

NATIONAL UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches

NEWSLETTER

Linking others valuing Freedom, Reason and Tolerance in Religion



In the flow of religious thought and practice,
Unitarians represent openness and inquiry in the spiritual quest.

Email address: nuf@nufonline.org.uk

Website: www.nufonline.org.uk

FELLOWSHIP MATTERS

The NUF AGM will be held on 16th April, 3.30 p.m. at the GA Meetings to be held at Swansea University. With this posting you are receiving the Annual Report. For those planning to attend the AGM it is advisable to read through the report prior to the meeting. After a brief AGM we shall be asking, 'What kind of a Unitarian are you?' Guest speakers will be Alan Ruston and Rev Dr Vernon Marshall.

We can now welcome three new members to the NUF Committee: Ella Lewis-Jones, Ian Martin and Alan Oates. Having three seats to fill and only three candidates it means that there will be no election this year. You will find profiles of the new Committee Members later in this *Newsletter*.

Since last summer I have been your Acting Secretary, but the time has come to step down. I will continue to serve on the Committee and assist a new Secretary until they are settled into the job. Although not having a specific member, who is able to take on the job at the present time, the NUF will continue to function as usual, with other Committee members ensuring that the role will be covered until some permanent arrangement can be made to take us into the future. Members will be kept informed through 'Fellowship Matters'. In the May Newsletter a new name for members to contact will be advised but in the meantime please feel free to contact me – details of which are on the back cover.

Joan Wilkinson

CHANGING MY NAME

A response to Dorothy Archer's 'Presidents' Page

Before I was married my name was HILDA HILL. What a silly name was that! My father was in the army and was frequently moved about and that meant frequent school changes for me and usually in the middle of a school term. My first days went something like this:

Teacher: "Now class, we have a new girl this morning. Stand up dear. What is your name?"

Me (timidly): Hilda Hill

Teacher: "Speak up, dear."

Me: HILDA HILL

Class: "Ha-ha".

No wonder I wanted to change it and I tried to.

When I joined the W.R.N.S. I told my fellows that my name was GWTNN, which was really my second name. That was alright until I was on leave, a matelot, one I desperately wanted to keep in touch with, phoned my home and asked to speak to GWYNN. It was my father who answered it and brusquely said, "There's no GWYNN here," and put the phone down.

I went back to being boring HILDA!

Cover picture: Composition 'Fulmar and foreshore' by Naomi Linnell

THE PRESIDENT'S PAGE

JOY AND SORROW

‘To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under the sun. A time to be born and a time to die; a time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn and a time to dance.’

On a pleasant Autumn day a middle-aged man opened the door of his car in a countryside car park and out rushed his Langdale terrier Scamp, all agog and a-wag at the prospect of a tramp over the moor. As his master put on his boots Scamp checked out all the new scents.

It is remarkable how many people turn to the hills at intervals, to be enfolded and calmed by them.

They set off but after a while Scamp recognised that things were not quite right, for his master’s steps were not regular or even. Suddenly he fell to the ground with a thump. Scamp ran to him, barked and licked his face but he did not stir. Puzzled, Scamp waited. And waited. And waited.

Eventually, two boys on mountain bikes swung round the corner chattering and laughing. Then silence. Then lots of activity. Then more men came. No-one seemed to take much notice of Scamp. All were looking at his master. Scamp, though frightened, stayed as close as he could. Then a black thing appeared in the sky and got bigger and bigger until it filled the whole sky. There was a great clatter and a wind blew downwards as it fell on them. Scamp fled.

The helicopter rose. The men packed up and left. The moor was quiet again.

The next day the stricken man’s sister came to look for Scamp but she did not find him. The moors are a dangerous place for a lone dog as shepherds with shotguns are apt to defend their flocks zealously.

However, she contacted the local daily paper to ask if a dog answering Scamp’s description had been seen by people in the nearby village. She had several responses. It seemed the dog was sheltering in the village by night and searching the moor for his master by day. Her brother died. The sister went to the village every night. Someone said she thought she had seen Scamp in her garden. The sister went there that night. It was the eleventh day since the incident. It was also the day of the funeral. She went to the garden where Scamp might be. She did see a shadow move. “Scamp,” she called. The shadow shot away. “Scamp!” she yelled. The shadow hesitated and then, recognising her voice, Scamp came pelting back into her arms, dancing with delight and licking her face madly in a moment of pure joy.

We are closer to animals than we often acknowledge, especially dogs, who have lived alongside humans longer than other animals.

‘All living things, plants, animals and even human beings form one chain of universal being from the beginning to the end of the world.’ Linnaeus

Dorothy Archer

THE MINISTER'S MUSINGS

My computer is beginning to show its age. There are little spells of forgetting and much, much longer time needed to perform ordinary tasks. It is frustrating and there are 'scenes' when I shout at the screen with impatience and promise a trip to the tip and a short good-bye as it is tossed into a container with a bunch of old analogue TVs.

They are followed by moments of remorse. Most of the stuff it is labouring to process is what I put there - old sermons, letters, agendas and minutes, photographs, videos, DVDs, podcasts, recordings, radio stations and football scores. Every morning at eight o'clock it comes to life with a triumphant electronic song and begins to offer a random selection of photographs from a hidden album within its depths until someone comes along to play. It will go to sleep after ten minutes if left unattended. Connect to the internet and a page is laid down which tells me the current phase of the moon, the current weather and forecast for Bolton, a daily saying of Einstein, a link for train times, a link for currency conversion, a world map, the latest news and sport, world photograph of the day, my latest emails, links to facebook and twitter, pictures from NASA and best of all a game of solitaire waiting to be played. Solitaire is very useful while waiting for a slow computer to perform its tricks. I suppose I am fond of it really. But the new ones can do so much more and if I had an 'i-pad' and an 'i-phone' as well

It wasn't the way I was brought up. Everything in our house was old, new clothes came along when we wore out of grew out of the old ones. There was no IKEA to wander round with bedrooms and kitchens to fantasise over. The telephone stood on a table near the front door and we never shopped around for different models with different colours. It was a functional item rather than a fashion item. We were sent off on the train to boarding school with a cheery wave and never a tear or a watery eye to suggest we might be missed. I remember those days with affection - such simplicity; the boundaries of life were secure and the pecking order of child and adult was firmly established. Do I want to go back to those good old bad old days? Certainly not!

