

National Unitarian Fellowship

Affiliated to the General Assembly of Unitarians

And Free Christian Churches

News & Views

Issue 10



Autumn 2021



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

Registered Charity No. 1040294

Six haikus

**silence: anywhere,
any time, it's just in front
of your eyes, your nose**

.....

**unheard melodies,
unseen landscapes, unfelt love:
they're there, always there**

.....

**you can embrace change
wholeheartedly, happily
and with open arms**

.....

**docile days collide
at summer's benign ebbing:
forests rest, down leaves**

.....

**windy windy day;
mind meanders along road
to somewhere unknown**

.....

**in solitude find
inspiration; learn living;
dispel those regrets**

Liz Brownhill

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Dedication

This issue of News & Views is dedicated to all those who have lost their lives or had their lives blighted by the Covid 19 virus; their families and friends; and all those, whether paid or unpaid, who have worked so hard and long to care for Covid patients, and to fight the disease through vaccination and other measures. May they find the strength to continue the battle until the war against the virus is won.

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Editorial

Welcome to the Autumn issue of News & Views. The theme of this issue is "For the healing of the Nation". This runs through the Dedication and all the Views pieces. The enormous and continuing effects of Covid 19 on the Nation's physical and mental health make references to healing timely; but there is surely a wider frame of reference too. I cannot remember a time when the Nation seemed so divided within itself. I recall times of bitter division, such as the invasion of the Nottinghamshire mining village where I was living by striking Yorkshire miners, but these, while disastrous for the communities concerned, did not affect large swathes of the country. Now we have division, not only between but also within the political parties; between age groups; divisions based on race, gender and sexual orientation; and both between and within religious groups.

It was particularly sad to read in *The Inquirer* recently¹ of the divisions, particularly vehement apparently on social media, between Christian and non-Christian Unitarians. Unitarians have always prided themselves on their inclusiveness and welcoming attitude to diversity, but how real is that claim if we are not prepared to consider points of view different from our own? While I would no longer claim to be a Christian, I think we can find much of value in Christian values and teaching. This explains the reference to a sister journal, *Faith and Freedom*, in the Letters page; the Views piece by Bob Pounder (which also takes an essential world-wide perspective); the inclusion of a poem by a Christian sympathetic to other faiths (Stella Bromhead); and the review of John Barton's magisterial study of the Bible (which is of course also vitally important to Judaism). The importance of really listening to others' points of view is at the centre of Kate Dean's piece. Meanwhile you will find trailers for the latest in the NUF's series of talks on World Religions (on Chinese religions) and for a talk on Hinduism in the Unitarian Transformers series. So we hope there will be something for everyone in this issue.

Meanwhile I have to mention that I am in need of healing myself as I have been diagnosed with myeloma. Hence the note on this uncommon form of cancer. As I expect to be undergoing many months of intensive treatment, I have felt it necessary to stand down as Editor after this issue. Joan Wilkinson will be taking over so I know the magazine will be in the best possible hands. It has been a privilege and pleasure to edit the magazine and I hope to continue to make the occasional contribution if my health allows. Meanwhile please send your contributions direct to Joan at the address shown on the back outside cover.

Nick Saunders

¹Sheena Gabriel, *Inquirer* 24 July, at p.7.

Letter to the Editor

Dear Nick,

Thank you for sending me your excellent journal.

I am sure many of your readers are already subscribers but I wonder if there is any chance you could publicise the latest issue of *Faith and Freedom* which has just come out?

If any of readers would like to take out a new subscription I will gladly send them a free issue 191 along with the latest issue.

Best wishes,

David

Rev Dr David Steers

Minister: Downpatrick, Ballee and Clough Non-Subscribing
Presbyterian Churches

Editor: *Faith and Freedom* www.faithandfreedom.org.uk/

Blog: <https://velvethummingbee.com/>

YouTube Channel: [https://www.youtube.com/channel/](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXPxAoAu_wl9IFzfa7mDxiw)

[UCXPxAoAu_wl9IFzfa7mDxiw](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCXPxAoAu_wl9IFzfa7mDxiw)

Minister's Page

It's funny how some things stick in your mind for years. Facts or events that are of no use to your life, yet they are ever present, part of a haul of useless facts. There was a chap I worked with once who could recite the books of the Old Testament backwards. It was his party piece when we were in the pub after work. My party piece was being able to name all the major nerves that originate in the brain, the cranial nerves. I don't think any of us would have known if Ezekiel or Haggai had been left out of the good book reverse recital, or where the trigeminal nerve leads.

When my son was a teenager, he was taken with the films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder. In one that he watched there was a dinner party going on and when it came to the end no one could leave, not because they were forced to stay or the doors were locked but they just couldn't bring themselves to walk through them. They couldn't take the first step through the open doorway. Later I took that scene as an allegory for the safety of the comfort zone and fear of what lay beyond it, or maybe of returning to a life they were not happy in.

I was thinking about that film when we had the so called 'Freedom Day' at the end of the last lockdown. I could have gone out for a meal but feared to. It took weeks before we ventured onto the train into Manchester. It is strange how the pandemic on the one hand put us in fear of one another. Out on walks we felt we were lepers as people stood well aside or moved in a big arc around us. On the other hand, we happily greeted everyone and exchanged 'Good Mornings' as our cocoons skirted one another. It surprises me how some have seemed to happily abandon all the restrictions the pandemic put on their lives while I still keep a face mask in my back pocket and put it on if I go into a place that feels enclosed. When I read about Fassbinder films, he seems always to portray people who have to face the reality of who they really are or the reality of their lives. Would we rather stay at the dinner party and see the door out as closed? I don't think they have anything to do with the wearing of masks, or do they?

Tony McNeile

Worship Page

The world we live in is a secular world, not a religious one. People say, 'O my God' but they might as well say 'Schucks'. God means nothing to them. 'It is just a word, a puff of air' as Shakespeare wrote of 'honour' in Falstaff's speech in Henry IV. The secular world has reclaimed Sunday and no doubt its nod to faith with shorter hours will one day be swept away, along with Easter Sunday. God lost credibility when 'He' was in charge of everything yet the world was so horrific with its wars and sufferings. If humankind was made in the image of that God, it doesn't say much about that God. Religion now is often described as nothing but a system of corporate control. No wonder the world turns away from it to face..... what? Spiritual Nothing or Spiritual Something? If Nothing, then make the best use of it. If we feel there is Something then a step has been taken onto the spiritual path. What do we really believe about ourselves and this blue planet floating in an endless space? What connects us to contentment in life? Scriptures, religions, temples, mosques and churches can be stepping stones on the way and might even become a satisfying shelter. Religion is alive when we ask ourselves about it and explore its meanings. Some say that when you turn away from the fascination of the secular world then you find true wealth.

