

Pluralist Magazine



2017
Autumn



My take on Manet's Luncheon on the Grass

This edition has a Spike Milligan approach to subtitling the news of the coming closure of Unitarian College Manchester. I had an unsatisfactory time there in 1989-90 and it was not fit for purpose then. Apparently it improved, but there is positive potential from its demise among all the decline.

Anglican Bishop Philip North is a traditionalist Anglo-Catholic who is held back as a suffragan bishop. Yet his theology of evangelism can be paralleled in Unitarianism.

I'm doing a lot of art lately. I do have a style, but I am reading and experimenting. Having done next to nothing in 2016 I have done a lot in 2017.

This is the Pluralist Website Magazine by Adrian Worsfold.

Catholic Unitarianism?

The Anglican Bishop of Burnley (2015-), Philip North, is a controversial character. Nominated for Whitby (2012) and Sheffield diocese (2017) he's withdrawn each because, not ordaining women priests and with ambiguous language about their fulfilled ministry, many oppose him.

I don't agree with just about anything he upholds as basics, either his Christianity or his male superiority as a principle of (sacramental) ministry. Nevertheless he wrote and delivered an interesting piece to [Anglican-Catholic Future](#) on September 30th 2017 called Catholic Evangelism. The [Keynote address](#) was headed 'Just do it'.

Despite its calls for unity, it takes a binary contrast view from Protestant Evangelism also seen within his own Church.

A Protestant evangelist will focus on the world as sinful:.

The task of an evangelist therefore is to draw people to individual repentance and conversion, to encourage them to place their faith in the saving work of Christ on the cross so that they can be plucked from an evil world and saved in Christ forever.

So, the Protestant atonement-based evangelism is contrasted with **Incarnational** approaches to mission where, he says, Christ is already present in the poor and dispossessed and in justice. In the world people can be raised to "their true purpose, their true identity, their true vocation and thereby be saved." It is slow, and about human dignity.

In contrast to Protestants, where (he says) the church is just a meeting place, for him the Church is a divine institution because it continues the Incarnate presence of the Son.

Catholic evangelism, he claims, is **Sacramental**, meaning that whereas a Protestant goes to worship as an 'add-on', the broader incarnational presence made specific in the Church is met at the sacramental service.

It is Bethlehem emphasised over Calvary (atonement), although he also refers to the 'work' by Christ at Calvary.

Then Catholic Evangelism is **Communal**, rather than the Protestant emphasis on the individual.

It's not about putting the Bible over any human institution but:

For a Catholic the authority of the Church is a divine one. The Scriptures are sacred because they are the Church's book.

And this continues that:

A Catholic theology will have a strong theology of the Church. That means that an incarnational missiology will emphasise community and the importance of belonging.

Finally Catholic Evangelism is **Lifelong**. Conversion is a process rather than a one-off event. A person goes through several stages of coming to and going from faith, and one should view the whole as a journey. Indeed, Pilgrimage is important for Catholics because it symbolises the lifelong walk with faith. The present life is a preparation for heaven.

Problems he identifies are a common inability to talk and express the faith position:

This is not helped by the influence of some ill-conceived, half-baked universalist theologies which are very unclear about the what the saving work of Jesus actually achieves or why the death of Christ was necessary.

There is an absence of will and congregations to create new Eucharistic communities; resources to evangelise are evangelical and lead new Catholics to join Protestants; dull, boring and correct worship replaces authentic worship; and the missional language is not theirs to like. It's not enough to put on masses but to talk with a strategy. Traditional Catholics have complained about being sidelined but now liberal Catholics are complaining. The language is secularising, so that of leadership focus is replacing the bishop as sacramental focus of unity, a problem to be solved by gathering new Catholics by engaging with the world.

He thinks it is a life and death matter (presumably salvation) that needs a shared vision by inspiring churches and changing priorities.

Among other things, he wants all the baptised to be seen as missionary disciples through worship, prayer, the study of Scripture and pilgrimage, have more paid and voluntary youth leaders and involve the young, reach schools, have better services with people evaluating the worshipping and devotional life, train more and celebrate the beauty of holiness through music, art and sacred space. He wants more confidence in the identity of the Church, encourage lifelong priestly formation, support growth, support hospitality, be a voice for the poor and vulnerable, promote service and protect the integrity of creation.

