each soap. It astounded me to hear of all the dreadful things being recounted—"He got drunk and hit his wife and then he hit a policeman, stole a truck"—that sort of thing. It seemed nothing good at all was happening in these stories but a whole litany of the lowest of human behaviour was being recounted.

I turned to the woman in the bed next to mine and said "that's such a terrible thing—that television is lying about human behaviour and telling us that so many people are so bad."

"Oh", she said casually "80% of people in the world are evil. In a state of shock I replied "No, no, 80% of people in this world are wonderful. Look at my visitors as they come tomorrow—you will see a procession of angels. That is what people are really like—look at the nurses and doctors here—they are angels and this is the real world".

My friends, look at someone near to you. Look hard because you are seeing an angel. Oh yes you are—in each person here there is mercy, pity, love and peace. Together we make this room, this church a place of love and peace. Can't you feel it?

TELL THE TRUTH

Speak no more in smart retorts, in clichés, in dumbed down language. Use your words for glory. Lift your voice above the rumble of discontent, the murmur of evil and the despair around you. Join your hearts and voices with mine and connect to each other. Let us weave a fabric of goodness so strong that the powers of evil will fall through and sink back to the dark corners from whence they came.

TELL THE TRUTH

Let the glory that some call God, some call intelligence, some call Love, shine forth in our world. And be what we are:

Creatures of light

Creatures of light

Creatures of light.....

Sabrina Lewis is a member of the UCA and will be known to some of you as the author of some delightful children's stories about Blume, the knitted blue mouse that lives in the Cambridge church.



THE GUILD OF THE GOOD SHEPHERD (see cover photograph)

Margaret Phelan recently sent *The Herald* this photograph. The Guild was a Unitarian society and each member branch had its own banner and it must have been akin to the Banner Parade at G. A. when the annual gathering was held, usually in Kidderminster, where they would parade from the School across the schoolyard and into the New Meeting Church. Anyone fancy writing a small piece on the Guild?



WOMAN LINK

An article appeared in the Herald last year submitted by Cynthia Richardson from the Unitarian Women's Group in which she reported on the raising of funds for two hospitals in Romania. They are currently helping to raise £1500 for a new ultrasound probe. If you wish for more information then please contact Cynthia Richardson, 18 Moss Croft Close, Urmston, Manchester M41 8TA. If you wish to send a donation please make the cheque payable to "Woman Link."

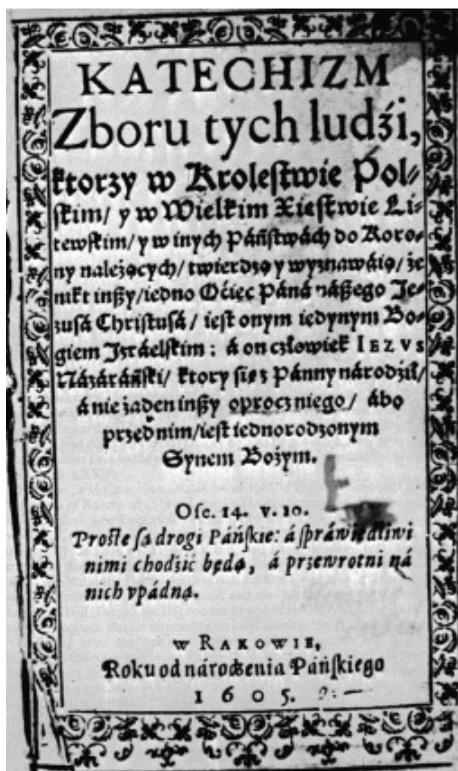


WORDS OF WISDOM FROM THE RACOVIAN CATECHISM 1605

Whilst we compose a Catechism, we prescribe nothing to any man: whilst we declare our own opinions, we oppress no one.

Let every person enjoy the freedom of his own judgement in religion; only let it be permitted to us also to exhibit our view of divine things, without injuring and calumniating others. For this is the golden Liberty of Prophesying which the sacred books of the New

Testament so earnestly recommend to us, wherein we are instructed by the example of the primitive apostolic church. “Quench not the spirit,” says the apostle (I Thess. v. 19, 20), Despise not prophesying; prove all things, hold fast to that which is good.”



WHAT DOES UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIANITY OFFER?

Andrew Brown

In essence this tradition offers a disciplined life journey following the way of Jesus. What his example is perceived to be about was beautifully put by Joseph Henry Crooker in 1908 (please do your own translation into inclusive language!):

The pre-eminence of Jesus does not lie in the mere fact that he did this or said that, but rather in the general impression of his life as the sublime exhibition of a perfect trust in God and a supreme love of man. He demonstrates what human life ought to be and what it can be. He gives men

not only a precept to follow but a life-motive sufficiently powerful to enable them to put the precept into action. He illustrates the victory of unselfish love, and he creates in us the love that actually serves and conquers. By his purity he shames us out of our wrong-doing, and by his doctrine and practice of forgiveness he encourages us to outgrow our sins. He makes known the heart of God by living wholly unto God, and he thereby warms our hearts to a loving kindness that creates the kingdom of God. By his example he reveals the way of life; by the winsome and forceful influence of his personality he creates in us the earnest desire to enter and the ability to walk securely in the way of eternal life. (*The Church of Today*, pp. 168-169).

Our churches are communities which seek to help people to walk this beautiful way of eternal life. We are not about dogmatically believing in this or that theological statement about the nature of Christ and nor are we concerned about slavishly fetishising the person Jesus, but we *are* concerned about transforming ourselves and our communities so that we, together and here and now, exhibit the same love of God and neighbour revealed to us by Jesus.