Tony McNeile

Prayer

When I wander in life's dark places, alone and lost in the world, may I feel the inner knowledge that light is stronger than darkness. On the trail I have left behind there are lights. People who have cared still stand in light. Good places still glow with memories. In the darkness our eyes adjust to the lack of light and we begin to see and the darkness begins to yield. The darkness holds a promise of light. If we are walking in darkness let us not lose faith in the coming dawn. Light will return.

Reflection

Numpties and Niceties

“What a numpty”, I said to my wife Jane, referring to a neighbour’s uncompleted garden fence. “Why didn’t he get a professional to do it?”

“Perhaps he couldn’t afford to.” my wife said more charitably.

Then I recalled the time, many years ago, when I was attempting to do car maintenance and had two cars on the driveway in pieces. I started to regret my initial superior attitude and loose language.

There seems to be an increasing amount of loose, and often hurtful, language about these days. I and I think many others were angered by the Health Secretary’s reference to “cowering” from Covid 19. (Mr Javid has since deleted the tweet and apologised for his “poor choice of word”.) When such language is complained about there is an increasing likelihood that the complainer will be faced with counter-claims that “we are all entitled to free speech” and that the “cancel culture” whereby controversial speakers have their invitations withdrawn is the result of a “woke” conspiracy of liberal urbanites who are only too ready to take offence.

In fact, the “cancel culture” is nothing new – I recall the University officials warning us on the University’s Criminology Committee in 1973 that if Professor Eysenck’s talk went ahead Special Branch would be present and there would be a heavy police presence to ensure the Professor’s safety. Unsurprisingly, the talk did not happen. But it needs to be recalled that while vital, the right to free speech is not and never has been absolute, it needs to be considered alongside other rights such as the right not to be seriously harmed, physically or mentally. (Note, this is not the same as merely taking offence.) And

even where there is a right it always needs to be considered whether it is the right thing to exercise it in the particular circumstances.

So is the answer a return to the niceties of middle-class conversation of generations past, where the truth was often masked by a veneer of respectable chit chat? Surely not, much has been gained by the more direct approach to conversation that has become more common since the 1960s. But we all need to be more alive to the potential for causing unnecessary hurt by deliberate or careless use of cutting language. After all, what is more basic to the “loving community” we Unitarians so often say we are looking for?

Nick Saunders

PAYING YOUR SUBSCRIPTION

This is an important notice for those members who have not yet paid their subscriptions (which were due on 1 January.) As we mentioned in the Spring issue, the NUF is moving its bank account to NatWest. The transfer of accounts has now been completed. If you pay your subscription by standing order, direct debit or by transfer over the internet please note the relevant account details:

Name of account: National Unitarian Fellowship

Sort code: 01 01 42

Account number: 26 32 55 19

When you renew your subscription, you might like to consider the advantages of receiving it by e mail. Apart from the environmental benefits if you do not print off the magazine, the electronic version is in full colour.

If you have any queries regarding your subscription, please contact John Wilkinson, contact details are on the back cover.

June Unitarian Societies Days

The NUF contributed to the first session of this event. For an overview of the three days please see the report by Tony McNeile, Joan Wilkinson and Celia Midgley in *The Inquirer* 10 July 2021 at p.7. Further reports on the presentations will appear in later issues of *The Inquirer*.

If you take part in a Unitarian event and are able to offer a note of the proceedings or a comment on them for inclusion in *News & Views* we would love to hear from you. Please contact Joan Wilkinson at the address on the outside back cover if you can help in this way.

Report from the 'Life Spirit' Group

The 'Life Spirit' Zoom trial will have almost reached completion by the time you read this article. In reading David Usher's book, *Life Spirit*, and discussing the questions within each unit, a small group has addressed and shared profound issues of our personal thoughts, understanding, experiences and beliefs. The course will have taken a full year, meeting fortnightly.

For various personal reasons we have lost three valuable members through the year, and this has been a great loss to the group and disappointing for those who could not complete the course. However, those who have been able to continue have valued the fortnightly meetings on a Thursday evening at 7.30 pm.

The trial has been a good learning process for us all and the group have been discussing what we would like to do when this course has been completed. This should be at the beginning of October.

Next step – ‘Living with Integrity’, Edited by Kate Whyman

This book seems the natural step from examining what we understand by spirituality to how values and beliefs are practised in our lives. The course will look at how we define ourselves and live within the family, the wider society, justice, work, politics, strangers, equality, and environment before looking at ageing and dying.

When following the *Life Spirit* book the present group would have benefitted from knowing more about the author and the book. Before starting the book, *Living with Integrity* the editor Rev Kate Whyman, has agreed to speak on Zoom about the book. Anyone who may be interested in reading the book for themselves or may like to join the discussion group which will study the topics in the book on alternate Thursday evenings on Zoom.

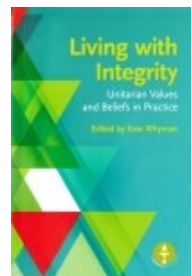
Would any NUF members or other Unitarians, who may be interested in listening to Kate, please get in touch with me:

joan@yorkshiregirl.org.uk and I will confirm the date, which will be either, Thursday 14th or 21st October at 7.30 pm. If after hearing Kate, you would like to join a group meeting regularly, you would be most welcome.

Living with Integrity is available at the cost of £8.50 from the GA Unitarian website:

https://uk.bookshop.org/books/1605841623_living-with-integrity-unitarian-values-and-beliefs-in-practice/9780853190882

or from Amazon at £8.50.



Joan Wilkinson

Hold the date!

The next talk in the Exploring World Religions series will be given by Roger Mason on **Wednesday 22 September at 7.30 p.m.** The subject will be **Chinese Religions**. As with previous talks there will be plenty of opportunity to ask questions and discuss.

Roger writes:

“I have visited and lived in the Peoples Republic of China for 35 years. Religion now thrives in China despite persecution during the Cultural Revolution. There are three major faith traditions: Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism. Confucianism is perhaps the most typically Chinese and a social and ethical system rather than a religion. Taoism follows the teaching of Laozi (Lao Tzu), who is believed to have lived about the same time as Confucius but was older. Chinese Buddhism belongs to the Mahayana Branch and was brought by teachers from India several centuries after the life of Siddhartha Gautama. Zen Buddhism began in China as Chan Buddhism. All three religions do not worship one god.

I have prepared a short Powerpoint presentation as an introduction but will devote most of my time to answering questions.”

