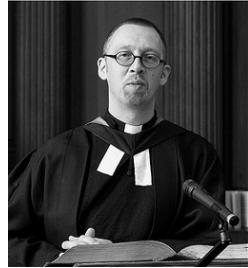


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LEADING ARTICLE

As you will read in the *Moderator's Comments* the *Unitarian Christian Association* (UCA) and the *Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Northern Ireland* (NSPCI) have, together, restored an important historical link that existed until recently between our respective church traditions. The UCA's Officer Group will, of course, continue to keep you informed and involved in further developments through both the pages of *The Herald* and face to face through its *Synods* (the next one is on the 5th August in Great Yarmouth news of which is contained elsewhere in this edition).



There is much I could say about this exciting event but one thing I would particularly like to bring to your attention here is the relationship that exists between Unitarian and Trinitarian Christian positions in a *liberal, non-credal* context. I also include in this edition a sermon on the subject I gave two years ago in Cambridge. The reason for raising this question here and now is that the NSPCI has, wisely in my opinion, always explicitly allowed both positions to co-exist within the same community. It is well known amongst us that Martineau was opposed to the use of the word *Unitarian* when it was applied to churches or denominations saying: 'Many of us entirely object to calling Unitarian congregations by that name, and any attempt at sectarian or theological union must in all respects signify

fail.”¹ He would have preferred to call our own family of churches simply by the name *Free Christian* and he thought that the epithet *Unitarian* should only be used to describe an individual’s understanding of the Christian faith. We know that, ultimately, Martineau’s view did not prevail and for many people this question is now of mere historical interest. In truth, however, it is becoming relevant once again because of the recent rapid development of a progressive and liberal movement which has crossed denominational/theological divides. Surely we wish to play an active part in this wider movement? If we do we must all be concerned to ensure that our churches are open and welcoming to liberal/progressive Unitarians and Trinitarians *alike*. I am pleased to report that, to my knowledge, they are, but that still leaves us with the question of how we should understand and use that tricky word *Unitarian* in the liberal and progressive Christian context. As it happens, to lay my own cards clearly on the table, in addition to being a committed *Free Christian*, I am also a committed *Unitarian* Christian and that means, probably like many of you, that whilst I am passionate about the Unitarian Christian tradition I also profoundly value being in creative fellowship with liberal/progressive Christians who are Trinitarians. What counts is not the creation of some narrow Unitarian Christian sect but a growing and deepening sense of belonging to a much wider liberal/progressive Christian community that encompasses the widest possible range of Christian beliefs.

All these musings brings me to the most important point I wish to make in this leading article which is publicly to extend to our liberal/progressive Trinitarian friends (whether in the NSPCI or in other Christian churches) our warmest greetings and the right hand of fellowship for we know, as Jesus taught us, that in our Father’s house there are many mansions (John 14:2). We are overjoyed to be once again to be closer neighbours and friends in such a venerable and liberal household of faith.

¹ Quoted in Bolam, C. Gordon et al., *The English Presbyterians*, (London, George Allen and Unwin 1968, p. 256

MODERATOR'S COMMENTS

Hands across the water....

Liberal Christians have a problem. And this is their fragmentation across and within several denominations. The truth is that you can find liberal Christians within a number of traditions, and not just within our own *General Assembly of Unitarian & Free Christian Churches*. The challenge then becomes, what can we do to bring those of the same faith into an ever closer conversation and relationship, one with another?



Well, we can start close to home. *Very* close in fact. In a real sense the *Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland* (NSPCI) is our sister Church across the water. We and they, have until very recently shared mutually beneficial — and historic — ties, which found organisational expression through a formal constitutional link with our General Assembly. It is worth recalling, that the NSPCI had representation within the old GA Council, and that a number of our ministers serve congregations in Ireland. So far, so good . . .

However, an unforeseen consequence of the recent constitutional changes within the GA ended this constitutional link and this was a matter of regret to many, on both sides of the water. Enter the UCA. We, in this affiliated society of the General Assembly, realised that we could offer something of use here; by way of a *restorative act* — and so conversations began between the NSPCI and the UCA. These culminated in a UCA delegation being invited to attend, as guests, their Annual Synod, in Belfast this June. Consequently, they took the historic decision to vote to affiliate as a denomination to the UCA.

Thus, *one* link between liberal Christians within these islands has been restored. They are affiliated to us. We are affiliated to the GA. Everyone wins. *A link restored*. We hear so much about division within our Unitarian and Free Christian family of faith these days, isn't it great to be able to report an act of unity for a change? And might it, just suggest, that the liberal Christian tradition remains the true basis of our common identity?