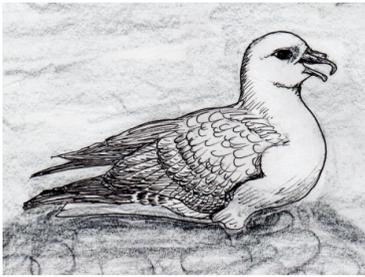
The modern world is a changing world - and much of it changes for the better. There is better understanding of the world, better medicine, better transport, better housing, better lifestyles for many, there should be better opportunities for everyone. It seems so sad that all the progress the world could be making is so easily damaged by the parasite of human greed. If only we could control that.

Tony Meneile

REFLECTIONS DRAB BEAUTY

It was as if overnight some Renaissance angel
had seized a vast pallet, monochromatic with every shade of grey,
to paint anew the great curving sweep of the bay,
until it now reappeared shimmering and mysterious,
stone carved behind a frosted curtain of fine silken gauze.

From the sheltering cliffs in the West
to the ever turning Light of the foreland in the East,
the very shore itself was grey, the sand
like roughly powdered slate abandoned on the floor



of a worked out, long forgotten mine.
There were beach huts, their sharks
teeth roofs silhouetted
anthracite against ashen cliffs;
and long fingers of rock, Davy's grey,
pointing down the sand towards
a soft running, gently retreating,
phantasmal sea.

Around the abandoned rock pools cast in shiny hematite
sat dark cinereous gulls, marbled grey fulmars and pallid kittiwakes
whose sad cry echoed thinly through the smokey chill on the lonely beach.
A rusty tanker rode the sea's drab rim, chalk white now from stern to stem
made new again by the generosity of a profligate winter sun.
From the cliff path an old man, flat capped and rheumy eyed, watched
the wind farm's ethereal towers springing from the sea
like a cohort of tall charcoal guardsmen,
darkly disguised against the fading horizon of the eastern sky.

The sun slipping unseen behind the cliffs into the western ocean,
fired slivers of light, rock-dove pale, into the banks
of cumulus clouds, huge and delicate globes of dappled swansdown,
their moving across the bay almost imperceptible
in the soft platinum mist above the silvered water.

The old man gone back to his fire and his tea,
I was left alone on the grey stone path
mesmerised by this luminous marine grisaille,
humbled last Thursday afternoon by such an extraordinary
and haunting beauty – shore and sea and sky made holy.

(‘Fulmar’ by Liz Egeback Foxbrook)

Naomi Linnell

SUPPORT AND KINDNESS

Just before Christmas I had successful surgery, spending Christmas day watching others eat whilst I continued to be nil by mouth. Quite a number of NUF members were aware of the situation and the kindness and support I felt did indeed help to carry me through that time. Many rang John and others wrote and sent cards, and for that I am very grateful. If I haven't got back to you yet I apologise for the delay but catching up is a long process.

Being in hospital for any length of time allows time for observing and thinking. I felt incredibly cared for and this evoked a great surge of gratitude for all the many different people who ensure that we are made as comfortable as possible at such times. It matters not the nationality or the colour of their skins or the particular job they do. From the cleaner, to the meal lady all were patient. The latter was particularly thoughtful in spending time in my room even though she wasn't able to give me any food. Kindness is something any individual can practise and it doesn't matter whether it is in distributing meals or carrying out surgery. I was very fortunate in finding kindness at every turn and before long I found others more than happy to come and talk to me about their lives. Derby is a city of many nationalities and this was reflected in the rich diversity of the staff. I will remember always the skill and sensitivity of one young nurse from the Philippines, who never seemed flustered in the face of many calls upon her time. By the time I left the hospital I had learned about her and her husband's pride in their young daughter and baby son. In only the few years she had been in England she had learned to love this place and wanted only to contribute to society and give her family a better life, giving a foundation for good relationships at the family and community levels.

It seems true too that in any informal exchanges that trust and friendships, whether short or long term, can be established when we allow ourselves to be open to the kindness within the exchanges of everyday life. Several years ago, one of our members spoke of informal exchanges and how important they are. She used the example of meeting people at the school gate or at the checkout of a supermarket. I would add that picking up the phone, writing a letter or sending an email is a particularly effective way for NUF members to nurture friendships based on kindness and openness to the needs of the other. Life is so much richer when we open ourselves and trust to kindness nurtured in relationship with others. We don't have to take time out as I did to recognise that this is true.

Joan Wilkinson

If we should deal out justice only, in this world, who would escape?
No, it is better to be generous, and in the end more profitable,
for it gains gratitude for us, and love.

Mark Twain

IMAGINED OR REAL?

We abuse children by firstly, teaching them to believe in Father Christmas, and then when they are a little older and have a play friend we cannot see tell them, 'It's only your imagination.' So where does it all end?