The Zoom details are:

Meeting ID: 852 1525 7900

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85215257900>

One tap mobile mn+442080806591,85215257900# United Kingdom

Dial by your location +44 208 080 6591 United Kingdom

Unitarian Transformers is described as follows by the Project Leader, Rev. Mark Hutchinson:

“Unitarian Transformers is a project funded by the Wood Green Trust exploring spiritual directions for adults and children. Transformers work with a small number of collaborative congregations. In the Connections meetings the aim is to bring together Unitarians and non-Unitarians to listen to each other as we explore different spiritual directions : free Christian, Hindu, Earth Spirit , Humanist etc.”

As part of this project Indra Sikdar is holding an event called **Hindu Connections** at **6.00p.m. on 18 September**. Indra will explore the concept of Dharma (Duty) both from a Hindu and a Western perspective. Can we find a balance between duty and freedom?

The Zoom details are:

Zoom Meeting Number: 2331964380

Zoom Password: 3c9Pb1

New NUF Website

The new NUF website is due to be completed by 31 August 2021. We do encourage all readers of News & Views to look at the site, if they have not already done so. We would very much appreciate feedback on the site and its ease of use on PCs, tablets and mobile phones.

Feedback can be provided via the site, by e mail to

nuf@nufonline.org.uk or to a member of the Committee, whose contact details are on the outside back cover.

Message from the President of the General Assembly, Anne Mills

Dear NUF Members,

It is my great pleasure, as the current GA President, to send you the Greetings and very warm wishes of The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches; when we refer to "The GA", we include each member of every Unitarian congregation in the United Kingdom-- approximately 160 churches and 3,000 people. Each person is important; each is valued, and every contribution counts towards the whole; it is our unity, as a denomination, which matters. Thank you for being part of this achievement!



I congratulate the NUF, too, on its website; I have been examining it, recently, and found it tremendously impressive. Set out in a clear, attractive manner, it is pleasant to look at; its information and material are plentiful, accessible, and interesting, and I know that there are many sections that I shall return to, later: to read, re-read, or use for worship. The "News and Views" section and the selection of Blogs I thought of especially high-quality, with a wealth of wide-ranging ideas, beautifully-written, by experts and enthusiasts alike; many of the contributors are eminent Unitarians, and this includes several of our Ministers. What talent, knowledge and generosity of spirit are represented here!

The Pandemic and lockdown, which we have endured, since March, 2020, have obliged us to look at new methods of communication and worship, in order to provide appropriate connection with our congre-

gations and our denomination. We have embraced Zoom with varying degrees of enthusiasm, and not a little anxiety, as a solution to the problems of isolation, although there is little acknowledgement of the part played by the NUF, along the years, since it first came into being, in 1944. Yet, to me, it seems clear that the original NUF established strong foundations for its organisation which are directly in keeping with the efforts we have all made to mitigate the widespread side-effects of Coronavirus. The section on Membership tells all interested parties that the benefits of belonging to the NUF are to keep people in touch; to enable them to communicate; to reduce isolation; and to provide relevant contacts and materials. Isn't this what we've all been aiming towards, during the last year and a half---in our personal lives and, more importantly, in our church-communities? The NUF recognised this, long ago, and has put theory into practice, ever since.

Within its framework, there is choice; the NUF may be used as an alternative to church-attendance, as a preparation for it, or as an enrichment of regular worship, and the usual warm Unitarian welcome and friendliness are well to the fore.

I applaud the NUF---and, in particular, its Minister, Rev. Tony McNeile, and its officers---on everything it has achieved, long-term; take pride in your efforts, as you spread your positive message of free, hopeful religion and spirituality amongst our denomination. I wish you every success in your future endeavours; thank you for everything you do, in the name of Unitarianism.

With very best wishes,

Anne

Looking through a glass darkly...

An introduction to the Unitarian Society for Psychological Studies

by David Taylor



The Unitarian Society for Psychological Studies (USPS) was founded in 1965 by the Revd. George Stanley Whitby and his wife, Revd. Florence Whitby. During his long and distinguished career, George was an examiner in Moral Philosophy at the University of Glasgow and subsequently a Lecturer in Philosophy and Scientific Method at the University of Sheffield. Amongst his published works are articles in the International Journal of Ethics, the Maurice Elliott Memorial Lecture 1966 (on the Value of Psychological Studies) and the Beard Memorial Lecture 1970 (Philosophy and Survival). He was also joint editor of 'Life, Death and Psychological Research' published on behalf of the Churches' Fellowship for Psychological & Spiritual Studies (Rider, 1973). For 30 years he was a minister of the Unitarian Central City churches in Glasgow and Sheffield, after which he became a minister of the Cotswold Group of Unitarian churches. He was also the Director of Studies for the Churches' Fellowship for Psychological and Spiritual Studies, as well as being Education Officer of the College of Psychic Studies and a member of the Society for Psychological Research.

The USPS held its inaugural meeting at the AGM of the Unitarian movement. Thinking that the new society wouldn't attract much interest the meeting was held in the church vestry. To everyone's surprise 140 people attended!

It was decided that once the society had been formed a journal should be produced to keep in contact with its members. The first issue of the journal, called 'Beyond', came out in June 1966. By Novem-

ber 1967 it had changed its name to 'Psychical Studies' as someone pointed out there was already a publication with that name!

Early issues of the journal carry some quite heavyweight articles dealing with the philosophy and theology of psychical research. And was it any wonder, for such a new organisation, that it had some of the great names of the subject associated with it. Rev. Herbert Crabtree served as the first President before becoming a life member. Rev. Crabtree was also a President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. When Crabtree stepped down as President in September 1968, the Society was fortunate to have Professor Henry Habberley Price, Wykeham Professor of Logic, and Fellow of New College as its second President. Price was President of the Society for Psychical Research from 1939 to 1941. He contributed much intellectual integrity to psychical research. He was also a supporter of the theory that apparitions were a form of 'recording' on the psychic ether.

Another well-known figure from the history of psychical research was Dr Robert Crookall, who served as USPS Vice-President. After taking his Ph.D., Crookall lectured at Aberdeen University before joining the staff of the Geological Survey of Great Britain. He resigned from his geological work in 1952 to devote the rest of his life to psychical research. Today, Crookall is best known for his work on astral projection and out of the body experiences, in such classic books as: 'The Supreme Adventure', 'The Study and Practice of Astral Projection' and 'Intimations of Immortality'.

Other well-known names from psychical research who were also members of the Society include Sir Cyril Burt, professor of psychology at University College London, Sir Herbert Pollard, Revd. Basil Viney, George Blaker, Sir Kelvin Spencer and Arthur Koestler.

Sir Alister Hardy, the biologist and former president of the Society for Psychical Research, was a Life Member and a regular speaker at USPS conferences. Sir Alister is today best known for setting up the 'Religious Experience Research Centre', which was housed in Oxford but is now based at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David. This is a unique collection of first-hand accounts of religious, mystical and psychic experiences, sadly mostly ignored by many modern psychical researchers.