So, *welcome* to all our friends in the NSPCI. We have much to learn from you. We hope and believe that have much to offer in return. Together, our shared Christian witness can only get stronger...

With every good wish and blessing.

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



ON UNDERSTANDING THE TRINITY

Andrew Brown reflects upon how to develop understanding between progressive Trinitarian and Unitarian Christians

The Unitarian minister and scholar of first-century Judaism, Robert Travers Herford, was right when he noted that:

The duty of Christians . . . is not to try and *convert* each other, but to try and *understand* each other, so as to be able to see how it is and why it is that they express their belief in different ways (*Unitarian Affirmations*, London: British and Foreign Unitarian Association, 1909, p. ix)

In this piece I try to do just this concerning the question of Unitarian and/or Trinitarian conceptions of God. Following Herford's advice another influential Unitarian minister and scholar (in his case mysticism), Sidney Spenser¹, came to realise that the disputes over the Unity or Trinity of God were not pointless merely intellectual spats but born out of something very real and meaningful. Spenser observed that the doctrine of the Trinity was 'formulated on the basis, not merely of speculation, but of experience.' Turning to those of us who consider ourselves to be Unitarian Christians he went on to say that 'the vital thing for us is not to hold the creed, but to enter into the experience out of which it developed.' Here is what Spenser wrote at the end of his 1955 essay on *Unitarians and the Trinity*:

Like the early Christians, we are led to experience God in three different ways. To us, as to them, God is, first, the Source of being, everlasting, transcendent, yet close to our hearts, the universal Father in whom we live and move and have our being. To us, as to Jesus, God is Father in the sense that we share His Life and seek to do His Will. Jesus leads us to see God as

¹ Two of Spenser's books particularly worth looking out are *The Deep Things of God – Essays in Liberal Religion* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955) and *Mysticism in World Religion* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1966).

the eternal Love who has made us for Himself. But, secondly, we see that Love, not only as a besetting Presence above and beyond us: we see it coming to dwell among us, entering into human life, revealing itself in human souls. The Church has emphasised the revelation of God in the life and death of Jesus. And it is true that, because of the fullness of his love, Jesus is the great revealer — the Son in whom we see the Father's glory. Yet that sonship is not a thing apart. Wherever life is enriched and redeemed by the spirit of self-giving love, there we see God dwelling among us, revealing Himself to our eyes. We experience God as Father in His eternal Presence: we experience Him as Son in His revelation in human souls; and, finally, we experience Him as Spirit in His indwelling Life in our hearts — as the sustaining, quickening Energy underlying and inspiring all our efforts after goodness and truth and beauty.

The Trinity has its real value, not as a literal truth, not as a definition of the eternal nature of God, but as a symbol, suggesting the quality — manifold, yet unified — of our experience. The traditional doctrine serves today to darken counsel rather than to bring us light. It implies a clear-cut distinction, which cannot be sustained, between the different aspects of the divine. It is well that we should think of God as transcendent, as incarnate, as indwelling. But it is essential, if we are to lay hold of the vital meaning of these truths, to bring them closely together. It is God, the Father of our spirits, the Height and Depth of being, who is within us, whose glory shines through the life of Christ-like souls. It is the infinite Power and Love of God which is nearer to us than we are to ourselves, ever waiting to penetrate and possess us and to lift us into union with Himself (Sidney Spenser, *The Deep Things of God*, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1955, p. 44-45).

I was able to put this beautiful insight into practice properly whilst I was an undergraduate at Oxford where I took the wonderful opportunity to take time to get to know my fellow ministry students from other church traditions. I invited them to Harris Manchester College and to our chapel services and, in return, I was invited to theirs. On one memorable occasion some of the students from Mansfield College, the United Reform Church's college down the road from us, invited me to attend a Sunday service and then stay on for lunch. We arranged this many weeks in advance and, at the time, none of us had consulted our liturgical calendars. It turned out that the day I was going to attend chapel and eat with them was Trinity Sunday. In the intervening weeks I had realized this and was rather intrigued to hear what might be preached. Well, I duly arrived and settled into my pew. The service proceeded and the sermon, from a

visiting Swiss theologian was, unsurprisingly, on the subject of the Trinity. It was, I recall, an insightful and challenging sermon and, although I did not entirely agree with the preacher on every point, I felt I had gained something from it. However, what took me wholly by surprise was that at the end of the service, rather like a disciplined group of synchronized swimmers, the URC students turned round to me as one with worried looks on their faces and asked me whether “I was alright.” Profuse apologies were offered as they admitted that, until the preacher began to preach, they had completely forgotten that I was a Unitarian and Free Christian because, in the general run of things, I was to them simply just a fellow classmate from down the road (I should add that this was a status I cherished). I was touched by their concern and it opened for us a door to a rich conversation on the subject of how each of us as individuals understood and experienced God. This conversation lasted, not only many hours into that first night, but throughout my entire three years at college. During that evening I discovered that there is a whole world of difference between sharing creatively ideas about the Trinity or Unity of God as people with living and lively faiths on the one hand and, on the other, of having a very narrow understanding of the concept rammed down your throat or used threateningly as a marker of whether you are, if I can mix religious metaphors for a moment, kosher or not.

