



The INQUIRER

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The voice of British and Irish Unitarians and Free Christians Issue 7842 4 July 2015

It
is
solved
by
walking



The INQUIRER

THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

Established 1842

The Inquirer is the oldest

Nonconformist religious newspaper

“To promote a free and inquiring religion through the worship of God and the celebration of life; the service of humanity and respect for all creation; and the upholding of the liberal Christian tradition.”

*From the Object passed at the
General Assembly of the Unitarian and
Free Christian Churches 2001*

The Inquirer is published fortnightly by The Inquirer Publishing Company (2004), Registered Charity 1101039.

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Articles express the views of their authors. Submissions are welcome and may be edited for content and length. They should be emailed or typed and should be the author's original work or be attributed appropriately.

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Advertise for £6 per column cm, on 3-col page, plus VAT or £7.50 per col cm, on a 2-col page. A one-page supplement is £200. One column on a 2-col page is £100, on a 3-col page, £75. A5 fliers may be inserted for £95 plus VAT. Contact the editor for details.

Births, marriages and deaths are 50p a word plus VAT.

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Inquiring Words

NEW EXODUS

No Moses leads them
to a promised land,
but still they come,
preyed on by parasites
without humanity.

They may number hundreds,
thousands, but they are not
a 'flood', a 'tidal wave',
they are people – each one
with their own story.

Still they come, in flight
from war and terror,
hunger and poverty –
desperate with hope.

Still they come, from lands
that cannot hold them
to a continent that offers
scant welcome.

Still they come, in wretchedness
and danger, seeking peace –
seeking a chance of food for all,
work for all, shelter for all;

seeking the chance to
prosper, the chance
for their children
not to die.

Still they come, from blighted Iraq,
hate-ravaged Syria, Afghanistan...
from Africa, continent of promise
unfulfilled.

No Moses leads them
but milk and honey
beckon just the same.
Still they come and
we don't know what to do.

Miserere

– Cliff Reed

Faith in Words

The annual summer issue of worship material, stories and meditations is coming up. Please send in prayers, addresses, meditations, art work, photographs – anything which is an expression of your faith – to *The Inquirer*.

For more information or to submit material, email: Inquirer@btinternet.com Or, use the editor's postal address at left.

Material is due by 10 July

A way to walk a sacred path



Danielle Wilson sits in the centre of her labyrinth at the 2005 Unitarian General Assembly meetings. Photo by James Barry

“Solvitur ambulando” – “It is solved by walking”

– *St. Augustine*

“Walking a labyrinth is a body prayer. It is non-threatening; all we are asked to do is walk. It is a crucible for change, a blueprint for the sacred meeting of psyche and soul, a field of light, a cosmic dance.”

Lauren Artress, Founder of Veriditas - The World Wide Labyrinth Project at Grace Cathedral, San Francisco, California

By Danielle Wilson

The labyrinth is an archetype, a divine imprint, found in religious traditions in various forms all around the world, dating back at least 4000 years. Labyrinths have been used as decorative motifs by the Greeks as well as found in art forms all around the world. The earliest known evidence is a portion of a vase found in Spain, from 2000BCE. Many people believe that labyrinths are a Christian symbol; however, they can't exclusively be if the symbol has been noted as early as 2000 BCE.

During the Middle Ages, an eleven-circuit labyrinth pattern emerged and was designed into the stone floors of many cathedrals in Europe. At that time, it was used as a metaphor for travelling to Jerusalem, the centre of Christianity. However, more commonly today, it is used to find your own spiritual centre.

It is a useful metaphor for many of life's journeys and transitions, as well as everyday issues: committing to a relationship, having children, deciding on a career, dealing with grief and loss. It can help quiet the mind for reflection, inspire

our creativity and remind us of what is important in our lives. The path winds throughout and becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. It touches our sorrows and releases our joys. I have seen a woodcut of Christians walking a labyrinth looking rather disconsolate. The message here is 'Don't get disheartened when your path seems to be moving you away from you goal'. The labyrinth, like faith, will hold and guide you towards your true centre. The path at some times does seem to be throwing you onto an outer circle but eventually you will wind your way back to centre. A great metaphor for trusting in the Divine!