The USPS organise an annual conference. In addition, each year until the intervention of Covid 19 they have organised a speaker for the Unitarian General Assembly. Past speakers have included leading experts in the field of psychical research such as Professor Archie Roy, Dr. Fiona Bowie, Dr. Martin Israel, David Ellis and Rev. E. Garth Moore.

So, is there such a thing as a Unitarian approach to psychical research? This is a tricky one to quantify. Unitarianism is a liberal and creedless faith, rooted in the Christian tradition, yet on a spiritual adventure in search of truth.

Unitarians are a faith community for those on a spiritual journey, for those who believe there is still more to be discovered in religion. They believe in religious exploration – through the intellect and through the spirit. Unitarians are known for their liberal attitudes to spirituality and embrace many different world views. If anything, this is the strength of a Unitarian approach to psychical research. Lack of dogma means that psychic experiences are approached in a truly sceptical way – with an open mind, following where the evidence leads. And if you hold different views to other members – then that is fine, in fact it is positively encouraged.

Unitarians have a long-standing tradition of contributing to the study

of the paranormal. In the nineteenth century, ministers such as Minot Savage and John Page Hopps were active investigators. In the twentieth century, Unitarian psychical investigators have included names such as Dr L. P. Jacks, Principal of Manchester College, Oxford, founder and first editor of the Hibbert Journal and a former President of the Society for Psychical Research, and Professor Frederick Stratton the Astrophysicist and Director of Solar Physics Observatory at Cambridge from 1928-47, who was also a past President of both the Society for Psychical Research and the Unitarian General Assembly. It was Professor Stratton who, in his Presidential address to the SPR, pointed out the limitations of laboratory experiments, urging members to report contemporary spontaneous cases. He suggested that it was the job of philosophers to think out “a reconciling conceptual framework” to include both spontaneous and laboratory approaches. This best sums up the Unitarian approach, an openness to go with the individual’s own experience, but also embracing a scientific approach. For many, science and religion cannot sit hand in hand, but in Unitarianism they can, neither is mutually exclusive, rather mutually inclusive.

For further details about the Unitarian Society for Psychical Studies please contact:

David Taylor - 07505 323443 or infousps@yahoo.co.uk
www.ukunitarians.org.uk/psychical

Report from the Unitarian Peace Fellowship

Movement for the Abolition of War birthday event 27th May, 2021

I signed up to join a Zoom meeting organised by the Movement for the Abolition of War (MAW), chaired by Tim Devereux, who introduced two guest speakers, Prof. Merered Hopwood and Paul Ingram. Merered is the chair of Welsh and Celtic Studies at Aberystwyth University. Paul was Executive Director of the British American Security Information Council (BASIC) until 2019 - a think tank focussing on nuclear disarmament.

The aim of the meeting was to briefly reflect on MAW's achievements and to think about the future.

Bruce Kent recollected that MAW was established following an international gathering at The Hague in 2001. The founder President was the Nobel prize winner Sir Joseph Rotblat. The considerable successful activities were outlined.

Then followed a series of prepared questions and answers to and from the guests.

- 1) the challenges of war and peace in the 21st century.
- 2) alternatives to war - including the UN, conflict transformation, and international law.
- 3) the role of the armed forces and their carbon footprint.

Replies were far ranging and complex and are presented here as a summary of each of the guest's views.

Paul Ingram

Paul described the Stepping Stones approach to discussions in a polarised international climate. It seeks to engage all members of the

international community in a co-operative and inclusive process that nudges the possessor states away from arms racing dynamics with an intention to reduce the salience of nuclear weapons, achieve incremental disarmament and progressively build up the capacity for further steps. The emphasis is on a positive direction of travel.

Paul mentioned Rear Admiral John Gower, CB, OBE, Ministry of Defence, who after 30 years changed his methods in favour of this approach. In fact, Paul suggested he found the military themselves the most sceptical of military involvement. He noted how conflict is portrayed as glamorous when recruiting with no mention that a military career actually can include trauma.

Paul postulated that the seeds of war are in all of us. Each of us has a sense of righteousness and that others are wrong or don't understand. It is important to take matters slowly with questions to the individual rather than taking positions. There are no easy answers. The international stage is characterised by dominance and aggression. However, there is evidence that some smaller states, such as Sweden, practise constructive strategies. It is important that states without nuclear weapons do not acquire them. This feels like head banging against a wall. However, the Stepping Stone approach does not expect to reach agreement immediately. It starts with where we are now followed by a process of encouraging vision. This can then drive action. It's about building trust and introducing an expectation that can drive action.

Paul pointed out that the armed forces are responsible for a significant proportion of our carbon footprint. While highlighting the security of the State they can be wasteful in their use of jet fuel, for example.

Merered Hopwood

She described how Wales now has a Peace Academy and a new peace curriculum, and emphasised the importance of education and language, e.g. defence against what? What makes us secure? An army? She looked at the Costa Rican experience where funds were diverted into health rather than defence. Costa Ricans came top for feeling happy in a research project. Merered further described a neglected culture/being under the influence of a big neighbour. She highlighted inclusiveness and the need for a restorative approach in Wales. Values can be changed, e.g. corporal punishment has been abolished in schools. She noted how if we Google peace studies there is evidence that they are out of fashion.

Summing up.

Of significance is the vigour and optimism from both speakers that, even though the present time is very challenging, there are opportunities to change attitudes and actions in the arena of war and peace.

Anne Griffin

The Case for a Unitarian Code of Ethics

This edition of *News & Views* has the theme 'Healing the nation', and it is this theme that prompts me to reference one of the observations of Lao Tzu, the author of the *Tao Te Ching*², which in translation is recorded as follows:

*"If there is to be peace in the world,
There must be peace in the nations.*

*If there is to be peace in the nations,
There must be peace in the cities.*

*If there is to be peace in the cities,
There must be peace between neighbours.*

*If there is to be peace between neighbours,
There must be peace in the home.*

*If there is to be peace in the home,
There must be peace in the heart.”*

This same quotation was referenced by Revd Celia Cartwright in her article published in the Inquirer (July 24, 2021) in which she asked the question, how do we translate peace within ourselves into peace with others? This is the challenge that underpins any attempt to develop a Code of Ethics to guide Unitarian congregations.

The motivation for the Findhorn Unitarian Network proposing to the General Assembly the development of a Unitarian Code of Ethics is an awareness that individuals have been the victims of unethical behaviour within the Unitarian movement, and the consequences have included divisions within chapel congregations, and people leaving disillusioned with the values of their church.