Some years back I was changing the kitchen sink and taps. Not being a plumber I was getting into a right lather as water was coming out of everywhere except the taps! Rushing from my workshop to the house I was suddenly stopped dead in my tracks. Then an overwhelming feeling of peace enveloped me and I felt that no trouble on earth could possibly touch me. Wow! Where did this come from? A glance at my watch showed it was ten minutes past four.

The next morning I received a phone call to tell me that my mother, who was emotionally very disturbed, had died the previous afternoon around four p.m.! Then I realised that she had come to tell me that she was now at peace. 'Imagined or real?'

As a guest in a development circle, I became aware of a tap tap tapping in the quiet stillness. I opened my eyes but could see no movement at all in the circle. Presently, the other members received the name of a crew member of the HMS Hood which was blown up and sunk during World War Two. They realised that this departed soul was trapped in earth time and so performed a 'Rescue'. The circle leader subsequently wrote to the Admiralty explaining our interest and asked if there was any help they could give us. She received a reply and a crew list. The list confirmed the name we had received as being that of the wireless operator!

The tapping sound we had all heard was that of the Morse key. 'Imagined or real?'

On weekly hospital visits for hospital radio I became very fond of Maurice, a patient in the McMillan unit. Half of Maurice's face was eaten away with cancer and he could not speak. We communicated with nods, signs and the written word. Sadly Maurice died and I shed my tears. Then walking back along the long corridor I became aware that Maurice was walking with me on my left side. Making sure no one else was around, I said aloud, "Hi, Maurice, how you doin'?" He then said to me this was a one time meeting to thank me for the visits I had made. Forgetting in the awe of the moment that I was hearing him psychically, I asked him to come on my right side where my good ear is, but he would not. We then said our fond goodbyes and he was gone. Walking along further and wondering, did I fantasise it, it then dawned on me that Maurice would not change sides as it was the left side of his face that was eaten away by the cancer!

My message to you, dear reader, is this: learn to trust your insights and inner knowingness. They are seldom if ever wrong!

Eric Talbot-Batting

THE UNITARIAN ETHOS

Recently there have been references on the NUF Forum to the 'Unitarian ethos'. As I am a little vague on the matter I thought it would be a good idea to investigate definitions of the 'Unitarian ethos' as understood by different Unitarian groups. Here is a selection of my findings:

Cross Street Chapel - *Unitarian* - Manchester

Our Unitarian Ethos

We are a spiritual community who would encourage you to think for yourself.

We believe that everyone has the right to seek truth and meaning for themselves, and that the best setting for this is a community that welcomes you for what you are - beliefs, doubts, questions and all!

We are called Unitarians because of our traditional insistence on divine unity, the oneness of God because we affirm the essential unity of humankind and of creation.

We do not claim the right to define God for others, nor do we expect anyone to accept uncritically anything they hear.

We recognise that God is experienced and defined in many ways. For some, the very word God is unhelpful.

We find unity in shared values such as:

- the nurturing of the spiritual dimension
- the use of reason and honest doubt in the search for truth
- mutual respect and goodwill in personal relations
- constructive tolerance and openness towards the sincerely held beliefs of others
- peace, compassion, justice and democracy in human affairs
- reverence for the earth and the whole natural system of which we are a part.

The website of the **Kensington Unitarians** carries the following from the website of the **General Assembly**:

Unitarian Ethos and Principles

We believe that:

Everyone has the right to seek truth and meaning for themselves.

The fundamental tools for doing this are your own life experience, your reflection upon it, your intuitive understanding and the promptings of your own conscience.

The best setting for this is a community that welcomes you for who you are, complete with your beliefs, doubts and questions.

We can be called religious 'liberals':

Religious because we unite to celebrate and affirm values that embrace and reflect a greater reality than self.

Liberal because we claim no exclusive revelation or status for ourselves; because we afford respect and toleration to those who follow different paths of faith.

We are called 'Unitarians':

Because of our traditional insistence on divine unity, the oneness of God.

Because we affirm the essential unity of humankind and of creation.

Last updated: 17 Nov 2010

Belper Unitarian Chapel

Our Ethos

This Unitarian congregation stands as a beacon to Freedom and Mutual Respect in matters of religion and faith. In the words of Francis David, 16th century Unitarian Court preacher: "We need not think alike to love alike."

We honour and learn from each other as we travel this journey of life; we seek the truth in love, sharing our life experiences and those of the Great Souls of humankind whose wisdom is contained in the sacred texts of the many faith traditions.

We regard our being together not as an unfortunate mishap warranting endless competition among us but as a deliberate act of God. To make us a community of brothers and sisters jointly involved in the quest for a composite answer to the varied problems of life.

Steve Biko, South African Anti-Apartheid campaigner

Ours is a theology of engagement: we draw inspiration from life itself, both the beauty and the brokenness, and our struggle to live in peace one with another. As Unitarians, we are often accused by the more orthodox, of believing what we like, but that is too simplistic. We believe not what we like, but what we must in all conscience. For we Unitarians, the words of our faith must be, above all, honest and relevant for today's society. Our common humanity and love for one another is the bridge that spans all the divisions that humankind has created to keep us apart, be they divisions of doctrine, culture, gender or sexuality. We know that underneath it all we are one.

Compiled by the Editor

To what extent does the newsletter succeed or fail in reflecting the Unitarian ethos and how can it be improved in this regard? Letters to the editor on this theme would be welcome.

CHOICE

We constantly read, see or hear news items via the media, so many of which are unpleasant. Yet the more dramatic they are, the more interest they generate.

Stories which are pleasant and heart-warming simply don't have the same appeal as those which contain some kind of catastrophe. The more lurid the information the more fervently do we seek it out. Stories of murder, cruelty and violation, especially to the more vulnerable among us, are enthusiastically sought out by newshounds and offered to an eager public; scandal of a sexual nature always being a favourite theme.

