

The Unitarian

Nurturing Faith

Celebrating Difference

Embracing Life



May 2019

No: 1373

The Unitarian

Established in 1903 and published by the Manchester District Association of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches.

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Subscriptions for 2019: 1 copy of ten editions, £14.00 including post and packing. Send cheques, made payable to 'MDA The Unitarian', to the above address, and include your full name and postal address for delivery.

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Unitarians in Britain

www.unitarian.org.uk

Our Unitarian community consists of about 200 congregations that meet in Chapels, Churches and Meeting Houses right across Britain.

We gather for worship and fellowship, to create a caring community where all feel supported in our search for meaning and value. Unitarians are an open faith community celebrating diverse beliefs. We originate from the liberal Christian tradition, but now include people of other faiths as well as spiritual seekers.

The National Unitarian Fellowship (www.nufonline.org.uk) exists for those who, (because of where they live, or for other reasons), are not able to be part of a traditional congregation and Unitarians also share ideas and experiences online via **websites, social media and blogs**.

Unitarians do not discriminate on grounds of gender (we have had women ministers for more than 100 years), age, race, religion or sexual orientation.

Unitarianism differs from many other religions in that we believe in helping people to find their own spiritual path rather than defining it for them.

We welcome all those with open minds who share our views on tolerance toward others, who embrace the freedom to be in a faith community that does not impose creeds or specific beliefs, and where the approach is based on **reason** not dogma.

Cover photo: Lancaster Canal © Mike Oram 2018.

Back cover: Mundesley © Mike Oram 2014

In the *Northampton Unitarians News* for April-June 2019, Rev Sue Woolley quoted an Arabian proverb about friendship:

A friend is one to whom one may pour out all the contents of one's heart, chaff and grain together, knowing that the gentlest of hands will take and sift it, keep what is worth keeping and with a breath of kindness blow the rest away.

Earlier this week, I visited a very long-term and dear friend, for whom Alzheimer's has become a reality. She knows me but forgets when she last saw me and that I know she has Alzheimer's, so she tells me again, as if new. We reminisced and I painted word pictures for her of things we used to do. She smiled and laughed and remembered some and muddled some - and I watched my dear friend trying to find herself in the deep inner place where much of her resides. She talked to me cheerily and busily and some conversation made sense and some did not, and so I resonate with the quotation above because, for the years of friendship between us, it was necessary to 'blow the chaff away' and hold on to the golden grain of the essence of her words.

None of us know what lies ahead, what we may find around the next bend in the road. It behoves us to savour the journey and treasure the experiences and conversations shared with our dearest travelling companions, so that, whatever may befall us, we have deep within, woven into our soul, those riches that never perish and which even loss of memory cannot erase.

Fran

Rules and Requests:

1. Please do not send me a copy of an article that has also been sent to *The Inquirer*. I do not want to duplicate material.
2. If you attach a photograph to your item, please label it. You may know that the image is of Mrs Jones, but I, most probably, will not. It also helps when I have multiple photograph submissions if they are not all left with just the camera numbers. If you can convert your image to 300 dpi, that also helps.
3. If you send me a copy of your chapel newsletter I shall assume that it carries with it permission to copy any item therein. If that is not the case, please enclose something to that effect, or say so in the body of the message if the publication is sent via email.
4. It is the policy of the MDA that we do not publish letters in *The Unitarian*.

Thanks. *Fran*

Rousing Finale to Faith Lectures at Rawtenstall

More than 70 people came to Rawtenstall Unitarian Church in Lancashire on Saturday 23rd March to hear the eminent ecologist and writer Alastair McIntosh deliver a rousing address on the question: *Does Christianity still matter, and if so, why?* The final lecture in a series considering 'The Future of Faith'. Under the title, '*Towards Third Millennium Christianity: Activism, Non-Violence and the Mystical Imperative*', the lecturer led his audience through the often-violent history of two millennia of Christianity, with learned asides into other faiths.

A Quaker and radical pacifist, Alastair McIntosh argued that if we are to rescue Christianity from what he called '*the fear-driven dynamics of violence and domination*', we need to address the ostensible '*divine violence*' of theories of the cross, of doctrines of salvation. Only then will it be possible, he argued, to open up a credible Christian theology for this Third Millennium.

In a wide-ranging talk, the speaker attempted to do precisely



Alastair McIntosh delivering his lecture at Rawtenstall.

Photos by John Hewerdine.