One can see, even when not sharing his theology, that there are some parallel ideas here that are useful for liberal religionists.

To be clear. I do not think anything happened at Calvary other than a man was put to death by the authorities. There is no mechanism by which this travels to anyone else in any meaningful sense. Nor do I believe in the definitiveness or incarnation of Jesus as the Christ. He was an end-time rabbi about whom early Christians made escalating claims as to who he was in their charismatic cross-cultural setting, after which traditions (and one in particular) looked back, both charismatic and traditional being supernatural.

But I do see the purpose of a place of contemplation and reflection based on a moving and changing memory of traditions that indicate, like art, something about transcendental values and potential. This is about language and symbol, and about collective culture that can be called religious.

To see religion like this does make changes from the (part) inheritance of Protestant individualism. There is a difference between Liberal Catholicism (either Anglican, modernist or more magical Theosophy-related) and Free Catholicism: the latter, really, is a high Protestantism. High Protestantism comes into the borderland of Catholicism, even as a high religious humanism.

Thus this interpretation of Unitarianism (as a tradition of liberal religion) has certain characteristics, and ones I would promote.

The world and its interconnectivity is upheld. Chaos within evolution and in nature generally (comparative advantage in

specific locations) becomes an interactive system with an equilibrium. So climate change is really the change from one equilibrium to another, via instability. We are part of this, and is worthy of our contemplation, reflection and action. Being incarnational can draw on and develop the view of James Martineau.

We also communicate with each other. We inherit thought forms that make life more meaningful. This is why we join communities or, forced to be in one (like the State), we develop identity through institutions. Talk and its meaning is collective. We are not simply individuals. Our development happens with others. Even online our development is like a dialogue with the beyond. Jurgen Habermas shows how individuals talking has a collective dimension.

So the Church is an essential community, and surely not an add-on once involved. If you are going to be 'Unitarian' you really ought not to stay at home when it has worship. Of course there are arguments and disputes, and sometimes unavoidable alternative activities, but if you are going to identify then participate in its activities.

The worship should indeed be of quality and authentic. I hate badly produced, stumbling, incoherent worship. It should be disciplined and thoughtful, with space for different forms of reflection. It is not programmed meditation with an internal purpose. There is a similarity with the Quaker emphasis in their quiet (not meditation!) waiting and expecting, except it is done with words and art forms. Whilst we do not necessarily believe in presences, the use of the flame in the bowl (contained light) and other forms of symbolism are a reflection on the energy and matter of the world and universe (and has European historical root in justice). The reason some still do air, fire, water and earth, for example, are not because we haven't caught up with known elements

in chemistry but because these are a reflective means on the material reality around us - incarnational in the broadest sense. Liberal religionists can do Eucharists according to broad understanding.

This religious search should be seen as lifelong. Of course people change: they come from another church or synagogue etc., or go off to a gurdwara or temple. It is still a lifelong journey. Some people say they convert, or deconvert, to Unitarianism, but it may better be seen as part of a process.

Unitarians have problems too with evangelistic language, but surely if we think an open community that evolves and has a plurality about it to be treasured, then it should be advertised as having potential for people. I still am wary of marketing language, as there is a persuasive dishonesty in one-sided presentation.

And of course Unitarians train and educate, in the history, theology and techniques of the tradition. We archive it as well, which requires knowledge and understanding, for future study (it may, after all, conk out). That involves the commitment to freedom, to the people and animals who need upholding, and the sense that progress needs justice. Unitarians are also interested in "their true purpose, their true identity, their true vocation" when it comes to the potential of the evolved.

We identify with the world, and with potential; it has nothing to do with "Bethlehem" (which is a myth all of its own) but simply what the problems are and what is the potential.

Personally I would prefer a more liturgical approach to worship: more ordered and with creative writing involved. We need to celebrate the beauty of holiness. Unitarians need to go beyond letting the hymn books define the faith

approach, good as they are. This has to be collective and not a form of DIY, even if by ministers. This is quite difficult to achieve, however: the method seems to be to let preachers say as they wish and then discuss it all afterwards, and add each to the pot. I am wondering if there can be a more communal approach, whilst allowing for space for change and minority views. It is still a market place of ideas (that I have argued for) but with something coming before and not just after the expressions.