Spencer’s insights combined with my own personal experiences have, in a way, left me unable to tell whether I am really an heretical Unitarian or an heretical Trinitarian! And you know, to be brutally honest about it, I don’t much care anymore. But what I do know is that my own Unitarian experience of the Oneness of God is pretty darn close to many of my Trinitarian friends’ experience of a Triune God. What I will say is that in the end I found I could remain a Unitarian, at least in the sense this word is understood within liberal/progressive Christianity. But, at the same time, I also discovered that the divide between Trinitarians and Unitarians (at least in liberal/progressive circles) is not what it was, even a hundred years ago, and so these days I work as comfortably as anyone else within the ecumenical scene.

In 1936 George and Ira Gershwin wrote the memorable song “Let’s Call the Whole Thing Off” and it serves as a useful concluding

meditation:

Things have come to a pretty pass,
Our romance is growing flat,
For you like this and the other
While I go for this and that.
Goodness knows what the end will be;
Oh, I don't know where I'm at...
It looks as if we two will never be one,
Something must be done.

(refrain)

You say eether and I say eyether, you say neether and I say nyther;
Eether, eyether, neether, nyther,
Let's call the whole thing off!
You like potato and I like potahto, you like tomato and I like tomahto;
Potato, potahto, tomato, tomahto!
Let's call the whole thing off!
But oh! If we call the whole thing off,
Then we must part.
And oh! If we ever part,
Then that might break my heart!
So, if you like pajamas and I like pajahmas,
I'll wear pajamas and give up pajahmas.
For we know we need each other,
So we better call the calling off off.
Let's call the whole thing off!

At difficult moments in the ecumenical dialogue the temptation is, sometimes, simply to call the whole thing off, to hide in our separate corners and refuse to work together. But the Gershwin's lyric reminds that in truth 'we know we need each other.' We know we cannot achieve all that must be done in our world alone so, if we truly want the world changed for the better in the manner taught to us by Jesus, we need to talk and understand each other and we most certainly must not 'call the whole thing off.' At the risk of sounding flippant (though I assure you I am not) I have concluded that for the most part Trinitarianism and Unitarianism are really like pajamas and pajahmas, and that if we just took the effort to wear each other's garments, perhaps just for a night or two, we may well be surprised at how comfortable they feel — in fact, quite like our own . . .

The Revd Andrew Brown is the editor of *The Herald* and minister of the Memorial Church (Unitarian), Cambridge. This is a revised version of a sermon first preached in Cambridge on Trinity Sunday, 21 May 2005.

THE HEART OF RELIGION

In the first of two sermons Prof. Victor Nuovo reflects on loving God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength

Psalm 23¹

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures;
He leadeth me beside the still waters;
He restoreth my soul.

He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, for his name's sake²
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil,
Thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies,
Thou anointest my head with oil,
My cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the house of the Lord, forever.

Isaiah 49: 14-16a³

But Zion said, The Lord hath forsaken me, and my Lord hath forgotten me.
[and the Lord answered] Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb? Yea they may forget, yet I will not forget thee.

Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.

The title of this sermon needs clarification. I have drawn the expression, 'heart of religion' from the first part of Jesus' summary of the Law, that we should love God with our whole heart and with our whole mind. If religion may be described, briefly, as loving God, then loving God with our whole heart is only a part of it; we must love God with our mind as well, although just what that

¹ Psalm 23 was probably written during the reign of Solomon (970-928 BCE), which was the golden age of the ancient Kingdom of Israel. It was Solomon who built the temple that is mentioned in the last line (the house of the Lord, or of Yahweh).

² This line should be translated: 'He makes sure I'm on the right path, his reputation depends upon it.'

³ These lines from Isaiah were written around 540 BCE. In 586 BCE, the remaining portion of Solomon's kingdom, the Kingdom of Judah, was conquered by the Babylonians, Jerusalem, i.e. Zion, was laid waste, including Solomon's temple, where the psalmist of Psalm 23 hoped to dwell forever. The elite classes of the population were sent into exile. The author of Isaiah 40-55 is referred to as the prophet of the exile.

means must be spelled out in some detail. So, I begin with the promise of another sermon or sermons still to come, one with a title that complements this one: viz. 'the mind of religion'.