When we were children we thoroughly enjoyed watching a scary movie and to be frightened almost out of our wits. Only afterwards did we suffer from bad dreams and a fear of the dark. As adults we hanker after excitement in a similar way. Perhaps, in the aftermath, our psyche suffers as it did when we were young.

It must be that we enjoy being outraged. The majority of us lead lives which are humdrum, rather tedious, so it isn't surprising that we jump at the chance to liven things up a little.

We come across a story which contains details of an unpleasant occurrence and we complain. That is, we 'sound off' – to anybody who will listen. This is our 'safety valve' and with it we are able to relieve the boredom. No blame is to be levelled, we all do it and let's face it, everybody enjoys a bit of scandal. The government knows the value to society of the safety valve factor so, with certain restrictions in place, we enjoy a relatively liberal press in this country. Many programmes on radio and television offer us the opportunity to express our views.

The conclusion to be drawn is that we are able to obtain quite some satisfaction from taking offence. The more offended we are, then the more satisfaction we derive. If the news item or story can, in some way, be applied to ourselves or to our own experience then, because we choose to take it personally, the sense of outrage is maximised. But we are sensitive creatures and apt to take offence even when it is obvious that none is meant. At this time it behoves us to think and act rationally. The choice is ours.

There are some subjects which the media cannot report on. We refer to them as being 'not politically correct' – they are taboo. These matters, which not so many years ago were open for free discussion, are now spoken of in hushed tones. We speak of them within the family circle but certainly not in public and sometimes a law is passed to enforce the taboo.

But to pass such a law does nothing to eradicate the problems inherent in these matters. In fact, brushed under the carpet, they remain there to fester with any chance of a solution now gone. To designate a subject as

‘forbidden’ is to attract attention to it. Being unable to refer to it, we make it ‘special’. [Some subjects are most definitely off-limits, others not so much. They could be categorised into four groups: political, social, personal and sexual. They include topics such as racism, immigration, the class system, physical deformity, mental disability, religion, corporal and capital punishment, torture, pornography, deviation, abortion, gene manipulation, sterilisation, eugenics, the monarchy, conspiracy theories, American foreign policy, economic systems – to name but a few.

In order to be comfortable discussing any of the above, our opinions would need to be in line with current norms. For instance, we would not wish to speak in favour of pornography, eugenics or enforced sterilisation. Nor could we openly criticise any ethnic group, or religion, or the monarchy. Then again, some matters are too embarrassing for inclusion in general conversation: we may talk about the human body but not the bodily functions or the private parts. Our inhibitions, whether instinctive or induced are so often dangerously oppressive.]

Of the mass of information pushed at us there is something for everyone. Every taste is catered for and we have a choice whether we accept it or not. In other words it need not offend us unless we wish it to.

In the Sep/Oct edition of the newsletter our President writes about this information. She warns that ‘Misinformation can be hurtful or even dangerous’ and that ‘we should be careful what we do with it and how we present it to others.’ Dorothy’s advice is well-intentioned but at the same time impractical because whether the information is correct or not it has the potential to offend: there is always somebody ready to complain about it.

To offer information which is likely to displease no-one would be to reduce everything to trivia. There would be no market at all for a constant supply of information which is innocuous and safe for universal consumption.

In the same newsletter Pat Caddick tells us, courageously let it be said, of a time when she became so frustrated while dealing with a loved one that her ‘patience snapped’. This is the inevitable response when we are overwhelmed by pressure. The event over, we must then deal with the problem of self-reproach. Our conscience can be quite unrelenting even when that previous loss of control was warranted or understandable.

Our fragility makes it difficult for us to cope appropriately and well with family, friends and others.

On the other hand, imagine how difficult it would be dealing with someone who is impeccable in all things, faultless in thought, word and deed. A person so saintly, if such could exist, would be a constant reminder of our own shortcomings and that would be intolerable. Much easier, surely, to deal with someone even if of an irritable disposition.

There would seem to be a lot of truth in the old adage that ‘Hell is

other people'. We always find it convenient to blame someone else for most of our problems. But this is unfair. Few people wish deliberately to cause trouble because the outcome means unpleasantness all round.

If we feel under attack, we defend ourselves, verbally or otherwise. If we do nothing, we feel that we have let ourselves down. Either way could lead to further problems. Any satisfaction to be gained from words or deeds given in revenge is momentary; the aftermath could be anything but satisfactory. The problem all too often lies within ourselves for it is only 'within ourselves' that peace can be found.

To love our neighbour as ourselves is quite impossible for the majority of us. We are human and all too fallible. If we strive to follow Christ's ideal, we can only do an honest best. Experience tells us to stop and think before we act, or, as Dorothy Archer puts it: 'assessing, sorting, testing and perhaps rejecting'. These are wise words. The Buddha called this action 'mindfulness' whereupon each thought, word and deed is consciously scrutinised before being acted on.

When we act with 'mindfulness' we learn to control wrong impulses and to develop right ones. This increases our self-knowledge and gives us an increased understanding of the problems experienced by others. We learn to compromise and in so doing there can be no reproach to self or to other. Only now do we come closer to realising Christ's ideal.

Michael Ablett

YOU ARE VERY SPECIAL

In all the world there is nobody, nobody like you. Since the beginning of time there has never been another person like you. Nobody has your smile, your eyes, your hands, your hair. Nobody owns your handwriting your voice. You're Special. Nobody can paint your brushstrokes. Nobody has your taste for food or music or dance or art. Nobody in the universe sees things as you do.