SOME DIARY DATES

Saturday 5th August **SUMMER SYNOD** at Dean Row Chapel, Wilmslow, 2pm - 5 pm. Afternoon tea provided. Please telephone or email The Rev Jeff Gould to say you will be attending on 0161 436 3233 or jeffreylanegould@btinternet.com.

Saturday 9th September **WOMEN IN THE LIFE OF JESUS**

A discussion day at Nazareth Chapel Padiham led by The Rev Jean McNeile. 10am-4pm Lunch provided. More information from Jean on telephone 01282 773 184



CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERS

Bolton, Halliwell Road Free Church, Halliwell Road, Bolton, Lancs.
10.30 am & 6.30 pm. www.halliwell-unitarians-bolton.org.uk

Bolton, Unity Church, The Gatehouse, 118 Chorley New Road, Bolton, Lancs.
BL1 4DH. 10 am

Cambridge, The Memorial Church, Emmanuel Road, Cambridge CB1 1JW
10.30 am & 6.30 pm (Four communion services per year, Christmas Eve, Good Friday, Whitsunday and during Harvest) www.cam.net.uk/home/unitarian

Dean Row (Wilmslow), Dean Row Chapel, Dean Row, Wilmslow, Cheshire.

11.15 am

Dundee, Williamson Memorial Unitarian Christian Church, Dudhope Street, Dundee. DD1 1JT. 11 am. www.dundee-unitarians.org.uk

Failsworth, Dob Lane Chapel, Oldham Road, Failsworth, Manchester. 9.30 am

Great Yarmouth, Old Meeting (Unitarian), Greyfriars Way, Great Yarmouth, NR30 2SW 3 pm (1st & 3rd Sundays each month).

www.unitarian.org.uk/eu/gtyarmouth

Hale Barns, Hale Chapel, 60 Chapel Lane, Hale Barns, Altrincham, Cheshire. WA15 0HT. 9.30 am. www.halechapel.org

Hyde, Flowery Field Church, Newton Street, Hyde, Cheshire. SK14 4NP. 2.30 pm (Communion 1st Sunday each month) www.unitarian.org.uk/ecu/floweryfield

Hyde, Hyde Chapel, Knott Lane, Gee Cross, Hyde, Cheshire. SK14 5SQ. 11 am (Communion 1st Sunday each month) www.unitarian.org.uk/ecu/hydechapel

Knutsford, Brook Street Chapel, Adams Hill, Knutsford. WA16 5DY. 11 am. Leeds, Mill Hill Chapel, City Square, Leeds. LS1 5EB. 10.45 am www.millhillchapel.org.uk

Liverpool, Ullet Road Church, 57 Ullet Road, Sefton Park, Liverpool. L17 2AA. 11 am. www.ullet-road-church.org.uk

London (Brixton), Effra Road Chapel, 63 Effra Road, Brixton, London. SW2 1BZ. 10.30 am. www.unitarian.org.uk/ldpa/brixton

London (Hampstead), Rosslyn Hill Chapel, 3 Pilgrim's Place, Hampstead. NW3 7NG. 11 am & 7 pm. www.rosslynhillchapel.com

Mansfield, The Old Meeting House, Stockwell Gate, Mansfield, Notts. NG18 1LG 10.45 am (2nd & 4th Sundays) 6.30 pm (1st, 3rd & 5th Sundays) www.unitarian.org.uk/emu/mansfield

Oxford, Manchester College Chapel Society, Harris Manchester College, Mansfield Rd, Oxford, OX1 3TD. 11 am. www.oxfordunitarians.org.uk

Padiham, Nazareth Chapel, Knight Hill, Church Street, Padiham. BB12 8JH. 10.30 am. www.padiham-unitarians.org.uk

Stalybridge, Stalybridge Unitarian Church, Forester Drive, Stalybridge, Cheshire. 11 am. www.stalybridgeunitarians.org.uk



UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION

Registered Charity No 101 777 1

To preserve and strengthen the Christian tradition within the Unitarian Movement

Annual subscription rates are: Individuals £7: Families £10: Students & Unwaged £4 (subscription to Herald only £5)

Congregational membership £35.00

Please address all membership enquiries to the Revd Andrew Parker at the address overleaf.

UNITARIAN CHRISTIAN ASSOCIATION
OFFICERS



The Revd Dr Arthur Long (Hon. President)
65 Scholes Lane, Prestwich, Manchester M25 0AW
Telephone: 0161 798 0779
Email: Arthur.long@care4free.net

The Revd Chris Wilson MA (Chairman)
1 Fairview Grove, Swaffham Prior, Cambridgeshire CB5 0LB
Telephone: 01638 742091
Email: Cjwilson63@aol.com

Mr Kenneth Howard (Hon. Secretary)
75 Hutton Avenue, Ashton-under-Lyne, Lancashire OL6 6QZ
Telephone: 0161 330 1295
Email: ken75howard1@aol.com

Mr Donald Booth (Treasurer)
43 Mewburn Road, Banbury, Oxfordshire OX16 9PQ
Telephone: 01295 253921
Email: don@mewburn43.freeserve.co.uk

The Revd Andrew Parker B.Th. (Membership Secretary)
260 Wood Street, Langley, Middleton, Manchester M24 5GL
Telephone: 0161 643 1824
Email: arp9898@hotmail.com

The Revd Andrew James Brown MA (Herald Editor)
The Manse, 5 Emmanuel Road, Cambridge CB1 1JW
Telephone: 01223 576952
Email: mail@revajbrown.demon.co.uk