God, who is the object of our religion, must be loved with mind and heart together. For, if God be truth itself, as has often been said, then, to borrow some words from a great philosopher, 'it is in God that we find that all the riddles of the world, all contradictions of thought are resolved', it is in God that the mind passes beyond its native limitations, and, as though climbing on a high mountain, enjoys the limitless prospect of truth, as though gazing out onto the whole of being illuminated by the clearest light. Or in the words of the songwriter Alan Jay Lerner, 'On a clear day, you can see forever,' 'you will know who you are,' and discover that 'the glow of your being outshines every star.' But also, it is in God 'that all griefs are healed', that our anxious and troubled hearts find comfort, in God our careworn and malnourished spirits find relief and sustenance and all our longings satisfied. It is in God that we find rest for our souls, for only God has the power to satisfy this limitless longing. This deep and unceasing restlessness and longing along with the hope and anticipation of its satisfaction I put under the heading of the heart of religion.

When we love God with our hearts only, more often than not we let our imaginations do the work. Our minds poetically fashion images of God, concrete images derived from the common life, tender and lyrical images that make God seem near and lovable. Yet underlying these concrete expressions there is a deep and at least on the face of it inexplicable feeling, although it is not an inexpressible one. We express this feeling in words like those I just read to you, or, if all else fails, in sighs too deep for words. This feeling has been described in various ways: as a feeling of dependence, or as a longing for perfect security or rest. So in the 23rd psalm, God is represented as a faithful shepherd, as a sure guide through a dangerous passage, and as a perfect host who offers inviolable sanctuary. If you want to experience what these feelings may be like, a sure way to begin might be to repeat to yourself these words: 'The Lord is my shepherd', or 'he maketh me to lie down in green pastures', or 'Yea, though I walk

through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou are with me,' 'Thou preparest a table before me ...' 'My cup runneth over'. Let your repeating of these words not be an idle recitation, but imagine it to be a cry of the heart, a cry for help. Or, you may recite them in the manner of someone whistling in the dark, as though the words themselves were your protector or a remedy for the paralysis of fear or despair or terror. Dissatisfaction with our lives, disappointment, a feeling that our lives have little worth, or are of no account, fear of disclosure, that all our inadequacies will be revealed to the world, fear of failure, fear of boredom, fear of death: the words of the psalm speak to these conditions and to the depths of longing that underlie them.

They have, nonetheless, a paradoxical effect: they give comfort. Yet it is curious that they do not merely relieve our fears or satisfy our longing, they also give these anxious moods a voice, so that our hearts are unsettled even as they are comforted; or comforted even as they are unsettled. This is because they are mere words of promise that do not disclose how that promise will be fulfilled. When I utter the words, 'The Lord is my shepherd', I am both comforted and perplexed, because the words themselves point beyond anything that I might reasonably expect or even conceive. Where are we to find these green pastures, these still waters, this idyllic place where we may lie down in safety, where we are to find rest for our souls?

There are still more reasons why these words should perplex us. The lyrical episodes of Psalm 23 portray us as mere subjects of God. Yet, we are, after all, not sheep, nor are we witless travellers, without a clue about how to find our way even when we are utterly lost, nor is our humanity respected if we only see ourselves as clients of a rich and powerful chieftain, who offers us protection along with a good meal and our daily bread. These words pacify, which is to say they are meant to make us patient or passive. But mere passivity diminishes our humanity.

Moreover, such passivity is not always benign, but often erupts into terrible violence. We need only read our newspapers to know how often this happens, when the confidence of those who profess faith in a God on whom they totally depend becomes a motive to

inflict monstrous cruelty on others. The oldest and most persistent forms of totalitarianism are religious.

‘Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies.’

It is not so unusual to have enemies, persons hostile to our purposes and our wellbeing, who threaten our complacency, our fortunes or even our lives. But too often the confidence that God is our protector becomes a reason to believe that our enemies must be God’s enemies also, a motive for self-righteous hatred? Consider the words of the Psalm 139: Do I not hate them, O Yahweh, that hate thee? ... I hate them with a perfect hatred: I count them mine enemies.

This is a dangerous faith. It is not founded upon reason, but upon pure feeling that engenders a will to destroy one’s enemies in the name of God, to inflict upon them the most cruel and inhuman punishments, to commit pitiless murder for God, massacre and genocide, all in the name of a the one who is our faithful shepherd, our sure guide, our steadfast protector, perfect host, our sure redeemer.