Panel discussion (l. to r.): Alastair McIntosh, Ben Dandelion and Shannon Ledbetter.

this ... concluding with a deeply-felt meditation on the meaning of the cross -- could we have been missing its real significance all along? His talk was profound, moving and provocative in turn.

Workshops for group discussion followed, then questions to a Panel consisting of: Alastair McIntosh, Rev Dr Shannon Ledbetter (an Anglican priest and theologian now working with the Unitarians) and Dr Ben

Dandelion (a Quaker theologian). The event was chaired by Rev Jim Corrigan, minister to the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry, which organised this lecture series together with Pendle Hill Quakers and the Progressive Christianity Network.

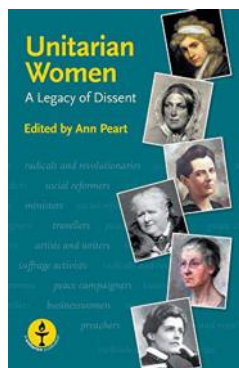
NOTE: The full text of the lecture is to be published in the coming issue of the Unitarian theological journal *Faith and Freedom*, due out at end of April 2019. To subscribe, contact Business Manager Nigel Clark at: 16 Fairfields, Kirton in Lindsey, Gainsborough, Lincolnshire, DN21 4GA, or at: faithandfreedom@btinternet.com. (Annual subscription in the UK is £15).

*Rev Jim Corrigan
Unitarian and Free Christian Minister.
Minister to Padiham, Rawtenstall and Chorley congregations,
and for the Lancashire Collaborative Ministry.*



Photograph from the recent interfaith service at Rawtenstall.





Unitarian Women: A Legacy of Dissent

by Ann Peart, Alan Ruston, et al.

Edited by Ann Peart

Paperback

ISBN: 978-0-85319-092-9

Pub: Lindsey Press, (22 Apr 2019).

£10.00

Ann is too modest in describing herself as "editor"; she wrote a substantial amount of the book herself, with remaining material supplied by eminent Unitarians.

This fascinating blend of history and biography---you will recognise many well-known names---covering 200 years, from the mid-eighteenth century onwards, may be read through or dipped into, equally successfully. Its referencing and indexing are meticulous, allowing for further personal research. (Harriet Martineau's novel, *Deerbrook*, is still available from Amazon!)

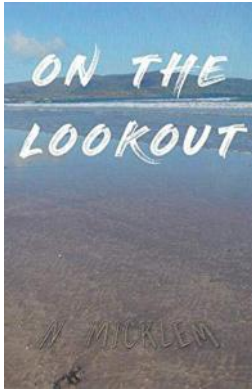
The earliest dissenting women were conditioned to domesticity, discouraged from intruding upon the male world, and persuaded that they were incapable of men's work. However, those who tried succeeded admirably, whether by preaching, writing, producing art, or embracing social justice issues; great talent flourished---without, usually, detracting from femininity. Many women raised funds to improve conditions for the disadvantaged, and, where they were banned from participating in committee work, started their own organisations, not only competing with the men, but outdoing them! Women's Suffrage issues involved women like Clementia Taylor: "earnest.....capable of persistent energy.....(and) successful."

What all these women had in common was a strong desire to share their ideals and beliefs. By all accounts, they must have been formidable adversaries! Rose Allen, for example, a Rosslyn Hill Women's League member, demonstrated huge determination in her 1915-1919 war-relief efforts.

Not all these women were lifelong Unitarians, though. Certainly, some came of solid stock and remained within the denomination. Others were attracted through friends, interests or contacts, but didn't necessarily stay. Some began as Unitarians but left; others joined late in life: Mary Rees Bevan, mother of Josiah, minister of Gellion Chapel, embraced Unitarianism in her eighties; eventually, their congregation converted---but only after "debate, splits, and physical fighting in the churchyard."

Congratulations, Ann, on a readable and informative book!

Anne Mills.



On the Lookout

by N. Micklem

Paperback

ISBN: 978-1789017519

Publisher: Troubador Publishing (12 Mar. 2019)

£7.99

PRESS RELEASE:

On the Lookout may be thought of as a contribution to the genre sometimes referred to as a 'quest of the historical Jesus', but not as scholars know it. It does not share the apparent view of New Testament scholars generally that the best one can hope to come across is 'the most plausible view' that can now be put forward by scholars about the man.

