

For a little less than two years I was responsible for producing the Hull Unitarian Magazine. I was never its editor, but I guaranteed its content and shape. Having given up this role, I want to maintain the skill base that I developed, using different software to give a variable 'look'.



*Historical Photograph*

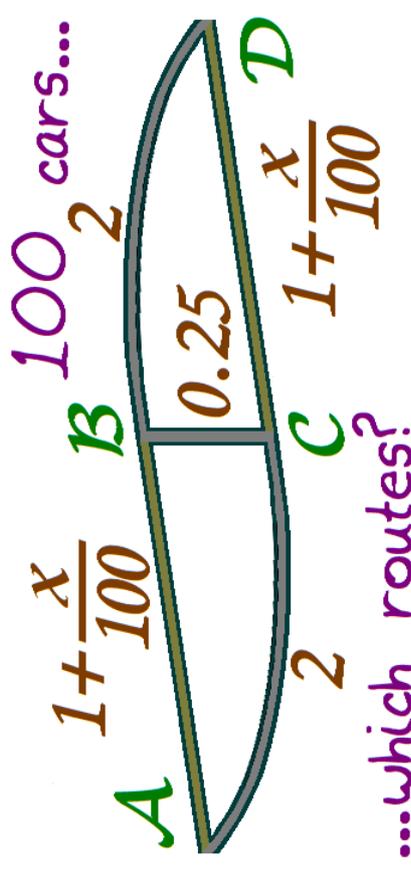
Here I am Editor as well as Writer and Compiler. This magazine from Sutton-on-Hull is directly related to and supporting the Pluralist Website, which is my own and has existed since November 1998. Material in here may be interchangeable with webpages or unique. The subject area is as across the website. As regards religion, this liberal magazine can be more 'ecumenical' and interfaith in basis.

So all the biases and ownerships are mine. If anyone wants to contribute, or comment, then contact me at [adrian@pluralist.co.uk](mailto:adrian@pluralist.co.uk). This magazine is only available online, but it is available both in continuous page format and in book format for printing on A4 as front and back facing pages - should anyone wish to do this.

## Puzzling All This Out

Several occasions during Unitarian services I have played the music of the late James Horner, who composed for films so he could be more romantic in style than in current serious music. He wrote for *A Beautiful Mind*, a slightly fictionalised narrative of John Nash, the mathematical economist with mental difficulties and who gained the Noble Prize late in his career for the 'Nash Equilibrium'.

This brings me to Hull traffic! It is often said that Hull's traffic jams started with the box roads (Ferensway, Freetown Way, Great Union Street, Castle Street) and pedestrianising roadspace in town. Possibly, but the Nash Equilibrium tells us that closing a road can speed up journey times! The Nash Equilibrium is: when everyone knows everyone else's strategy, each person individually can find no strategic benefit in altering their own behaviour.



Suppose 100 cars want to travel from A to D. They can go A B D or A C D or indeed A B C D (using that extra rat-run road). The numbers in brown represent time and each car is one X.

What killed off Setam was the change in the retail environment that favours chains with extensive supply routes into the far east. The example I was given was B & M's ability to sell a drinking glass for 69p each when Setam could only sell the same for 99p and that with 2p profit - a profit not large enough on Setam's volumes to pay the electricity bill.

With some manufacturing in Britain and a diversity of supply lines, Setam was creative in stock acquisition, for example getting hold of auctioned-off stock from damaged warehouses rejected by main stores. The exploitation now of singular supply lines on a world wide basis has cut off the creative means to find stock on anything like a regular basis.

Shopping in supermarkets and online has become sufficient. The last ten pounds in someone's pocket also goes into the supermarket and not into the likes of Setam.

The evidence was in the reduced 'footfall' along Hessele Road. This is not simply a function of relocated housing decades ago. People still shopped in Hessele Road. They stopped when they changed retail habits. The writing was on the wall five years back, but creative solutions were considered.

All along the line, items have been lost to potential competition. Thus greetings cards became sold by *Moonpig* and similar on the Internet, and thus another line of income effectively disappeared. The Internet promised to be an easy access of small home and group publishing, but in trading terms a few monster websites now corner the online market.