Finally, the God named in the verses that I have read, called the Lord, viz. Yahweh, is notoriously a vain and fickle and unreliable God, subject to whim, and often forgetful of his promises. The Bible is a book of disappointment as well as promise. We miss its meaning, indeed, we miss the meaning of a pure religion of the heart, if we overlook this ambiguity and ambivalence. ‘But Zion said, “Yahweh, has forsaken me, Yahweh has forgotten me.”’ How often has that been said? Jesus said it on the Cross: ‘My God my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the character of Yahweh [the name is translated ‘the Lord’ in Protestant English bibles] is always portrayed with subtle irony and literary finesse. When Moses inquires after the name of the god who is sending him on his mission to lead the exodus of the people of Israel out of Egypt, the answer he received was “I am that I am”, or “I will be what I will be”. The answer is a play on the name of Yahweh, a derivative of the enigmatic very ‘to be’. This divine arbitrariness, however, has become adopted without subtlety

or irony into official Christian theology almost from its very beginning and enshrined in its dogma.

I remember as a divinity student how I was moved the first time I read the opening lines of the Heidelberg Catechism. They go like this

Q. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Ans. That I ... am not my own, but belong to my faithful saviour Jesus Christ.

The author of the catechism, Zacharias Ursinus, who was foremost among the second generation of Reformed theologians, explained in a subsequent comment that readers of these lines should draw comfort from the fact that all the power of God, and therefore all the power in the universe, is marshalled to guarantee my salvation; that, if I belong to Jesus Christ, there is absolutely nothing able to prevent it. This is because God has decreed my salvation from eternity; he has chosen me. But according to Ursinus, God has chosen me not because of my faith and my righteousness, rather I believe and am righteous because God has chosen me out of pure unmerited arbitrary love and from eternity has determined I shall believe and act as he chooses. Likewise, those whom God rejects are rejected not because they are wicked unbelievers, rather they do immoral things and believe nothing or, even worse, the wrong things, because God has decreed that they should be instruments of divine wrath; as though divine justice requires something to hate. Perfect love is complemented by a perfect hate. It would, I think, be immoral for anyone to take comfort in these assurances.

There is, however, a purer love than the love of a divine shepherd for his sheep, or an omnipotent God for his elect. This is the love of a mother for her sucking child. Consider the image of God as mother. If God is truth, then, since mother love is a truer image of love, we ought to embrace it. Indeed, it expresses the whole meaning of our existence.

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she would not have compassion on the fruit of her womb? ... Behold, I have graven thee on the palms of my hands. To illustrate, I will tell you a story, a true story, about a mother and her nurslings, not a human mother, but a mouse.

Some weeks ago, I was loading a cart to carry my recycling down the driveway. It looked like rain, so I thought it advisable to cover it with a tarpaulin, to keep the paper from becoming rain-soaked and hard to handle. The tarpaulin lay rolled up beside the cart, where it had been for some weeks. When I unravelled it, I discovered that a mother mouse had made her nest in it; there she was nursing her brood. She was terrified as were her nurslings, whose eyes had yet to open. They clung to her teats not, in this instance, to suckle, but because they found security there. She tried to cover them with her body. They were as one being. It was a beautiful sight, and yet heartbreaking. I had absolute power over them. I could have killed them, and perhaps I should have. But I could not. Instead, I set them gently on a flat shovel, and carried them to the edge of the yard and set them down in some undergrowth. Once there, the faithful mother mouse moved away, her nurslings still clinging to her breasts, and found shelter. Oh how I wished that I might make all beings in the world safe! But I am not the king of love, or a faithful shepherd. And there is no such power. There is only mother love all the way down.

I remember that as a child, my mother would come to my bedroom in the evenings to tuck me into bed and to turn out the light. I remember the comfort I received from this. I remember the feel of her hands, strong but gentle as she tucked in the covers. I can also recall when ill, how her cool hand relieved my fevered brow. I cannot now feel the touch of my mother's hands, but the memory of it is indelible. Surely my being was graven upon those hands.

A mother's love is the purest love. It knows no bounds. Its finds expression in the everyday care that mothers show to their children. It may be fierce, in protecting them, but never cruel. It is the most reliable thing in the world. We who are beneficiaries of this care know that we are not mere subjects to it, not mere sheep, for a mother's love is a nurturing love. Its aim is to nurture to maturity a free human being (or in an adventurous mouse), the perfection of the life that was conceived in her womb and carried there. These are wonderful words: suckle, suckling. To suckle is both to nurse and to be nursed. A suckling is a sucking child, a nursling; suckling however also denotes clover, viz. lamb suckling, that lambs suckle after they

have left their mother's breast. It is a primary activity of life. But there is more.

When a child first enters the world, it is given to its mother who gently directs it to her breast. It is the beginning of a child's engagement with the world, the first moment in the adventure of learning, the awakening of the mind, perhaps its first act, a prelude to finding one's way in the world.