So, yes, liberal religionist and Unitarian worship should be incarnational in the broadest sense, sacramental in an artistic and collective-conversational sense, and therefore communal (about us and them, not me), and a lifelong search with others.



Rapid painting of a 'lost church' with loose use of colour

Doing Art

Oh to be able to paint like Joseph Wright of Derby (1734-97). He was the one who painted members of the Lunar Society, many of whom were Unitarians and were industrialists. The painting application is precise and detailed. We today would call it photo-realist, but of course this was well before photography. However, if his scenes were photographed they would need to use precise lighting to achieve a good picture and the glow of light from either a candle/s source or the industrial source of heat and light. The alternative is longer exposure and the assembled keeping very still - but it still would not quite work. It would need many reflectors out of shot and not a little post-event picture digital processing.

When photography did come along, painters tried something else. Impressionists tried to capture light and bold colour, using colour theory, and something immediate.

I've been absorbing Nethaniel Harris's *Treasury of Impressionism* (Hamlyn, 1979), a comprehensive guide to the artists' stages and interactions. The book includes Gaugan, Cezanne and Van Gogh. I have let these influence my painting, for finding a style like they all found their styles. Yet some of these masterpieces look unconvincing to me.

Now I know that when paintings go wrong they get rescued and compromises are made. The best paintings are the quickest, and in general for me the longer a painting takes the more wrong it has been.

[Next page is a rough 5 minute drawing 10 minute surface paint of Degas's painting in the Impressionism book.]



For a full painting, starting with or without a pencil, pen or felt tips drawing, I always back-colour a canvas or paper. Many years back I used pink almost always. I'd go with my mother to an art class and bang out a painting an evening,

but there was this tutor who said to me, "I don't know how you do it but you get the light to come off the people."

I did know. It was the back colour, pink, that warmed the painting and tricked the eye. It was also the fact that I painted in watercolour and gouache the wrong way around. Instead of preserving light areas and darkening progressively, I would paint dark to light, slapping on these cheap paints including the Chinese White (often).

I don't go to such classes now. In 2017 I did try an art group, first in one premises that were most unfriendly (not even a tap and sink in the room, up a narrow flight of stairs), and then in a one-time school art room. In the three hours including twenty minutes rest each time, I knocked out two paintings a time. One model was clothed and one nude. I did finish off the second painting each time afterwards at home, so only one each was purely on the premises.

Nevertheless I didn't take up membership because it was sixty pounds a year and I worked out that dropping a few quid each time for the model would also cost about sixty pounds, even if only going to the better venue weekly. I'd have to keep up the supply of materials and then also pay for transport. I can't afford it; it is for the retired well-off.

Satisfied I can paint from 3D, I nevertheless use photographic and similar sources. Nowadays the back colour is likely to be orange, green and blue, to be colours around flesh and its shadow. Blue and green are most likely because of the flesh colour (but it varies with clothing). For landscapes the back colour is likely to be orange but may still be a light red or pink. The idea is that as the sky and land go on, you don't obviously notice the orange or pink, but they do their job.

[Next see an image from County Sligo, Ireland]



I use acrylics a lot now, but still stir in other paints. After the single colour, a painting may go from two-tone (say orange and green) to more colours. They may be washes, but they are more likely to be opaque layers. What then happens is the black and white phases, where more detail goes in, but I am likely to mix the white and the black with existing colours to create contrast and detail. Brushes used get smaller.

However, if the impact is too crude, there may well be further washes of a single colour or single colours in parts to reduce down the boundaries between one part of the painting and another.

In 2016 I hardly painted anything. Spurred on by talking art with a friend on a Friday morning and trying his art circle, I have painted many in 2017. A photograph soon gets painted.



[Overpainting removed creases in this use of a photograph]

So I look at the Impressionists and alter frequently. And I think they made errors like I do. I end up with long necks, shoulders not quite right, legs too long, the thumbs on a hand

not set far back enough, and hands too small. I do make revisions, and I know my tendencies. So all the time improvement is the intention.