Setam also went online, not with a shop window as in this website's suggestion, but via the monster of eBay. This website had strange effects on trading and pricing because some items were sold successfully at well over shop prices and enough to cover the postage. Items were sent to the

music theory and practice who can communicate a simple, good tune. (112) But surely congregations are mixed: some know a lot, and some very little. The skilled can indeed speak clearly and simply (114), but the requirement is to introduce topics without boring the knowing, and to get into some detail without losing the uninitiated. Perhaps one introduces and spends a few minutes on implication. Not all of a sermon appeals to everyone.

Coggan is concerned with the change in thought patterns, in that core Christian words no longer carry their interconnected meanings among a people with scientific and technological forms of thinking (113). Perhaps liberals have an advantage here, in that we intend to deal with scientific and technological forms of thinking. We go into the museum of religious artefacts and language, because religious language is inherited, and try to make some connections. The fact is that we do not think like our forebears, and indeed much ordinary thinking has changed most recently: people are now habitually secular in basic explanations. So the bridge-building is less critical compared with an orthodox Christian trying to retain word-meanings being lost (perhaps preserved best within sectarian environments), but it still has to be done if there is to be some 'chain of memory' (Hervieu-Léger, D. (2000), *Religion as a Chain of Memory*, Lee, S. (trans.) from (1993) *La Religion Pour Mémoire*, New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.) showing where we were and how we arrived at the now. This, viewed from a theistic perspective, is all about the Spirit: the freedom to change, the freedom to deal in a newer language, the activity of the religious in the present.

The key then, is, perhaps, to represent, through preached words, at a core moment of the service, the tradition as it changes and renews, and the sources that speak, and then to use these to build among the seated responders and effective

You don't hear it as often, these days: Unitarians who consider themselves part of the 'Universal Church'. There are still many who call themselves 'Christian', and many more 'liberal Christian'. I don't call myself either, despite clearly dealing in that tradition, along with humanism and aspects of Western Buddhism.

## Can Unitarians Be Christians?

I have often wondered who should receive the title 'Christian'. My preferred answer (beyond acknowledging those who want the title) is to see one's stance as continuous with the early Church, from the earliest origins after Jesus's death to the various Fathers of the Church.

Of course many will simply say that they are followers of Jesus Christ. But what does this mean? It often means something in their own emotional imagination, along with



approved readings of selective biblical literature. If so, it won't be the historical Jesus, even if connected loosely.

There are many schools of history (in general), but all of them rely on primary sources:

documents directly written for purpose at the time and place area of an event. There are no primary documents about Jesus. In fact there are no primary documents about the early Churches either, but there are documents based on oral

things. This is why it is important that there remains some organisation that can examine someone who preaches, even if it is the congregation itself, or by some wider training and selection.

The first principle for Coggan might have been the bringing of truth, and this for him means Christ as *the way, the truth and the light*, or as Bernard Lord Manning had put it, the Incarnate Word via the written word through the spoken word. In preaching, Wesley "offered" Christ. (108)

Given difference, plurality and multiple sourcing, what can the liberal preacher have as such sourcing, if anything? Does preaching therefore "all fall to pieces" (109) without this one Christ that coheres? Why should this be necessary, however, if one studies prophetic figures and utterances from the past and indeed present, and attempts faithful representation of them? Beyond the bolts of lightning in revelation, or some sort of supernatural intervention into history (that is not doing history), there can only be the relativity of cultures and the need to find and discern, whether this activity of sourcing becomes the insights and life of Christ, or Buddha, or Gandhi, however textually represented, or indeed of a whole range of people who have experienced, lived, realised, been recorded or retold, and taught something into posterity.

There is further matter over scriptural sources. Coggan worries over what should be illustrations becoming the theme (111). This is the difference between using newspapers and television, and the scripture that should be the true source. Liberals should not be too worried: liberals do not 'close the canon'. However, trivia might be the equivalent worry. Liberals need to discern: for quality, faithfulness and sincerity rather than so much chatter.