The love of a mother for her sucking child is vast; a human heart cannot contain it. And yet, it is not a controlling or possessive love, but, as I said, a nurturing and sustaining and ultimately liberating love. Mothers nurture their children, and then, if they are wise, they let them go. Yet they do not forget them.

Where does this love come from? The answer, I think, is that it is in the nature of things to love in this way. We cannot all be mothers, but we can all learn to love like this, tenderly, faithfully, steadfastly, in a way that nourishes, that gives life, that comforts, that seeks to set free, as though we were all mothers to each other.

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb? Yea they may forget, yet I will not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.

Whose hands are these? The words belong to us, and the hands they describe belong to us also. Hands are not mere metaphors, but instruments to do good work, if we learn to use them gently and for goodness' sake. The words bind us together into a community where everyone is accepted, no one is rejected, where everyone's name is graven on the palm of the hands of each and all. They are also nature's hands, for we belong to nature as much as infants belong to their nursing mothers. As I have said, it is in the nature of things to suckle, at least for mammals like us, to nourish and to protect, and in a broader sense to care for each other's needs, to embrace the needy, to take them to our breasts as a mother does her newborn child or as a hen gathers her chicks. Here, in this place, as nature's children, together we find comfort, here we find protection, here we engage the world, are nurtured and become free. Here the heart of love expands beyond breaking to embrace all that lives and moves and has

being.

Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the child of her womb? Yea they may forget, yet I will not forget thee. Behold, I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands.

Victor Nuovo is Professor of Philosophy and Dean of Arts and Humanities at Middlebury College and a Senior Research Fellow at Harris Manchester College, Oxford. This sermon was originally given at the Congregational Church of Middlebury, Vermont on 19 November 2006. The second sermon, *The Mind of Religion*, will appear in the next edition of *The Herald*.



THE CUTTING EDGE

Malcolm Guite

At my back, like you, I always hear
The edge, the cutting edge is coming near.

Not the blind fury
With the abhorred shears
But this is what I fear;
The stealthy scissors of a blinded time
Cutting through accretions of the past
Dully and daily deleting, whatever is not next
Sneering, and sniping and snipping,
Excising every sign-post from the text
Paring all the parts that point away
To something other than our circled self.

I know the angels were the first to fall,
Cherub and Seraph spiralled down
In circling curlicues of sacred text,
Flaring in ink and paper to the floor,
The shredded evidence of our affair
Our old, embarrassing affair with God.
And God himself will follow soon enough;
A little word so easy to excise
Another snippet for the cutting room
A sweeping on the heap of history.

But still at night, I tiptoe to the door
To rustle through these severed strips of love,
And strew my heart with scraps of poetry,
Forbidden hopes and shards of mystery.
They rustle through me in my waking dreams
And so I'll have a heart-, a head-, a handful when
The scissors come for me.

For at my back, like you, I always hear
The cutting edge, the edge is coming near.

The Revd Dr. Malcolm Guite is a poet and singer-songwriter living in Cambridge. He is an Anglican priest, chaplain (of Girton College), teacher and author of various essays and articles as well as a book about contemporary Christianity. He also plays in Cambridge country rock band *Mystery Train*, and lectures widely in England and USA on poetry and theology. For more information on Malcolm and his work visit <http://www.malcolmguite.com>



Editorial Note: Malcolm and I know each other through various ecumenical and music/poetry connections and a few weeks ago I was playing double-bass on a session during which we recorded some of Malcolm's poems. It struck me as we worked on the musical setting for this particular poem that it spoke incredibly powerfully to some of our own tradition's present problems. I told him, and he very kindly gave me permission to publish it here.



AN EXTRACT FROM

“JESUS — A Unitarian & Free Christian View”