But take Cezanne and *The Bridge at Maincy* (1882-5). My mother once copied it (many decades ago). I said to her its wooden bridge across from the right stone arch did not meet the left stone arch, hanging in mid-air, which she'd set back. Well, she'd copied it faithfully: that's what Cezanne did, and it is wrong. And Renoir's *Young Girl Combing Her Hair* (1894) has a waist that is too thin and rightward and a right shoulder that sticks out far too far. And everyone knows that Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass* (1862-3) has the female at the back far too big. Renoir's *The Large Bathers* (1884-7) has them in silly poses and they do not match the surrounding coloured landscape. The painter I like best is probably Camille Pissarro, both in the UK and France, and with changing styles. Lucien Pissarro's painting of his wife Esther is in the Ferens Gallery in Hull, and I stared at that for a long time.

Such is art. Some paintings really capture a mood and also have accuracy enough. Others show that painting is a struggle. Some styles enhance an effect, and some cause problems for appreciation. The Impressionists do not have the perfection of Joseph Wright of Derby. Mine vary. Some are good I think and are done more quickly: two or three hours. Some have to be rescued and most end up being reasonable. You could x-ray and ultra-violet/ infra red them to see how they were changed. Others I just have to accept haven't turned out as I would wish.

This is the point. Often told that I do landscapes better than people (but I do get likenesses), I paint people not because the task is easy but because it is a challenge every time. When something goes right, for example larger a breast gives a real sense of being heavy (as I did with the clothed 3D

model painting), then it's time to recall how it was done and what causes the effect. You build up from failures and successes.

I am hoping for a visit from Dr. Who. She can take me to the future when my discovered paintings are on a gallery wall achieving huge prices. She can then bring me back and I'll be satisfied. I mainly give paintings away to my victims, or as thank yous, but long back (between 1990 and 1994) I exhibited and sold for modest amounts (ten or fifteen pounds) when a member of Chesterfield Art Club.



[This was painted within an hour at the art club I visited.
There is no separate drawing, it is all paint.]

Closing UCM

and My Part in its Downfall

The news that Unitarian College Manchester is going to close is no surprise. This year (2017) it has had one student, and the year before one and a half. Its closure will be part of broadening out and redefining ministry training. (Harris Manchester College Oxford, simply continues.) Back when I attended, in 1989-90, there were four of us. One for each of three years, and one from Meghalaya.

I got to the point where I seriously complained that I had nothing to do, and at one point occupied my time by writing a fifty page article on ministry: arguing against 'the priesthood of all people' as a concept that used an unshared foundation within the denomination, and argued in favour of educational enhancement theories drawing on Paulo Freiré, the community educationalist with direct relevance to liberation theology. This was a paper that was ignored, as expected, but it satisfied me because I was thinking things through.

I was only at the college for a year, because I was trying out all sorts of radical ideas and forms; no one knew what to do with me, asking how I would fit in with congregations bar a few (an opinion from one of the church practices). I also moved from an MA in a social theology course, because it repeated my Ph.D, after I was told to be less academic in my approach; I moved to a more useful psychology of education course and people were suspicious about that. Plus, I was on the wrong side of a theological war between local liberal Christians and religious humanists. I was chucked out at the same time as a Marxist liberationist chap in Oxford, who was

also beyond the pale for his intellectual position and inability to communicate as I was for my non-realism. Anglican-style radicalism had no theological anchor in Unitarianism!

A Baptist man, who was also a non-realist, and my closest friend in Luther King House, carried on after I had to leave, although I know he went into teaching not ministry. In fact there was a nucleus of us. There was a Baptist man who believed in the chakras; a URC woman, who was a theist but definitely not Christocentric; and a lay student, who was into radical theology. My difficulty was with Unitarians. I also had good relations with a Baptist fundy because he knew I was not pretending to be a Christian, and indeed I got on with just about everyone. I withdrew from the Eucharist, whereas others and the Principal tried to compromise with it, and he and I knew that it was a high-pressured internal-defining event for the other denominations that excluded outsiders like us. The clarity of my withdrawal did not enhance my position among Unitarians seeking close relations in associate membership.

Just to complete this, I was giving an atheist theological service to what I thought was a student gathering and instead turned out to be a weekday community event. This did it for me. "Go on, do it," I was told when I said in some panic that my service was not appropriate. From then on my reputation - as unsuitable for theist, Lord's Prayer and traditional services - was fixed and always went ahead of me. My wild humanism, even Paganism, had to be avoided. This was despite a Buddhist-orientated Principal (who left soon after I went) and a neo-Pagan tutor (who advised acquiring a gown, and thus why I had a green and gold gown made).