In all time there never has been anyone who laughs in exactly your way, and what makes you laugh or cry or think may have a totally different response in another. So – You're Special. You're different from any other person who has ever lived in the history of the universe. You are the only one in the whole creation who has your particular set of abilities. There is always someone who is your superior in at least one way. Nobody in the universe can reach the quality of the combination of your talents, your feelings.

Colin Carvel

'At bottom every man knows well enough that he is a unique being, only once on this earth; and by no extraordinary chance will such a marvellously picturesque piece of diversity in unity as he is, ever be put together a second time.'

Friedrich Nietzsche

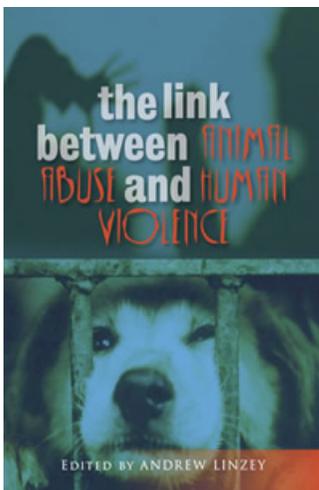
THE OXFORD CENTRE FOR ANIMAL ETHICS

Issue 375 (January 2008) of the newsletter carried a brief report on the establishment of a new Centre at Oxford dedicated to ‘the enhancement of the ethical status of animals through academic publication, teaching and research.’ The Reverend Professor Andrew Linzey is the founder and the Director of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics (www.oxfordanimaethics.com) and a member of the Faculty of Theology in the University of Oxford. He is one of the world’s leading ethicists on the status of animals and the pre-eminent theologian on animal issues. On 11th September 2010 the RSPCA presented him with one of its highest awards, the Lord Erskine Award, at a special ceremony held at the RSPCA Headquarters in Horsham, the first time that the award has been given to a theologian.

The RSPCA’s award is named after Lord Erskine (1750–1823) who pioneered the first anti-cruelty legislation in the United Kingdom. The Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (as it then was) was founded a year after his death in 1824.

Professor Linzey has written or edited more than 20 books including seminal works on animals: *Animal Theology* (1994), *Animal Gospel* (1999), *Creatures of the Same God* (2004), and *The Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence* (2009). His latest book, *Why Animal Suffering Matters* published by Oxford University Press in 2009 has been described as “a paradigmatic example of how practical ethics ought to be done”. (Christopher Libby, *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 4.1. 2010).

THE LINK BETWEEN ANIMAL ABUSE and HUMAN VIOLENCE



Based on the contributions to the 2007 international conference at Oxford, held under the auspices of the Centre, *The Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence* is the most up to date, authoritative, and comprehensive volume on the relationship between animal abuse and human violence. Published by Sussex Academic Press, it comprises 27 chapters (350 pages) by a range of international scholars. Philosophers, ethicists, legal scholars, law enforcement officers, scientists and theologians all contribute. Many abusers of women, children and the elderly, also most serial killers and violent serial rapists, typically

demonstrate a history of animal abuse, with the worst offenders beginning with childhood abuse of animals. Abused children witnessing animal abuse often grow up to emulate it. Animal abuse also accompanies human abuse, when pets are hurt or killed to terrorize and punish children, or threatened to extort money from vulnerable elders. I was saddened to learn that many women delay escaping an abusive partner for the safety of a shelter for fear of leaving a threatened pet behind.

‘A number of contributors, Linzey included, consider the pathology of violence towards wild animals, including the desensitization to suffering typically fostered among aficionados of English fox hunting and American deer hunting. They discuss the infamous dolphin drive hunts of Japan, with highly sentient creatures hounded, terrorised, gaffed and speared in a bloody maelstrom, all for the traditional right to eat cetacean meat (though it is increasingly unpopular, being mercury-laden), and English hunt advocates scorning reports of foxes (also unlucky domestic dogs and cats) torn apart by dog packs in the countryside – even in people’s yards, in front of children.’

(Extracts from a review by Scott Cowdell)

At £60 for the hardback (ISBN: 978-1-84519-324-9) this book is beyond the pockets of most of us but, of course, may be borrowed from your local library. A limited number of paperback copies are available for sale to Fellows and supporters of the Centre, at a special rate of £25 (including package and postage). Please send a cheque (made payable to the Centre) to the Director, Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics, 91 Iffley Road, Oxford OX4 1EG. May also be obtained directly from Sussex Academic Press, PO Box 139, Eastbourne, East Sussex, BN24 9BP.

(Editor)

from **Cruelty to Animals**, the speech of Lord Erskine in the House of Peers on the second reading of the Bill for preventing malicious and wanton cruelty to animals, 1809:

‘Animals are considered as property only. To destroy or to abuse them, from malice to the proprietor, or with an intention injurious to his interest in them, is criminal. But the animals themselves are without protection. The law regards them not substantively. They have no RIGHTS!

‘... I am to ask your Lordships, in the name of that God who gave to Man his dominion over the lower world, to acknowledge and recognize that dominion to be A MORAL TRUST.

‘... For every animal which comes in contact with Man, and whose powers, and qualities, and instincts, are obviously constructed for his use, Nature has taken the same care to provide, and as carefully and bountifully as for man himself, organs and feelings for its own enjoyment and happiness.

Almost every sense bestowed upon Man is equally bestowed upon them - seeing, hearing, feeling, thinking, the sense of pain and pleasure, and passions of love and anger, sensibility to kindness, and pangs from unkindness and neglect, are inseparable characteristics of their natures as much as of our own.'

UNITARIAN ANIMAL WELFARE SOCIETY

In a letter to The Inquirer of 8th January 2011 the Rev Fergus O'Connor mentioned the Unitarian Animal Welfare Society. I have been unable to find out anything about the society. If any member of the Fellowship knows about it would you kindly consider writing an informative article or letter to the editor?