This is probable. There used to be a C. H. Dodd school and the like that suggested that the Kingdom of God was coming within oneself. The problem for this is that it removes context and takes away the motive for immediacy. The argument that the apocalyptic is a reflection of the Romans' destruction of the Temple underplays at best the influence of Qumran on John the Baptist and indeed on Jesus himself - beliefs in the coming end and the Teacher of Righteousness.

The historical Jesus raises the conundrum of whether Jesus, aware of the scriptures, cooked up his suffering end with his 'chancellor', Judas, to bring about the prompting. It would strike us as devious and unethical. So much of the passion story does not add up. The probability again is that he was a minor nuisance dispatched at a sensitive sign by Romans nervous with their edge of empire occupation.

The problem for afterwards is that the original Jesus family Church at Jerusalem did not last. Certainly by 135 CE it is completely replaced, but it was fundamentally weakened much earlier than that with the 70 CE Roman actions. In fact that Church had nowhere to go even without Roman oppression because with Jesus's death he had to be the transformed figure, indeed escalated to Messiah, and failure to return was a failure of expectation. These Jews were the minim of other Jews. Yes, there were Ebionites, who travelled and who obeyed the Law: they lasted long enough in pockets to influence others - e.g. Muhammad - and Tertullian (c 160- c 230 CE) claimed they said this Jesus was a mere man with an angel in him and Eusebius (C 260 - C 340 CE) said they didn't have faith in Christ alone, as Paul had steered the beliefs of the main proto-orthodox sets of believers. The Ebionites were like other Messianic Jews: Jesus had 'forefilled' and not yet fulfilled, and he became part of ritual waiting.

Surely the service is the place where unfolding traditions of religious narrative get represented both liturgically and in freer expression, the latter within the sermon. What is then the sermon? What is it in liberal context supposed to do?

## Defining Liberal Preaching

Back in 1987 was published Bishop Donald Coggan's *The Sacrament of the Word*, in Fount Paperbacks, an examination of preaching in Anglican context. Preaching is not a sacrament, of course (the two Anglican sacraments are Baptism and the Lord's Supper), but he was trying to raise or even rescue its status from comparative neglect. Chapter 6 is entitled 'Towards a Definition of Preaching' (pages 105-116), and it can be used as a comparative template for a more liberal approach examined here.

The liberal open to difference surely undermines saying that the Word is being preached: as if an authorised person can deliver some kind of supernatural deliverance (when done faithfully and properly). come about. What then, via several comparisons and contrasts, of getting towards a definition for preaching relevant for pluralistic liberals?

The chapter itself is deliberately open and inconclusive, for further reflection. It is for the reader to generate *an answer* (105). Indeed, Coggan considers that beyond grasping laid-out principles, preachers might gather together to form a definition and use it to test their own preaching and revise this via thought, prayer and practice (116).

The principles Donald Coggan considers he lists (114) as: the unique personality it is who preaches; the substance of the Christ must be in the core truth of preaching; the Spirit (if rather briefly considered) is active within the action of

miss the argument that made orthodoxy - that the material is to be good. Arguably the Eastern Orthodox (the Byzantines that were separated after 1054) have maintained this best. The resurrection, the world, represents the glory of God. Marcion of Pontus may have rejected the Hebrew Bible, but mainline Christianity kept it with its material grounding.

Someone like John Henry Newman, brother of Unitarian Francis William Newman, could say that first three Gospels were Unitarian, and John Arian. He then conflated the whole New Testament together as orthodox. All the Gospels are Paul influenced. John's 'In the beginning was the Word' is Arian in that through Christ all things were made, and Christ was from the beginning. But other Gospels do not lay out divinity from the start, but a show a Jesus who develops (and, incidentally, the Virgin Birth, compromised by Father-side genealogies, means no more than the sign of a prophetic figure, mistranslated as it is). Paul's Jesus is the sole prophetic figure of some divinity under God.