Too often, silence has been the response to unethical behaviour. There is a tendency not to call out corrupt acts, bullying, and discriminatory views. We also tend to ignore or stay silent about unethical inter-personal behaviour, perhaps because some of us are too polite, or for fear of discrediting our Unitarian chapel by making things ‘public’. Those who lead our church communities are often the people who fail to act on immoral or discriminatory acts. Their reasons include loyalty to the perpetrator who may be well regarded, or because the person is someone upon whom the church community is dependent for its continued viability.

The result is that those aggrieved by unconscionable acts leave the church community, and in some instances become vocal critics of the Unitarian movement.

The frequency of unethical acts in Unitarian communities is not widely recognised, primarily because our communities remain silent. The perpetrator may leave, but more often it is those perturbed by the lack of action to rectify the offence who walk away. The scars can linger for a long time and the veracity of accusations is rarely tested. This lack of accountability for both accused and accusers means injustices persist.

Could a Code of Ethics help?

Unitarian chapels are autonomous charities and hence many congregations will normally abide no interference, even when there is wrongdoing that is unlawful. Hence, any attempt at a top-down imposition of a Code of Ethics will be resisted as contrary to the independence of each chapel. Thus, while the General Assembly should play a coordinating role, the process of creating a Unitarian Code of Ethics must be one that engages people across the Unitarian movement, and which draws upon the informed views of members of congregations.

We therefore first need an information base for congregations and societies to consider. This may require some level of disclosure of the frequency of unethical events, because some people do not accept that such events are too common to be ignored. Next, we need a consultative process by which we collectively identify our standards of behaviour. If this can be achieved, then we also need a mechanism by which the Code is used in practice. Hence, an essential element is a Code of Practice to accompany the Code of Ethics, that individuals and communities understand and agree to implement, even when the circumstances are disconcerting to the chapel authorities. This is where the nature of autonomy needs to be interrogated. The as-

sumption that underpins this is that if one is to call oneself Unitarian, one needs to be willing to be held to account for one's actions. Resistance is often a result of past bad experiences, and therefore, as Celia Cartwright suggests, our Code of Practice needs to throw love at fear.

To achieve wide acceptance of a Code of Ethics will require extensive consultation and engagement. It is not something that can be achieved by a couple of busy members of the Executive Committee of the GA putting in a few hours work. The need for a Code of Ethics arises from among our laity, and it is to them that we need to turn to make this a reality. There is an extraordinary depth of talent among Unitarians, so we have the capacity to do this consultation in an inclusive and effective way. We just need the Executive Committee to invite people with the requisite skills and commitment to step forward, and for the EC to then support the people they appoint to conduct the consultative process.

If UK Unitarians want to grow their communities of faith, they need a mechanism to stem the impact of unethical behaviour. A Code of Ethics can establish the standards by which we abide, but the essential element is a widely accepted mechanism by which the Code is used in practice, to maintain the integrity of our communities.

Revd Dr Ralph Catts, on behalf of the Findhorn Unitarian Network Committee <https://www.facebook.com/FindhornUnitarianNetwork/>

²The Tao is defined by Wikipedia as 'the natural order of the universe whose character one's human intuition must discern in order to realize the potential for individual wisdom. This intuitive knowing of "life" cannot be grasped as a concept; it is known through actual living experience of one's everyday being'. This seems to be a philosophy consistent with Unitarian spirituality.

Red Cross Memorial Peace Appeal

There follows an extract from the GA website.

We are pleased to support this appeal.

This emergency appeal, drafted by Rev Feargus O'Connor (Golders Green Unitarians), is being launched in response to truly unprecedented global crises. It honours and implements our 2021 General Assembly resolution in support of the Red Cross Memorial Peace Appeal, which funds Red Cross lifesaving worldwide appeals.

Occupied Palestinian Territories and Israel Crisis Appeal

As a result of the recent armed conflict 6,794 Palestinians have been injured in the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, and 7 killed. In Gaza 242 Palestinians, including at least 66 children, have been killed and 1,948 people have been injured. Residential buildings, water and electricity infrastructure and medical facilities have been seriously damaged or destroyed. The Hala Al Shawwa primary health centre, which provides COVID-19 testing and vaccinations, was destroyed. In the midst of the pandemic the Palestine Red Crescent Society (PRCS) is struggling to supply soap, bandages, antiseptics and antibiotics as well as specialist lifesaving treatments such as those used for children with severe injuries and burns.

According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, in Gaza alone more than 77,000 were displaced and over 2500 made homeless by the destruction of their homes. In Israel 12 Israeli citizens have been killed and hundreds injured by rockets fired by Hamas. Medical and other essential humanitarian aid funded by this emergency appeal will be channelled through the Palestine Red Crescent Society and Magen David Adom, the Israeli Red Cross.

Global Coronavirus Emergency Appeal

Right now in war-torn Yemen two million children are suffering acute malnutrition. Yemen faces the threat of the most devastating famine in decades. In Syria over 5 million people have fled the country since 2011. Over 6 million people have been internally displaced. According to [UNICEF](#), 90 per cent of Syrian children are in need of food, medical and other humanitarian aid. In both countries millions of children suffer acute psychological distress resulting from continued exposure to violence, shock and trauma.

A surge in coronavirus infections is devastating India and spiralling out of control. Cases are surging by as many as 400,000 a day. The total number has skyrocketed to more than 18 million. The death toll is steadily increasing. Hospital beds are full and there is an acute shortage of oxygen nationwide. There is a desperate need to provide essential medical supplies and treatment facilities. The [Indian Red Cross](#) is working round the clock to provide urgent support where it is most needed, particularly in India's most vulnerable communities. This appeal not only honours our [2021 GA resolution](#) but is truly in the spirit of, and builds upon, our 2011 GA resolution affirming the Charter for Compassion, our 2013 one proclaiming global interdependence and the interconnected web of all creation, the 2014 one in support of Red Cross lifesaving emergency appeals and our 2016 resolution calling for urgent humanitarian aid to millions of victims of war and destitute refugees whose lives remain in acute and immediate danger. [You can find a list of these previous resolutions here.](#)

It is being supported by our GA President, Anne Mills, our Chief Officer, Elizabeth Slade, the editor of The Inquirer, M. Colleen Burns, the Global President of the IARF, Robert Ince, our elected Executive Committee, and the Unitarian Peace Fellowship.

If you wish to make a donation please make it payable to the **British Red Cross** and send it to the charity's offices at 44 Moorfields, London EC2Y 9AL and kindly specify the appeal to which you wish to donate. Or phone 0300 023 0811. [Or donate online here](#)

The British Red Cross warmly thanks all committed and generous Unitarian donors who have contributed £115, 104 to Red Cross emergency appeals since April 2012, both to the Clara Barton Appeal and its interfaith successor, the Red Cross Memorial Peace Appeal, an umbrella appeal for these donations, which can be sent to the Red Cross emergency appeal of the donor's choice. No money is kept in any fund and there are no administrative charges of any kind as all donations go directly to the British Red Cross.