DONGRIA KONDH

Tribal Tribulations - Indigenous rights prevail over corporate greed.

At the last Annual Meetings in 2010 a Resolution was passed supporting the Dongria Kondh people in Orissa in their efforts to prevent their lands and sacred places being mined by Vedanta Resources. This Resolution, proposed by Macclesfield Unitarians, was a part of a major international campaign by non-governmental organisations and faith groups.

I am pleased to report that the campaign has been a success. The following article appeared in Resurgence (January/February 2011, No. 264):

"In the summer of 2009, Resurgence published an article by Mark Heylar which detailed the David v Goliath type struggle that India's indigenous Dongria Kondh community were facing in Orissa state as giant mining company Vedanta Resources sought to quarry their sacred hills for the bauxite beneath. In a four-year real-life struggle that echoed the film Avatar - yet received little of the media attention the film enjoyed - the Dongria Kondh refused to give up the fight, effectively eliciting the lobbying might of international NGO's to support their cause.

In an extraordinary and unexpected move, India's Environment Minister, Jairam Ramesh, has blocked Vedanta's plans, saying they had shown "a shocking and blatant disregard for the rights of tribal groups". Amnesty International, whose members sent 10,000 letters of protest to India's Environment Minister, hopes this will act as a wake-up call to other corporations whose reckless profiteering threatens sacred lands.

In the words of actor, broadcaster and Amnesty International supporter Michael Palin, this "sends a signal to the big corporations that they can never assume that might is right. It's a big victory for the little people".

Derek McAuley, Chief Officer GA

ELECTION PROFILES

Each candidate for election to the NUF Committee is required to provide a profile of not more than 250 words.

Ella Lewis-Jones

I have been a member of Highland Place Unitarian Church, Aberdare, (South East Wales) for the past six years. During that time I have taken on various supportive roles. For five years until April 2010 I was Secretary of Aberdare Women's League. I am currently a member of Highland Place Church Committee and Minute Secretary for the South East Wales Unitarian Society. In 2010 I acted as Secretary for a steering group which was set up to appoint a Minister jointly between Aberdare, Cardiff and Cefn Coed. The steering Groups application for inclusion on the Denominational Ministerial Vacancies list was accepted but sadly there has been no appointment.

I use email and word processing on a regular basis but do not regard myself as a computer geek. During the past year I and my husband Keith have produced all of the literature and publicity for the 150th celebrations at Highland Place. This included sending regular reports to the local press, all of which were published, helping to increase the profile of the Unitarian Community within the locality. For the past three years I have contributed to the Bi-monthly South East Wales District News where I introduced the popular feature, "Interviews with Local Unitarians".

I am a former Health Service Manager and have qualifications in Health Promotion, Counselling, Education, Management and an MA in Medical Ethics (Keele 1994).

I am member of the National Unitarian Fellowship and have contributed a number of short video meditations for the NUF Website.

Ian Martin

I am an English teacher now living in Thailand, originally from the south of England. I have been part of the Unitarian movement for more than thirty years. I started to attend the Brighton Unitarian Church and later Westgate Lewes with whom I retain contact. My long years of living and working overseas have taught me the spiritual journey begins and ends at home. The truth is not discovered in exotic places. However one will discover in the world at large religion is certainly not in decline. Church membership has fallen in England but there are many who are still looking for an alternative to outdated dogmas and the void of negative and arid atheism. I believe the NUF plays an important and expanding role for those seeking such an alternative. In these days of the internet, we must use the tools of the

modern media to reach those who have lost touch with religion and who seek a more spiritual life.

Alan Oates

I was raised as an Anglican, and in my youth I was happy to be a member of the established Church. In those days the Church of England was more tolerant, and liberal, than it was to become after the publication of 'Honest to God' in 1963. I have come to see that as a turning point.

As I felt increasingly uncomfortable in my parish church, I joined the NUF in 1983 and became a contributor to the Books of Fellowship almost immediately. I was glad to have the opportunity to discuss my spiritual concerns with a variety of people, openly and frankly.

Before long, I began to attend services in different Unitarian churches from time to time. It was Unitarians who introduced me to the writings of Matthew Fox, the exponent of Creation Spirituality. This has influenced me enormously.

Today I am a member of Croydon Church. I am interested in all shades of Unitarian belief and subscribe to the Unitarian Earth Spirit Network. I have been the organizer of the Books of Fellowship since 2003.

I will be happy to serve on the Committee of the NUF if I am elected.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Newsletter lacks wide appeal

The NUF, which by its statement, 'aims to meet the needs of Unitarians and others who value a free and positive approach to religion, whether they attend a church or not', has the potential to lead today's folk to a more balanced outlook of life and away from an emphasis on advertising, claim culture and lack of responsibility. Great – but to be effective we need to be widely, much more widely, known and embraced. We need more members.

But, look at the latest Newsletter, especially the book reviews. They are erudite and challenging but not the sort of material that would catch the imagination of an enquiring would-be member. We are being too clever by half.

There is a place for all this learning but NOT in a NEWSLETTER.

Hilda Handoll

Dr Carwyn Tywyn (known to some as Carwyn Fowler) was appointed Secretary of the Welsh Department. Carwyn has a BA in Politics from the University of Strathclyde and a PhD from Cardiff University. He has worked as a researcher, journalist with GOLWG, the Welsh language current affairs

weekly magazine, and in the voluntary sector with Keep Wales Tidy and the Disability Law Service. He is also a professional folk harpist (and will be performing at the Annual Meetings). He currently lives in Burry Port, Carmarthenshire. He is a member of the National Unitarian Fellowship.