The case against the Unitarians is usually the passages in Matthew (28:19) and Paul (2nd Corinthians 13:13). Matthew is dramatised as prior to Jesus's ascension, is not historical at all and late. The texts across all gospels that gives the apostles the legitimate power to forgive sins may be necessary for authority but it is outside history as well. Paul's baptismal formula does not of itself carry doctrine. Indeed, Unitarians were well aware, as were trinitarians, of doctrine, and Unitarians happily referred to God the Father, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, and did so without any suggestion that they were anything but Unitarian. They weren't stupid, putting the formula in their liturgies. (Ah - but did they baptise in the trinitarian formula? Probably not!) They connected themselves to the earliest Church and used Jesus Christ in teacher/ brother exemplarist mode and the Holy Spirit meant the same God acting (e.g., offering grace).

## Unitarianism & Politics: An Example

Fred Maddison, who went to Adelaide Street Wesleyan School, Hull, was born on 17th August 1856 in Boston and died 12 March 1937. A Justice of the Peace, and Temperance movement speaker, he indicates the connection between Unitarianism and political liberalism, even when within the Labour movement.



He became a Composer and rose to Chairman of the Hull branch of the Typographical Association, becoming President of the Hull Trades and Labour Council, and achieved President of the Trades Union Congress in 1886. He was Editor of the *Railway Review* for the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants 1889-1897. He was the first working class member of Hull Corporation between 1887 and 1889.

In those days the Liberal Party supported candidates financed by trade unions, known as Lib-Lab. The Independent Labour Party started in 1892 (strongly opposed by Maddison), and the new Labour Party formed in 1900 moved to associate itself with unions, especially after the Liberals dithered over legal decisions to financially restrict union activities (until 1906).

Maddison was defeated at Hull Central in 1892 and 1895 and elsewhere as late as 1923. But in-between he was Liberal MP

various doctrinal emphases: Paul and Peter apparently founded Rome, Peter apparently founded Antioch with its 'humanity of Christ' emphasis, Mark (of Paul and Peter) supposedly founded Alexandria with its 'divinity of Christ' emphasis. Monophysites came to emphasise Christ as of one nature, not two as in the mainline view, and Nestorius, who took the antiochian view towards denying a hypostatic union between Christ's two natures, was pushed into exile; and the Nestorian Church as it went east into Taoist and Buddhist territory evolved into an almost magical divinity of Christ proclamation - Jesus as iconic from birth for the way.

All Protestantism is post Western orthodoxy, including Unitarian. In other words it carries and rejects views on Augustinian Original Sin never acquired by the Eastern Orthodox. The West was more rational compared with a mystical emphasis in the east, and Protestantism intensified this reasoning element, even when doctrinally strong in Church authority. It is all post-Renaissance too, a humanist emphasis. The left wing of the Reformation started in Eastern Europe thanks in part to Muslim influence weaker Austria-Habsburg Catholic authority.

Reading the Bible afresh once again revealed its doctrinal variety, and thus Poles had a form of Arianism in the Socinians and Unitarianism grew in Transylvania. In fact Eastern Europe up to the Baltic was an early zone of tolerance. It wasn't to last but Transylvania had enough in establishing the Unitarians to survive through to modern times, if with a conservative ethos. Are they not Christian? Now even orthodox Christians think mostly like humanists. For every day purposes the old magical Middle Ages world (and before) of powers unseen have gone. This went first from the intellectual world, but now no one seriously prays for rain - we understand chaotic chance systems as in weather maps. We know that animals evolve and humans are

speaking, recording, animals. People are suspicious of coincidence but they know probability. Intelligence is late, it reflects back: it didn't start things going. All one can say is that regularity helps persistence, and this universe got going in a way that it could form and expand and not just vanish away. Lay out a pack of cards and say what tiny chance has this order got, and the answer is the tiny chance that produced it and sustained its viewing.

This is why we cannot go back in time to lost cultures. It would need anthropologists to do it, or imaginary sectarians who must ignore predominant paradigms of thinking today.

These paradigms are not just intellectual, they are common culture that derives from technological achievement. There will be new paradigms, of course, but they won't be like the Middle Ages and before. No historian will write like Bede did, that a bishop might appear noble with magical powers. These days narrative theologies focus on text and there are all sorts of creative ways by which old traditions are given intellectual respectability. Listen carefully to a Rowan Williams talking about 'stories', the Church Fathers and traditions so that we are not left with just sentiments and 'apple