There is sound evidence outside the New Testament, which is widely ignored, but which puts matters beyond doubt. It is time to move on. A quest of the historical Jesus is not a question of swallowing stories told by Mark, Luke and Matthew hook, line and sinker, but a search for salvage in the wreckage of your boat.

Jesus deserves to be introduced to those who have not met him as someone worth knowing in himself, not just as a predecessor, or forerunner, of a religious entity known as Jesus Christ. Neuroscientists have been making it clear now for some time how the subconscious human brain works and what part emotion plays in our evaluation of those whom we meet. *"Christians have deliberately shrouded the man Jesus in misconceptions,"* the author says. *"It is time to cut the cackle and give the man his due."*

N. Micklem was brought up as a Christian, but in a household where scholarship was also prized. His career was in the law where evidence was always of supreme importance. After retirement, he decided to use his long practice of the use of evidence to try and solve some of the major questions left unresolved by religious academia.

Round and About

The Unitarian

Karen Armstrong, the religious author and founder of the “Charter for Compassion” writes about how we can encourage compassion within family life:

“As the Confucians have taught us, the family is a school of compassion because it is here that we learn to live with other people. Family life involves self-sacrifice, because daily we have to put ourselves to one side in order to accommodate the needs of other family members; nearly every day there is something to forgive. Instead of seeing this as an irritant, we should see these tensions as opportunities for growth and transformation.”

*Quoted by Rev Caroline Cormack.
Aberdeen Unitarian Church's April 'Calendar'.*



Richard Gilbert, who describes himself as a mystical religious humanist writes:

*Life is too transient to be cruel with one another;
It is too short for thoughtlessness,
Too brief for hurting.
Life is long enough for caring,
It is lasting enough for sharing,
Precious enough for love.
Be gentle with one another*

Extract from *Gentleness in Living*. In a meditation manual: *In the Holy Quiet of this Hour*. Skinner House Books.
Quoted in Bradford Unitarians' April and May Newsletter.

The worst of errors is to believe that any one religion has the monopoly of goodness. For every person, that religion is good which makes them gentle, upright and kind.

Ernest Renan (born February 28, 1823)
Underbank Chapel April Calendar.

It's the circle of life
And it moves us all
Through despair and hope
Through faith and love
Till we find our place
On the path unwinding
In the circle
In the circle of life.

From *The Lion King*.
Quoted in Newcastle-
under-Lyme
April Newsletter.



When the white missionaries came to Africa, they had the Bible and we had the land. They said “Let us pray.” We closed our eyes. When we opened them, we had the Bible and they had the land.

Desmond Tutu.
From the *STANDARD*,
April and May issue.
Stand Unitarian Chapel.

I send you out now, to share yourself with the world.
May its promise and complexity set your mind ablaze,
may you hold fast to what your life has taught you,
may you question everything.
And when you have changed the world,
may you return again to this place
and share what you have learned with us.

*Kelly Weisman Asprooth-Jackson.
Quoted in Bradford Unitarians'
April and May Newsletter.*

**People think
being alone
makes you lonely,
but I don't think
that's true.
Being surrounded
by the wrong
people is the
loneliest thing
in the world.**

Justice in Trials Threatened by Inadequate Forensics and Legal Aid

The Forensic Science Regulator, Dr. Gillian Tully, has made a scathing report in her annual report for November, 2017-18. Standards of forensic science investigations have fallen to a point where experts both from the police services and from commercial sources often fail to give evidence or are doubted when they do. Cuts in legal aid are roundly criticised. The Government's own Forensic Science Service, often praised internationally, was privatised "as too expensive" in 2012. See:

[https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/practice/forensics-shortfalls-and-legal-aid-rates-jeopardising-trials/5069642.article?](https://www.lawgazette.co.uk/practice/forensics-shortfalls-and-legal-aid-rates-jeopardising-trials/5069642.article?utm_source=dispatch&utm_medium=email)

[utm_source=dispatch&utm_medium=email](#)

and for more on forensic standards see the PSAP article *Truth, Justice and Forensic Science* in *The Inquirer*, 23 March, 2019.

PSAP News, Issue 31, 2019.

Welcome Rucksack Project for Asylum-seekers in Norwich

The Octagon Unitarian Chapel's scheme is to give every new arrival, adult, teenager or child a rucksack full of essentials suited to them. Other local and faith groups are joining the collecting of items to fill them. The Chapel's new website is just opening. octagonunitarianchapel928549612.wordpress.com/

PSAP News, Issue 31, 2019

One Tree can start a forest;
One smile can begin a friendship;
One hand can lift the soul;
One word can frame the goal;
One candle can wipe out darkness;
One laugh can conquer gloom;
One hope can raise spirits;
One touch can show your care;
One life can make a difference
Be that one today!