Have you heard of Myeloma?

No, I hadn't until I was diagnosed with it as the result of a routine blood test. Fortunately, my GP had been a haematologist and recognised the distinctive spike of a protein which is a marker for what is a cancer of the blood. Like many myeloma patients in the early stage of the illness I had no obvious symptoms except repeated exhaustion, which I had put down to my heart condition.

Doctors do not know the cause of myeloma, though there may be both genetic and environmental factors. There is no cure, although patients generally die of infection, such as pneumonia, rather than the illness itself. Both the illness and the treatment (mainly chemotherapy) are highly individual so it is impossible for doctors to give any precise prognosis. Research is leading to improved life expectancy but this is an uncommon illness – only some 5,700 people a year are diagnosed with it each year in the UK, so research is not as well funded as that into the more common cancers.

I am due to start chemotherapy in September, continuing into the New Year. Following that I have been fortunate to be offered a round of stem cell treatment. This involves some of my own stem cells being harvested and transfused back into me. I will need to be in hospital in isolation for a month as I will be extremely vulnerable to infection. Some months at home recuperating will then be needed. Hopefully I will then be in remission for a period before further chemotherapy may be needed.

As a result of all this I hope you will understand that I felt I could not continue as Editor of News & Views. I hope to continue to contribute to the magazine from time to time. I know that with Joan and John Wilkinson in charge the magazine is in good hands but please do consider offering them a piece – new contributors are always welcome. For more information on myeloma see www.myelomaUK.org

Nick Saunders

Healing the Nation

Rev Kate Dean

Have we lost the art of conversation? Although I long for more social contact, I can find myself to be hesitant when the opportunity arises. Do I still have the ability for small talk or will I talk more than I listen? Encouraging people to listen more deeply is a passion of mine and I think it could go a long way to healing from this pandemic experience, but do I do enough of it in my own interactions? Practising what I preach is always the hardest part!



We can't yet know the impact of this collective experience. It has been different for all of us and yet very few have been left untouched by the pandemic. Almost every person has felt some sort of loss: in the grieving of a loved one, the lost opportunities or missed experiences or perhaps a sense that time has slipped away and can never be recovered. There is much to heal. And there is no doubt that our lives have been transformed in the past 18 months or so. As our society begins its process of recovery and healing, it is time to decide what parts of this experience help us to grow and what we can leave in the past.

Inequality and injustices have been amplified by the pandemic and we can feel overwhelmed by the enormity of the problems. The impact of racism in our society and climate change on our world are two such examples. Finding small steps to take can help in gaining a sense of control over our lives and what is happening. The antiracism protests last year and new sensitisation to these issues recently have led many to revisit historic injustices and learn more about a system of oppression which was barely acknowledged by those who benefited from it. In my own spiritual community, a group has been working through the antiracism handbook *Me and White Supremacy*, confronting inner stereotypes and unconscious biases. The author, Layla Saad, invites us to reflect on what are the things we now see that we cannot un-see and what we are going to do with this new way of seeing. Part of it will be to leave behind old behaviours which no longer serve us and to find the courage to speak up when we see injustice, by becoming more the people we hope to be.

We have also come to recognise that it is likely to be the poorest countries and most vulnerable individuals who will be disproportion-

ately affected by climate change. Everywhere we look we can see the impact of human behaviour and for some climate anxiety comes in waves, each daily news update bringing fresh concerns. The environmental activist Joanna Macy observes that: 'We are living cells in the living body of the Earth. Our collective body is in trauma and we are experiencing that. Even though we try to suppress it or drown it out or cut a nerve so we don't feel it, the collective plight exists at some level of our consciousness... we need to listen to ourselves as if we were listening to a message from the universe.... There is no private salvation.'

We all have our part to play in tackling this crisis and perhaps we need to balance the big actions with the small; holding governments and companies to account on the one hand, and holding ourselves to account for our extravagances on the other. One of our Chapel Elders alerted me to a website (evry.app) which is a tool to choose small daily activities to help you make a difference on the path to healing the planet.

A few weeks ago, someone challenged me to give a one word 'mission statement' for our organisation and I replied *Kindness*. It may not be as striking as other words I could mention, but a little kindness goes a long way and when it's in short supply, life can look pretty bleak. The Golden Rule binds Unitarians to one another and to the great faith traditions of the world. 'Loving your neighbour' is at once a simple and challenging message. On a personal level, we struggle with our demons from the snippet of gossip to family tragedies, and on our TV screens there are constant reports of conflict in other parts of the world. Too wrapped up in ourselves we can lose sight of the importance of those around us. But our circle of neighbours seems to

be ever-expanding so it can feel overwhelming to think that we should love every single one of them.

It is said that the Abbot Pastor of the desert fathers once said 'If you have a chest full of clothing and leave it for a long time, the clothing will rot inside it. It is the same with the thoughts in our heart. If we do not carry them out by physical action, after a long while they will spoil and turn bad.' The thoughts in our hearts may be dreams unfulfilled, they may also be past hurts that lie buried. Without the opportunity to release deep tensions, they can cause us even more harm. This is why we need our spiritual communities, in whatever form they take, to help us do the work of deep listening and deep healing.

In lives that can be busy with frustrations and hardships, large and small, the love we show each other brings us the sweetness of existence. So, if someone opens up to you, try to listen to them with unconditional love, encouraging them to be present with their emotions. Through feeling the feelings, we can find true healing.

Kate Dean is the minister for Rosslyn Hill Chapel in Hampstead, North London.

For the Healing of the Nations

Bob Pounder



Those familiar with Unitarian hymnody will know the hymn: [*For the Healing of The Nations*](#). This particular hymn may be found in the red hymnbook, *Hymns of Faith and Freedom* (1991) and in the green hymnbook, *Hymns for Living* (1985). In both of these hymn books it is only three verses long whereas the

original hymn is four verses long. One can only assume that Unitarian sensibilities, at the time, may have recoiled from the stated theology of the final verse, the idea of a creator God in whose image we have all been made:

*You, Creator God, have written
your great name on humankind;
for our growing in your likeness
bring the life of Christ to mind;
that by our response and service
earth its destiny may find.*

The message of the fourth verse of the hymn tells us that since we are made in the image of God, we are called, each one of us, to seek Him, and to grow into His image after the image of Christ. The key to the healing of the nations, therefore lies in the human response to this calling, and that through our imitation of Christ, God's calling, God's kingdom will come to earth.