Dr. Tywyn will be a great asset to the Unitarian Movement in Wales, and in Great Britain.

RESURRECTION

A poem by C. Day Lewis, which I cut out from a weekly, is called 'The House Where I was Born'. The poet writes of a photograph showing his father standing outside the Irish parsonage in which he was born. The family had moved to England before he reached an age which he can remember, and his mother had died four years later. He had no knowledge of the interior arrangements of the house, or of the human feelings and relationships of its inhabitants...

*Perhaps that is why so often I gaze
At your picture and try to divine
Through it the buried treasure, the lost life –
Reclaim what was yours, and mine.
I put up the curtains for them again
And light a fire in their grate:
I bring the young father and mother to lean above me,
Ignorant, loving, complete:
I ask the questions I never could ask them
Until it was too late.'*

The world is full of such 'buried treasure' – things gone beyond the power of living memory to recall, but which our hearts can reach out to in sympathy, and wish to resuscitate. In the end, all things which men have ever cared for will be part of that 'Lost Life'. In fact, the poet is simply giving new expression to one of the oldest of themes. But it seems to me to be a true and touching expression of it.

Perhaps that is why, in seeking significance and fulfilment, men's faith has reached out not to bare survival but to Resurrection, to the raising up and bringing into the open of all the living treasure that has been buried by the passage of earthly time. That is the faith which, in our century, has inspired Stanley Spencer's paintings of this theme.

It is not an easy faith. A full and true raising of the past would confront us with so much that we would shrink from because it pains or shames or accuses us, or poses questions to which we have not found the answer. But perhaps the purpose of our lives is to be found in preparing for some such ultimate confrontations and reunion.

Francis Terry, First President of the NUF (NL March 1967)

MORE BOOKS FROM THE NUF COLLECTION

Kharang by Bruce Findlow, with an introduction by Margaret Barr, is a small publication of 62 pages, published by The Lindsey Press in 1955. This is an eye-witness account of the project that Margaret Barr dedicated herself to, during the years when she was trying to establish provision for youngsters in the outlying villages. It was lonely work and she welcomed input from volunteers from the Unitarian movement so you can imagine her delight when learning that Bruce Findlow would be taking a whole year to spend with her and the community in Kharang. Although this publication was written many years ago it highlights the enormity of the task Margaret Barr had set herself, and the tenacity of this woman of faith. The booklet can be read in one sitting and is a must for anyone interested in the Khasi Hills project and the woman who made it happen.

The next book is by Karen Armstrong, **A History of God** published by William Heinemann Ltd in 1993. Readers will realise very quickly that this author is a favourite of mine, who, I believe, appeals to many Unitarians. It was no surprise to find that the themed speakers at Summer School, when examining how they spoke of God, used this author more than any other. As ever, the book is thoroughly researched beginning with a primitive monotheism before men and women began worshipping a number of gods. The chapters move from the beginning, to one God, a light to the gentiles, the Christian God, the God of Islam, the God of the philosophers, the God of the mystics, the God of the reformers, the Enlightenment, the death of God until finally we ask 'has God a future'. This has been my second time of reading and I imagine it will not be the last. It isn't a quick read and demands our attention, although some readers may wish to pick out their favourite periods or begin into the book. However, the time spent in addressing it is well rewarded.

Although the final book proved to be a challenging read and not for the faint hearted, it has a significant message that reaches out beyond any inward looking religious tradition. I feel fortunate to have picked it up from the Summer School second-hand bookstall. It is **Lost Icons – Reflections on Cultural Bereavement** by Archbishop Rowan Williams published in 2000 by T & T Clark. Although only 187 pages the material is dense and closely argued. It highlights the impact of materialism that has changed the face of what childhood now means. Children are nurtured as part of a commercialised world, caught up in marketing, dress and behaviour. The book was written before the great financial crises that demonstrated the greed embedded in society from top to bottom and not often recognised or accepted. We can no longer express remorse in a competitive world. "Lost souls: that is ultimately what the 'lost icons' of the title points to". Running as

the underlying theme through the book is a challenge to an individualism gone too far; the belief that we can create ourselves in isolation. Selfishness as to what is due to us fails to recognise the role of the other. We need to understand what it means to discover oneself only in relationship, without which we do not have a self/soul.

Please contact me if you would like to borrow any of the above books.

Joan Wilkinson

ALSO FROM THE NUF COLLECTION

Karen Armstrong is at her brilliant best in her latest book, **The Case For God – What Religion Really Means**. This was published in 2009 and is now available in both hard and paperback, from Amazon at only £4.82. The copy now to be added to the NUF Book Collection is in hardback so the cost of circulating that copy would probably be almost as much as purchasing a copy of your own. This was my second time of reading and there is no doubt that I will turn to it again and again. It is the best answer from all I have read, refuting ‘The God Delusion’ by Richard Dawkins. She draws on her encyclopaedic knowledge building up her case from 30,000 BCE to 1500 CE, that section being considered under the title ‘The Unknown God’. The second section, which looks at ‘The Modern God’ to the present day, shows a distinctive difference between the two periods. That does not mean she doesn’t examine the complex differences within each very long period. What she does demonstrate though is the organic nature of change leading up to the very distinctive changes around 1500 C.E., with the Renaissance, Reformation and growth of science. The need for individuals to have proof through a literal reading of sacred texts – the need for proof became a hallmark from 1500 C.E. on. A belief that we can know everything, and all can be explained so that we can be certain of a final truth. This approach has led to the fundamentalist approach of some religious groups and some scientists, and Richard Dawkins can be included in the latter. Both approach their different disciplines knowing they are right without humbling themselves before the vast ‘unknowing’ of our existence. Science too has its mythological language to symbolise the limits of what can be expressed mathematically or in words: eg. The String Theory, Big Bang, Black Holes, Red in Tooth and Claw, and so we could go on. Many scientific insights are creative leaps of thoughts. Many religious insights too are creative leaps of thoughts in the same changing world that we inhabit. Religion is done in the meeting together, in ritual and in the way we live in society. The God that Dawkins doesn’t believe in is the God of literalism. His approach to science is closely connected to this literalism, which has been a feature of the modern period since 1500 C.E. The literalist approach leads to these two arrogant and opposing camps. One is certain