Revd Fred Kenworthy

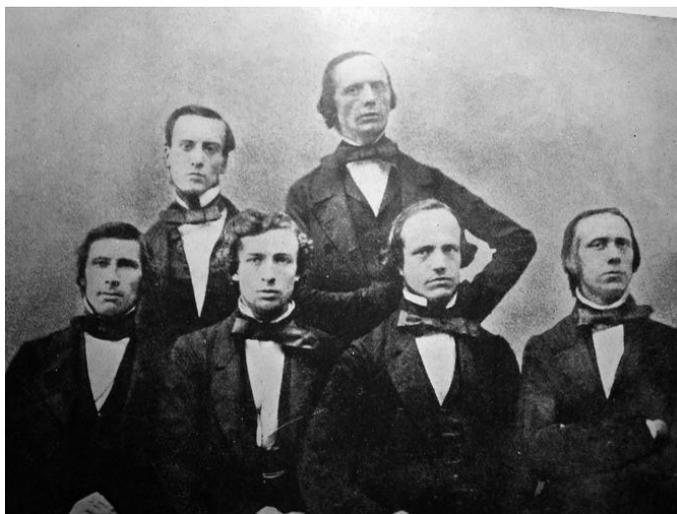
It has been said that [Unitarians and Free Christians] are people who do not believe in Jesus Christ. Nothing could be further from the truth. Their faith in Jesus Christ is greater and not less because of their conviction. It makes His teaching and His way of life all the more compelling. On the evidence of the Gospels, and what is equally important, on the evidence of Christian experience that nothing men could do could destroy the new impulse that He had brought into human life, they believe most passionately that the spirit of the divine was in Him. Jesus lived in terms of the highest fellowship and

communion with God, so that in His words and deeds He carried out what we believe to be the will of God. The divine was in Him. But the divine was not in Him exclusively. That is the truth the Unitarians would emphasise. Many orthodox teachers, who are having great influence on theological thought today, are claiming that at one point, and at one point only in human history, in one man, and in one man only, God came into human life. They speak as though God had never been present in human life before Jesus, and had never spoken through men since Jesus. Jesus was God, so it is claimed, in a way that made Him essentially different from the rest of humanity. He was absolutely unique, God Himself in human form. But while the Unitarian cannot believe that the spirit of the divine was exclusively present in Jesus, he makes a greater and not a lesser affirmation. Jesus is significant because He reveals that in some small measure all men have the divine in them. In other men, its light is often dimmed; it is almost extinguished by sin and selfishness, though it can be quickened anew, as Jesus did quicken it. In Jesus Himself, however, the light of the divine came to a glorious fullness. That is why He is still a symbol of hope, a perennial source of inspiration for all mankind. If one man has reached the heights of moral and spiritual excellence reached by Jesus, then we can never despair of the human race.

There is, therefore, no worse misunderstanding of their teaching than to think that Unitarians and Free Christians relegate Jesus to the status of 'mere' man. It would be false and untrue. They do not think of Moses, or Shakespeare, or Plato as 'mere' men; on the contrary these were very great men, far above the common level of humanity. To Unitarians, Jesus stands out among the founders of the world's great and enduring religions. Men in other parts of the world may look to Mohammed as the prophet of God, or to the Buddha for what they believe to 'be the truest interpretation of life. Unitarians cannot deny, nor do they wish to deny, that they have taught divine things, that they have quickened men to noble thoughts and to lives of great spiritual achievement, but for those who have been nurtured in Christianity, Jesus Christ is the supreme teacher of religion. They do not state dogmatically that in the centuries yet to come no higher being will ever live on earth. That cannot be known. But Unitarians believe that the way of life in Jesus is the most compelling way of

salvation open to them. Unitarians therefore are followers and disciples of Jesus. They would seek, however humbly, sincerely to live in His spirit. They are not greatly concerned whether, by others, they are granted or denied the name of Christian. They remember that Jesus did not ask His disciples to assent to any formula at all. They remember the words — that it is not those who call Him Lord, Lord, who shall enter the Kingdom of Heaven. It is not those who ascribe to Him the highest titles of respect who have the best claim to be His disciples. It is those who follow His great principles of life, the principles of Love to God and Love to man. That is the touchstone, the standard of reference, by which men may or may not be called Christians. By that standard or test — if tests are to be applied — Unitarians are willing to be judged. They claim for themselves no superiority at all; but they believe that in their record of service to men in the spirit of Jesus they do not fall behind the rest of Christendom.

The Revd Fred Kenworthy MA, BD (1909–1974) was the Principal of the Unitarian College, Manchester (from 1955–1974).



The first students at Unitarian College Manchester in 1854

Photo courtesy of the Unitarian Historical Society

<http://www.unitariansocieties.org.uk/historical/hsindex.html>

DIARY DATES & NEWS

The **LANCE GARRARD LECTURE** which will be held on **Saturday 14th JULY at 2.30pm**. The lecture will be given by The Revd T. N. Playfair, Minister of The First Presbyterian Church, Belfast and Clerk of the General Synod of The Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland. His lecture is entitled 'What is to be done?' and will be delivered at: **Stalybridge Unitarian Church, Forester Drive, Stalybridge SK15 2HU**. The afternoon will commence with a Communion service and a tea will be served at the end of the afternoon. To help those doing the catering please notify the Clerk, Ken Howard (details as above).