The author of the hymn, the Rev. Fred Kaan (1929-2009) began his ministry in 1955 as a Congregational minister. In that post-war period, he, like many young church leaders, expressed the sentiment of a new generation. This sentiment, we could say, was an awakening, or a reaction to all that had gone before, in the first half of the 20th century: the slaughter and misery of two world wars. On the death of Fred Kaan, *The Guardian* journalist, Paul Oestreicher wrote:

He was born in Haarlem in the Netherlands, and his teenage experience of Nazi occupation never left him. His parents were deeply involved in the resistance movement, with weapons hidden under their floor; the deputy German commandant, a secret anti-Nazi, helped to protect them as they successfully hid a young Jewish woman and a

political prisoner who had escaped from Belsen. Three of Fred's grandparents died from starvation shortly before the war's end.

As these living memories of the horrors of total war fade ever more into the past, it is difficult, I am sure, for those of us who have never had to face such trauma to really have a sense of context and the earnestness in the which the words *For the Healing of the Nations* were born. But the hymn reduced to three verses becomes merely platitudinous. In the topical index of *Hymns for Living*, the hymn is listed under 'peace between nations.' The hymn does affirm a desire for world peace, sure enough, but truncated it is simply lame and uninspiring.

Fred Kaan, of his hymn, *For the Healing of The Nations*, said, *Of all the hymns I have written, this is the text that has been more widely re-printed and incorporated into hymnbooks than any other. It was first used in 1965 in a worship service of the Pilgrim Church in Plymouth (where I was then serving as a pastor) to mark Human Rights Day, it has been used on many official occasions such as the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Organisation.*

All those years ago, in a different time, the fault lines between Kaan's hymn and the secular nature and drift of the United Nations Organisation would not have been apparent. However, the appearance of the Unitarian three-verse version of the hymn in *Hymns for Living*, looking back, shows the direction of travel, not only within the context of Unitarianism but more significantly within society as a whole. To be clear, the severing of the fourth verse, the essential Christian message, from the main body of the hymn is testament to this. This severing denies the individual and the Church an essential power. The source of that power is the acknowledgement of the relationship between God and humanity, the absence of which, nothing lasting or good can really be achieved.

Indeed, the hymn, *For the Healing of the Nations* is only saved by its fourth verse. The fourth verse really means to remind us that the greatest law is to love God and that only after that, we should love our neighbours as much as we love ourselves, in that order; God comes first. Kaan, a Christian minister, in writing this hymn would definitely have had in mind that famous verse from Revelation 22:2, the tree of life and the leaves of that tree, 'for the healing of the nations'. It's interesting also, that the tree of life is mentioned in the first book of the Bible, Genesis 2:9, 3:22-24 and as previously mentioned in Revelation, the last book of the Bible. The tree of life in both the Old and New Testaments is depicted as the source of eternal life. In the Garden of Eden, we are driven away from the tree of life, but it is our destiny to return to it, to return to God, to ourselves, a journey in which we discover who we really are. Symbolically, in Revelation 22.1, the tree of life is 'fed from the river of the water of life', 'flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb...'

For Christians, the healing of the nations is not a secular political objective but rather an essential spiritual quest. It's no coincidence that the First Psalm speaks of that state of blessedness we must seek, a delightedness in meditating in the law of the Lord, 'both day and night.' Fed by the streams of living water (God), we become the interconnected trees, the vine, the fruit and the leaves for the healing of the nations for the New Heaven and Earth.

Bob Pounder is Minister of Oldham Unitarian Chapel

Healing the Nation

Peter Zoné

For the past 18 months, each and everybody in every corner of the wonderful planet we live on has been affected, in different ways, by a powerful, evil virus, thought to have originated from China, as many flu viruses have done in the past.



More than 3 million people around the world have died directly, or indirectly, so far, from the Covid-19 virus. The pandemic is not over, although many countries have come far in massive vaccination campaigns, but all countries have imposed lockdowns and other restrictions on their populations. Now in August 2021, most countries have lifted or are lifting the most severe restrictions, but still the work, education and leisure sectors, including the transport and tourist industries and communities large and small, are struggling to find their feet, and many people are still working from home.

Many countries, communities and workplaces are desperately trying to orient themselves in a new landscape.

Before I started to write this article, I looked up how the word “healing” is defined by the Cambridge English Dictionary, and a few American sources (just in case there was a difference between English and American English).

In short, the definitions I found, which can be based on medical or spiritual values, are as follows:

- *the process of making or becoming sound or healthy again;
- *healing only begins when the hurt is shared with someone;
- *to make free from injury or disease;

*to patch up, or correct (a breach or division);

*to restore to original purity or integrity.

The situation today, in most communities and countries, can tick all the boxes above. We are all as best we can, on wobbly legs and with dimmed eyesight, trying to find solutions and creative ways to move forward in the new “normal”, in living conditions not known to us before. These solutions and creative ways will differ from country to country, from community to community, from workplace to workplace, family to family.

I think in the future, we will be talking of the world “before and after” the 2020-2021 Covid-19 pandemic. No matter where we live, all people have lost loved ones, work and classmates and so on. It will be interesting to follow how the pandemic changes the way people think, and /or appreciate friendship, community connections etc.

Will we be able to combine modern techniques and traditional routines, events and ways of communicating with, or meeting loved ones? How will we do Christmas parties, weddings and other big family gatherings?

I have no straightforward, clear answers to the above questions, but despite the terrible outcome of the Covid-19 pandemic, I think, although it might sound harsh, that there is always something good in everything bad.

Everybody has been forced to slam on their brakes, and give deep thought as to what is important in life, and about the true values of a good life. Not to take “everything for granted” – for example, that your loved ones “have always been around”. Apparently safe and secure workplaces may suddenly have gone overnight. I think personal connections, and family bonds will be more appreciated in most families. At least, there will be more appreciation that we all depend on

each other, we are not so independent as many people have thought. Modern Western welfare and public health systems do not have unlimited resources to support each and every individual citizen affected by a world-wide pandemic, or any other major crisis.

Covid-19 has not only changed our way of thinking and the way we do paid or voluntary work, it will also change our languages. The Swedish word for holiday is “semester” – and most people have, up to 2020, often travelled to warmer holiday resorts during the summer months. Then restrictions were imposed, and people were more or less forced to spend their holidays at home. A new word was invented “hemester” – which can be translated as “holiday at home”. (Hem=home). The domestic holiday sector is now advertising “hemester packages” – one specific example of how one sector is adapting to the “new normal”.

I think it would be a good idea if not only the GA Executive Committee but also each Unitarian congregation tried during the rest of 2021 to work out how to adapt to the “new normal”. How do we fit in? How will we fit in during the years to come? What is the best way to use our individual and shared resources?

I end this article as I started it. Healing the Nation will mean that different processes will need to be adopted at different levels, by individuals and societies alike. At least I think so. I look forward to readers’ comments.

Regards from Sweden

Peter Zoné is a former NUF Committee member. He lives in Örbyhus, Sweden.