that the words in the Bible are static and ‘prove’ that God exists and how he exists, the latter is certain he/science has ‘proved’ that there is no God. Neither opposing camps seem able to acknowledge what was once named, ‘The Cloud of Unknowing’, within their relative discourses of religion and science. Armstrong’s book is a profound read at all sorts of levels but it is worth working right the way through because the author ensures that the threads are closely woven ensuring a completed and strong argument, which becomes obvious only late in the book. Each page is valuable in its own right, but the way the author pulls everything together for the concluding chapter and epilogue is nothing less than brilliant and inspirational.

Joan Wilkinson

God's creation

For a man regards some deeds as well done and some as evil,
and our Lord does not regard them so,
for everything which exists in nature is of God's creation,
so that everything which is done has the property of being God's doing

Julian of Norwich

ADORATION

Recently, I encountered an Anglican priest who seems to be obsessed with the subject of prayer. Everything and everyone has to be prayed about and over.

Discussing this with a Catholic friend, she told me that she had been taught that the correct priority in devotion was adoration, contrition, thanksgiving and supplication . . . remembered as ACTS. Adoration comes first.

This, it appears to me, is what my advocacy of the recital of a devotional mantra is about. Lovingly and mentally reciting the name of our object of devotion is surely adoration.

So it is that I am led to recall the beautiful old hymn beginning with ‘Thee will I love . . .’ It was written by Johann Scheffler in the 17th century, and translated by John Wesley in the 18th. My hope is that it may still be found in some hymn books, and still sung. In my late wife’s Methodist Hymn Book, it is number 445, and comes under the heading of ‘Love and Communion’.

In conclusion, I come back to my theme of a mantra expressing adoration. ‘Thee will I love . . .’ And Johann Scheffler’s lovely hymn concludes with the significant words, ‘What though my flesh and heart decay? Thee shall I love in endless day!’

Ross Howard

A PRAYER FOR THE DEAR DEPARTED

May light perpetual shine upon them and their souls find comfort.
May we hold them in continual remembrance; may we and they be united at all
times in a pure affection and an abiding communion; may we ever feel that we
are all one family, one company of friends, in the life beyond and in this.
Amen

Ross Howard

HELP NEEDED AT UNITARIAN COLLEGE, MANCHESTER

Graham Johnson, the archivist working on the Unitarian Collection at
John Rylands Library, is looking for volunteers to help in the listing of various
items. Unitarian College is able to offer travelling expenses of up to £10 per
day to people willing to undertake this work. If you are interested in helping in
this task, please address enquiries to Graham at:

graham.johnson@manchester.ac.uk or telephone him on 0161 275
8723.

Rev Alex Bradley Principal, Unitarian College, Manchester

GA News

ITHACA

Always keep Ithaca fixed in your mind.
To arrive there is what you are destined for.
But don't hurry the journey at all.
Better if it lasts for many years,
So you're old by the time you reach the isle,
Wealthy with all you have gained on the way
And not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.

Ithaca gave you the beautiful journey.
Without her you'd never have set out.
But she has nothing more to give you now.
And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have deceived you.
Wise as you have become, after so much experience,
You'll have understood by then what these Ithacas mean.

C. P. Cavafy
(Poemata, Ikaros 1963)

The dancer is the dance
The player is the game
The singer is the song
One and the same

WEB NEWS

The Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics
www.oxfordanaethics.com/home

A review of 'The Link Between Animal Abuse and Human Violence' (See p.13) may be found at <http://humaneeducation.org.za/view/blog/childhood-development-impaired-by-animal-abuse/>

The Chief Officer, Derek McAuley has started a new blog for those who want to know what the Chief Officer has been up to and get an insight into some of the issues facing the Unitarian and Free Christian denomination. Followers might even find out what inspires and occasionally shocks Derek. <http://unitarianchiefofficer.blogspot.com/> - it is possible to sign up and comment on postings. GA News

Following feedback received, we have updated the home page of our main site to include more direct links. These can be seen at: www.unitarian.org.uk. Thank you to all of those who have submitted comments, we do find these useful. GA

The **Alister Hardy Society** now has its own website up and running. This can be accessed on: <http://www.alisterhardysociety.org>.

DIARY DATES

The Annual Meetings of the General Assembly will be held at Swansea University 15th-18th April 2011 The new Annual Meetings Panel (Derek McAuley, Andrew Mason, Lis Dyson-Jones, Dot Hewerdine and James Barry) are working hard to ensure that the Unitarian Meetings for 2011, to be held Swansea, will be one to remember. On the accommodation front, most of the rooms at the University are en-suite, but there are a few which are not, enabling a budget option to be available.

MEMBERSHIP MATTERS

Any member who would like to correspond with another member, near or far, please contact the membership Secretary.

NEXT ISSUE

The deadline for the next issue is Wednesday 16th April 2011. Contributions on any theme and responses to any item in the newsletter are always welcome. All contributions are acknowledged.

The views expressed in the newsletter are those of the contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the NUF or of the wider Unitarian movement. All contributors are members of the NUF except where otherwise indicated.