UCA SUMMER SYNOD 2007 will be held on **Saturday 5th August 2007** at Old Meeting, Greyfriars Way, Great Yarmouth NR30 2SW. For more details please contact the UCA's Clerk Ken Howard on 0161 330 1295 or ken75howard1@aol.com



LENSDEN PUBLISHING has launched a Series of CD ROMs making available facsimiles of scarce classic Unitarian texts now usually found only in major academic libraries. The discs are most easily read in Microsoft Windows using Picture and Fax Viewer, but may also be compatible with other operating systems capable of reading jpeg files.

The three titles published so far are *Pictures of Unitarian Churches* (1901); *Memoirs of Theophilus Lindsey* by Thomas Belsham (1812); and an account of *The Manchester Socinian Controversy*. Each CD costs £5, plus Postage & Packing £1. Cheques payable to 'L.Smith' please, and the proceeds will benefit Unitarian College, Manchester. Forthcoming titles will include Richard Wright's *Missionary Life and Labours* and Robert Spears *Record of Unitarian Worthies*.

For more information please contact: *Lensden Publishing*, 63 Silverdale Road, Arncliffe, Cumbria, LA5 0DZ. Tel: 01524 762264 Email: DrLenSmith@lensden.fsnet.co.uk



CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERS

GREAT BRITAIN

Bolton, Halliwell Road Free Church, Halliwell Road, Bolton, Lancs.

10.30 am & 6.30 pm. www.halliwell-unitarians-bolton.org.uk

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.cambridgeunitarian.org

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

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

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

THE NON-SUBSCRIBING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF IRELAND



www.nspresbyterian.org

PRESBYTERY OF ANTRIM

Antrim, First (Old) Presbyterian Congregation. Services, as arranged.

Ballycarry, Old Presbyterian Church, Main Street, Ballycarry. 12 noon.

Ballyclare, Old Presbyterian Church, Main Street, Ballyclare. 10.15am.

Ballymoney, NSP Congregation. Services, as arranged.

Belfast, All Souls, Elmwood Avenue, Belfast. 11.30am.

Belfast, First Presbyterian Church, Rosemary Street, Belfast. 10.30am.

Cairncastle, Old Presbyterian Church, Cairncastle. 12.15pm.

Crumlin, Old Presbyterian Church, Main Street, Crumlin. 3pm.

Downpatrick, First Presbyterian Church, Stream Street, Downpatrick. 11.15am.

Dunmurry, First Presbyterian Church, Glebe Road, Dunmurry. 11.30am.

Glenarm, Old Presbyterian Church, Ballymena Road, Glenarm. 11am.

Greyabbey, First (NS) Presbyterian Church, Main Street, Greyabbey. 10.30am.

Holywood, First (NS) Presbyterian Church, High Street, Holywood. 12 noon.

Larne & Kilwaughter, Old Presbyterian Church, Ballymena Road, Larne. 10.30am

Newtownards, NS Presbyterian Church, Victoria Avenue, Newtownards. 12 noon.

Raloo, NS Presbyterian Church, Raloo, Larne. 3pm.

Templepatrick, Old Presbyterian Church, Main Road, Templepatrick. 11am.

PRESBYTERY OF BANGOR

Ballee, NS Presbyterian Church, Ballee, Downpatrick. 9.45am.

Ballyhemlin, Meeting House, Ballyhalbert. 3pm, 1st & 3rd Sundays.

Banbridge, First Presbyterian Church, Downshire Road, Banbridge. 10am.

Belfast, Mountpottinger NS Presbyterian Church, Belfast. 10.30am.
Clough, NS Presbyterian Church, Castlewellan Road, Clough. 9.45am
(2nd & 4th) & 11.15am. (1st, 3rd & 5th Sundays)
Comber, NS Presbyterian Church, Windmill Hill, Comber. 12 noon.
Dromore, First Presbyterian Church, Rampart Street, Dromore.
11.30am.
Killinchy, NS Presbyterian Church, Comber Road, Killinchy. 11.30am.
Moira, First (NS) Presbyterian Church, Meeting Street, Moira. 11.30am,
2nd & last Sundays.
Moneyreagh, NS Presbyterian Church, Church Road, Moneyreagh.
12 noon.
Newry, First (NS) Presbyterian, Needham Place, Newry. 11.30am.
Rademon, First Kilmore Church, Kilmore, Crossgar. 10am.
Ravara, NS Presbyterian Church, Saintfield Road, Ballygowan. 3.30pm
last Sunday.
Warrenpoint, First Presbyterian Church, Burren Road, Warrenpoint.
3pm, 1st & 3rd Sundays.

SYNOD OF MUNSTER

Cork, Unitarian Church, Prince's Street, Cork. 11am.
Dublin, Unitarian Church, St. Stephen's Green, Dublin. 11am



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