I knew the game was up even as 1989 became 1990: my dismissal confirmed to me that the denomination was not of 'freedom of religion' as it had been claimed in Hull.

(The best post-match analysis came from Keith Gilley, who said before going I should have visited congregation after congregation so that all the assumptions back at Hull would have been challenged. I know which minister gave the worst post-match analysis, for future selection, but I keep that to myself: only that it confirmed that there were 'creeds by the backdoor'.)

I detect that things have progressed since then somewhat. Many of those who did the arm-twisting in congregations and among ministers have died.

Anyway, in those days part of the problem was me wondering (rather openly, if only occasionally) whether I would 'see out' Unitarianism or it would fizzle out before I did.

When I took services I would do so to say a dozen or 15 folks at home and similar or even sometimes 30 away. I don't take services now. I have retained my academic interest and recognise my non-communication inabilities when tackling more complex theological issues. What finally did it for me some years back was a service on the beauty of equations, that equations are more beautiful when simple and yet generate fractal-like complexity. To refer to the Mandelbrot equation is to leave some people remembering mathematics at school and going dumb. Many of my services were full of historical ballast that went against the running invented traditions in much Unitarianism and people don't like arguments that run against the grain.

But at least I have annoyed people: there were people to annoy. Now so many have gone, and many of those alive have also left or gone to the margins (including me). So I should be pleased about progressive progress...

I am a great believer in religion. The whole 'spiritual but not religious' approach is definitely no saviour of the worship enterprise. Anyway, as soon as anyone makes a statement using language (thus a conversation), and draws on inheritances to say it, and the setting is collective, then it is religion. Religion is such a conversation ritualised.

I have listened to some Unitarians recently make a case for 'the Spirit' and have connected Unitarians with Anabaptists who were the radicals of immediacy and of the Spirit. This involves an attempt to a) link Unitarianism in its newer immediacy with Christianity still and b) link the 'spiritual but not religious' with the religious - which indeed it does. However, it is a highly selective extraction of Anabaptism, which proves to have quite a range of views and beliefs among such labelled adherents. The connection is loose, as the effort is made to connect with sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century radical theologies and movements of people across Europe, east to west. Such Anabaptists (like the Puritans) would not recognise or be very impressed with the highly diluted future that has resulted.

The 'spiritual but not religious' approach does not need a church, a history or a ministry. It just needs an individual to think there are higher or inner powers present and do some practice. It is not Unitarianism or any other kind of ism beyond individualism. It can make connectional mistakes.

But there is no doubt that the movement that was Unitarianism is collapsing. UCM will close not because a new understanding of ministry is taking place, but because there aren't the students any more to justify the cost of even sharing in a theology college as an associate member. That itself was an adjustment when the attachment to other denominations happened. Recently a Facebook argument had a 'shocked' individual about the closure refer to 1854. Well,

1854 is another country, when Unitarian College represented the denominationalists who ran their own college entirely. The men in training were stiff upper lip Greek and Hebrew learning biblicists. They behaved themselves and were upstanding. Manchester College, meanwhile, represented the desire for intellectual ecumenical breadth, the Church of the parishes, where the learned absorbed the Classics. These were men of high status, also supported by previous Puritans and liberal capitalists and social climbers, not facilitators like we have today in ministry.

Had I gone through the three years - and I would indeed have been a minister on acceptance into a congregation - I would now be considering retirement in maybe seven or twelve years, although of course there are now ministers who start in retirement. (Ministry becomes a job after a job.) I would now be wondering if indeed Unitarianism would be seeing me out or find it going from under my feet. Hopefully I'd have a radical and inquisitive congregation, and contributed more widely to intellectual definitions and directions. But who knows? You cannot beat the sociology of knowledge and the sociology of behaviour. All church life is in retreat now: going into a distanced sectarianism that deludes with relative success, and the cathedrals of concert-like relative non-involvement (so you can indulge but be anonymous).

The task now, it seems to me, is for people interested in the Unitarian memory to become archivists. There is a treasure of background that ought to be recorded for later reference and study. There is still a contrast to be made between now and then. There may well be a rump of people in future who meet regionally and even in some locations; there are happy accidents where a church has a local root - say perhaps in a town where the competition is all evangelical and people still gather in functioning numbers. Training ought to be incremental, and ministers will simply be those who have

done more of it, and there will be specialities of ministers. Unitarians should retain and develop some meeting-centres for gatherings. We do not have to go the way of, say, Findhorn, in charging hefty fees for various supposed courses and bed and breakfast: it still should be a communal and accessible gathering based around interests and conversations.