The Fulwood Messenger, April/May 2019.

Did you hear the latest from the world of sheep? Farmers have decided that they will no longer use dyes or branding to mark their flocks. Instead, they will use black and white vertical stripes. They are calling them “baa codes”.



Aberdeen April 'Calendar'.



The pillars of Islam are first to declare their faith, to believe in one God and to follow the guidelines of Mohammed, the other prophets. Jesus and Abraham, for example, are important, but Mohammed is the most recent one.

The second is obligatory prayer, which take place five times a day, before dawn, at one o'clock, about three o'clock, at dusk and about two hours later every day. Muslims should join in as many times as practical.

The third is compulsory giving to charity, Each Muslim adult has to donate two and a half percent of their annual income after living expenses. The UN has agreed that if every wage earner in the world did this, including large corporations, there would be no poverty anywhere. Food for thought!

The fourth pillar is fasting for Ramadan. Muslims believe fasting is good for your own body and it also reminds you of the plight of people with no food. Small children in families are encouraged to join in but in a limited way. By the time they are pubescent they are able to be fully engaged.

The fifth pillar is a pilgrimage to Mecca. This is not compulsory but advisable if you can afford the journey without pushing yourself into poverty when you return.

*Malcolm and Sandra Hawes, from their description of a day spent at a local mosque..
Ipswich Unitarians' April newsletter.*

**And Spring arose in the garden fair,
Like the Spirit of Love felt everywhere.
And each flower and herb on Earth's dark breast,
Rose from the dreams of its wintry rest**

*Percy Bysshe Shelley,
Unity Church, Bolton, April & May newsletter.*

Circle Dancing in Hastings Unitarian Church



The Circle Dancing group at the church was started in November 1996, after another local group closed. We originally held one session a week, but the group grew so large that it had two circles, one inside the other, for all the dances. A second session, for beginners was eventually started, and remains until this day.

Circle Dancing is nearly as old as time – it started when there were just enough people on earth, mostly women, to join hands and dance as a “libation” or honour to God or just for the pleasure of it. It originated as sacred dancing with a few minutes of quiet contemplation, followed by time for reflection and meditation. It began in Eastern Europe, and was used as a prayer to God, then as a celebration at funerals, rituals, meditation and special occasions.

Modern circle dancing was started some time in the mid 1800s, by a Polish Protestant clergyman, who would play his violin to amuse his children. Other people began to watch and then join in and so it spread beyond his home.

Later, a German dance professor took circle dancing to a spiritual community at Findhorn, on the edge of the Moray Firth in Scotland, which was started in the 1960s by people who wanted a peaceful place for others to visit and enrich their own spiritual lives. Ever since, circle dancing has been a part of the activities at this holy place.

At each dance session there is a centrepiece; a round mat or circular piece of glass, a lighted nightlight and sometimes a flower arrangement and pretty scarf to make a focal point. At the end of the session, the dancers direct the light of the candle outwards, in thought, to bring healing and comfort to those in need. We then stand in a small ring, arms around each other, and sing the words: “Shanti, Shanti, Shantiora”, believed to be the Sanskrit words for peace. The candle is then blown out to signify the end of the session.

Our current membership in Hastings is about 35, all very friendly, welcoming, and keen to learn new dances. We sometimes go to local homes for the elderly, or other interested groups. We also danced on the lawn of a fine 17th century cottage in Brede Village. One of our dances is “The Bells of Norwich”, and just as we finished the dance, the bells of Brede Church rang in celebration of a wedding, which seemed a fitting end to this dance. The weather was perfect, and we enjoyed a picnic on the lawn.

We all hope to continue dancing as long as we are able. It is a very good form of exercise and fellowship, and long may it continue with future generations.

Christine Hayward, Hastings Unitarian Church.

A visit to the seaside

**A smell of seaweed;
seagulls soaring...**

**The long horizon of blues and greens,
and a celebration of kids' poems on stones.**

**There are down-and-outs in doorways;
and cultural privilege at the Gallery.**

**A late afternoon skyscape
can be viewed from the beach.**

Standing stones, swimmers.

And down-and-outs in doorways.

Dennis Evans