How I view Healing

Caroline Earl

Several years ago, I was about to embark on The Unity House Healing course in Plymouth, Devon. I felt very humble but excited to be learning a skill that would hopefully enable me to be a channel for healing.

The subject of healing is a vast one in that 'dis-ease' or illness can occur on many levels and in a sense the function of a physical illnesses is like a final corrective, a last-ditch attempt by the body to grab the attention of the sufferer and hopefully to force them to focus on the possible causes.

I believe the human body wants to be whole and given the right support and encouragement will overcome even the most serious threats. Good food and water, cleanliness and rest are basic requirements on a physical level for the body to function, but of course we as human beings exist on many more levels than just the physical. An imbalance or crisis in the emotions can have profound detrimental effects on the working of the human body.

I am rereading Edward Bach's book about the 38 Archetypal Soul states that he identified with flower essences³. I expect many of you will be familiar with Bach's Rescue Remedy, made up of several flower essences known for their calming and fortifying effects. The book is a fascinating study of the mind/body link and as Bach put it "There is no true healing unless there is a change of outlook, peace of mind and inner happiness".

I believe it to be the case that unless a person is ready to take responsibility for his/her own development and state of health very little healing can take place. Moment by moment we should build our future rather than leave it waiting for us in some far-off nebulous place

where we hope things might have miraculously improved. The future is always shaped in the present and only we can effect that healing change by being totally present and facing the good and the bad with equal openness and acceptance.

A loving heart is essential for the healing energy to be effective. Love is the only way, as this anonymous quotation eloquently states:

'Righteousness without love makes us hard
Truth without love makes us fanatical
Power without love makes us brutal
Duty without love makes us peevish
Orderliness without love makes us petty'

It is also important that we have a good degree of self-knowledge and as much as possible heal ourselves so that we are not looking at the person we are helping through a lens of our own fears and inhibitions and prejudices.

For healing to take place our aim, as healers, must surely be to, as it were, lead the person into the light of self-worth and self-acceptance, which is the optimum state for healing on every level to take place.

On a much more scientific level I can certainly highly recommend a book I read very recently, 'Cure' by Jo Marchant⁴, a well-respected popular science writer. In the book she beautifully describes the cutting-edge research going on now in the fascinating and until now unexplored area of mind-body medicine.

Enjoy and may you be well.

Caroline Earl is a member of the NUF and Plymouth Unitarian Church

³ See <https://www.bachcentre.com/en/>

⁴ Cure: a Journey into the Science of Mind over Body, Jo Merchant, Canongate Books, 2016

Book Reviews

The Midnight Library, Matt Haig, Canongate 2020

This was the first book by Matt Haig that I have read although his previous books, such as *How to Stop Time*, have been popular. Described by Sarah Collins in The i newspaper as “a captivating story and an uplifting antidote to the cult of self-improvement; a manifesto for true self-acceptance” I thought it might resonate with Unitarians. I also chose it for the book group which my wife Jane runs – it is out now in paperback at a supermarket near you!

The book is presented as a novel. Nora describes herself as an “inbetween person”, neither alive nor dead. On the brink of committing suicide, she finds herself in “the midnight library” overseen by her former school librarian. She opens her “book of regrets” and is encouraged to open the books which describe how her life would have panned out if she had taken the paths she had actually declined. Unsurprisingly these turn out to be very different from what she had imagined they might have been. Ultimately she realises that she does not want to die, but to live and to pursue all those opportunities that life offers. As she says to her brother Joe, ‘You don’t have to *understand* life. You just have to *live* it.’

I enjoyed this book but I cannot agree with Sarah Collins that “Despite the fantastical nature of the plot...Nora is real.” After Nora has explored some of her alternative lives the author’s formula becomes predictable and the book reads more like a self-help manual than a novel. Some Unitarians may also disagree with Nora’s rejection of attempting to understand life. However, it is interesting to speculate on what makes a best - seller. It does seem the case that many of us

are weighed down with regret for the choices we have made and are unable to accept ourselves as we are. This is particularly poignant during a pandemic when many people have lost loved ones without the opportunity to express those thoughts which they have perhaps bottled up for many years. There is an opportunity here for Unitarians to stress our message to “come as you are” with all your strengths and weaknesses – you are welcome in our chapels, fellowships and societies, however you come to us.

Nick Saunders

A History of the Bible: the book and its faiths

John Barton, Allen Lane 2019

I was inspired to read this study by Joan Wilkinson, who had heard Hugh Bonneville read extracts on BBC Radio. (Unfortunately, it is no longer available on BBC Sounds.) It is certainly a most impressive work of scholarship, unsurprisingly as the author is a former professor of the interpretation of scripture at Oxford University. The end notes run to over 50 pages and the index to over 30. But Barton also brings to the book nearly 40 years of experience as a Church of England priest and this ensures that the work is refreshingly down to earth and in the best sense worldly wise.

Rather daunted by the book’s 600 plus pages I read the Introduction (The Bible Today) and Conclusion (The Bible and Faith) first. I found them riveting. The bulk of the book (which I have to admit is harder going) is divided into four parts – The Old Testament, The New Testament, The Bible and its Texts, and The Meanings of the Bible. The emphasis is on the historical development of the work we nowadays think of as one but which in fact developed over a long period from a

collection of books written for very different purposes – teaching and liturgy as well as narrative. And the “s” at the end of “Meanings” is very deliberate – Barton shows how over time approaches to the Bible’s meaning have changed substantially.

There is much in the book that will resonate with Unitarians. Barton shows how there is slim support within the Bible for the concept of the Trinity (only one reference, at Matthew 28:19, and this is “widely suspected of being a later addition to the Gospel”.) More generally, Barton shows how much of Jewish and Christian theology is based on tenets of these faiths that have developed over time but not directly from Biblical sources, despite frequent claims to the contrary.

Paradoxically, reading this book made me more rather than less inclined to want to know what the Bible says on particular issues. While welcoming input from other faiths and their special books I suggest we should not lose sight of our roots in Christianity (and Judaism). I wonder if you agree?

Nick Saunders

National Unitarian Fellowship

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Hope for the 21st Century

Hope in a world where there seems no hope,
Where can we turn to find the key?
A voice sings out two thousand years old
“Be not afraid, but come unto me.”
We ask for strong faith that will lead us to hope,
For a faith that is weak will lead us astray,
So pray for the strength to have
Faith that endures,
That will lead us to hope
And bring peace to our world.

*Stella Bromhead (1926-2013)**



**Stella Bromhead, née Saunders, was a paternal aunt of the Editor. While a lifelong Anglican, she was sympathetic to other faiths, including Buddhism, having been born in Hong Kong while her father was working for the Cable Company in the Far East. She published privately several volumes of poetry and reminiscences of her childhood in the Far East.*

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