Three thousand and still declining is a very low figure, and it is unlikely to reverse. Back at UCM in 1989-90 (seven thousand plus) I imagined it at a thousand and trainees going to Great Hucklow with both colleges gone. No wonder people didn't like me! *See if I am right*. The need for central executive administration is pretty much over: there are many trust funds to manage but that's about it, and they can be put to use for the gatherings. The Unitarians will soon be joined by the United Reformed Church, the Quakers, the Methodists and even the Baptists. The Church of England will survive (even reabsorb) but riddled with contradictions containing both nasty and nice. It's just better to be realistic. Unitarians know one another because it is so tiny, and that's the way forward for the rump movement.

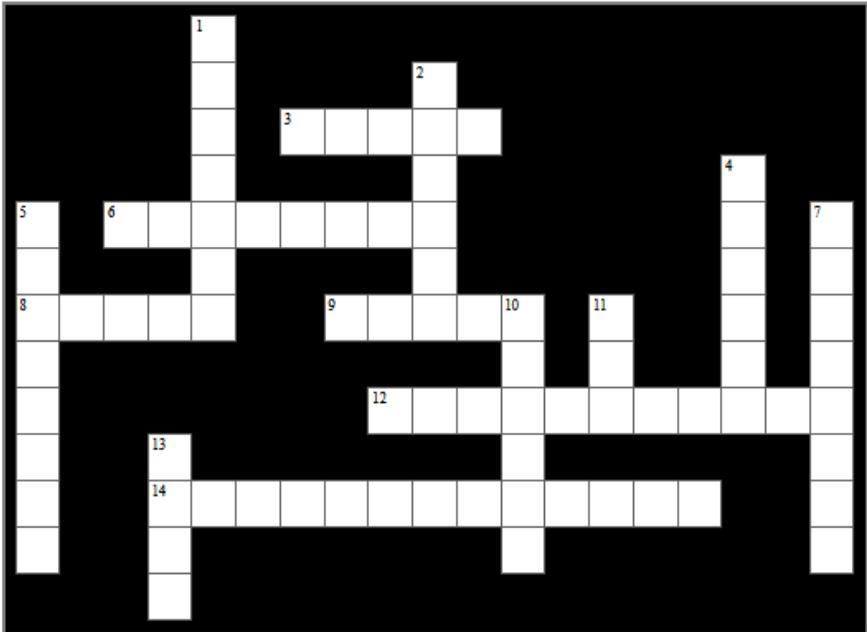
Puzzling All This Out

So, the Summer edition of the Pluralist Magazine did not appear, and it has taken until October to produce another magazine. After some shifting around of website hosts, the Pluralist Website is all on a new server and paid account now.

Here is the solution to the *Spot the Difference* puzzle in the Spring edition. A *Crossword* is over the page for this edition.



This magazine is produced by me, Adrian Worsfold. The images are by me or my risk of responsibility. Contributions are welcome. Although this website magazine discusses liberal religion and Unitarianism in particular, there is no representation of the Unitarian movement and the opinions expressed are mine only.



ACROSS 3. This artist sounds like there are many at lunch. 6. This artist creates a bow curve in the direction of the urinal. 8. This artist at Argenteuil sounds like he's in the money. 9. Directional bishop by North West. 12. A (not e) Quebec version of a blue-like brain expression of inner surprise, exasperation, or dismay. 14. Of Christ and the enchanted world within the common vehicle of a nation's identity.

DOWN 1. Not exactly a Morris motor artist mourning with a bouquet of violets. 2. This artist refers to the dark film style. 4. Dotty painter surely at Courbevoie. 5. Of the collective life in a Paris-siezed equivalent of a Kibbutz. 7. Longitudinal learning from life's cradle to the grave that's now one word. 10. Nethaniel's named college is not actually in Manchester - can you guess who it is yet? 11. Three letters rush home claiming, "Oh 'ell, it's closing down!" 13. Witty royal part in a Mancunian dream of a learning residence that produced ninety five theses.