Psychologist Carl Jung called the labyrinth an 'archetype of transformation.' Walkers along its sinuous path find they are often deeply affected. The Rev Artress writes that people in transition periods find a calmer perspective. Those with untapped gifts to offer have their creative fires rekindled. Walkers dealing with grief experience peace. For millennia, the circling path that evolved from the simple spiral brought centeredness and healing to untold numbers of walkers. After lying dormant for several centuries, this ancient design is making a comeback, as a variety of institutions and individuals re-create it on floors, lawns, and canvas. Labyrinths are widely installed in the USA and Canada in the grounds of hospitals, hospices, schools, parks, churches and community centres.

Often the words 'labyrinth' and 'maze' are used interchangeably. While both refer to circling patterns, the forms are totally different. A maze is a puzzle with dead ends and wrong turns. It is designed to confuse or mislead you.

(Continued on next page)

Labyrinth: Release, receive and return

(Continued from previous page)

Walkers must use their reasoning and cunning to escape. A labyrinth is a single path that leads the walker to the centre and back out. It has no tricks to it, nor any dead ends. It is designed to guide and inform you. You are not asked to make any decisions whilst on the labyrinth, whether to turn this way or that. In this respect, it frees up the mind to move away from left brain/analytical thinking. The point is not to use these reasoning powers, but rather to turn these off and to go into a 'right brain' or imaginative mode. In an open, receptive, frame of mind the walker simply follows the path and experiences a deep, refreshing form of meditation.

In its simplest form, it can be viewed as a walking meditation. It can help quiet the mind for reflection, inspire our creativity and remind us of what is important in our lives.

It is particularly well suited to those who cannot sit still for seated meditation. The movement of the body along the path and the absence of any decision making process help to free up the mind to find that still, quiet place at the centre of our beings.

Labyrinths are found in a multitude of designs: circular (as in the Chartres pattern), spiral (as in Cretan spiral), square, etc. Really, any pathway that has the same route going in as coming out is a labyrinth!

There are three stages to the walk:

On the way in: Purgation (releasing). A releasing, a letting go of the details of your life. This is an act of shedding thoughts and emotions. It quiets and empties the mind.

Reaching the centre: Illumination (receiving). Stay there as long as you like. It is a place of meditation and prayer. Receive whatever message (or illumination) is there for you to receive.

On the way out: Union (returning). Joining with God, your Higher Power, the Divine or the healing forces at work in the world. Each time you walk the labyrinth you become more empowered to find and do the work you feel your soul reaching for. Take the message received in the centre out into the world and do something with it.

There are many myths about the Chartres labyrinth. Three of the most famous myths are:

- If you were to hinge the Rose Window on the West façade down, the window would fit exactly over the labyrinth
- There used to be a bronze plaque at the centre with the figure of the minotaur on it
- You will find Jesus in the centre of the labyrinth.

But much more has been written about the sacred geometry of the Chartres labyrinth:



In 2013, members of the Matthew Henry Unitarian congregation in Chester created a labyrinth made from CDs. Photo provided by Eileen Wiggins

- The six petals in the centre could represent the six days of Spirit coming into matter: mineral, vegetable, animal, human, angelic and unknown.
- The six petals can also represent the 6 days of Creation.
- The labrys represent the double-headed Cretan axe. Labyr is also believed to be the route of the word 'labyrinth'.
- If you overlay the labyrinth with an equal-armed cross, it divides into quadrants. In each quadrant, there are 28 lunations (the toothy detail on the outside perimeter). One theory is that the labyrinth was used as a lunar calendar, to determine when Easter would fall.

Whatever meaning is relevant to you that you wish to attach to the labyrinth is valuable. However, I do not think anyone can say categorically that there is an absolute truth. There are no records that exist about the design or purpose of the Chartres labyrinth.

Although I do find it interesting to read what has been written about it, in the end, the important thing to remember is that each person will have his or her own unique experience when walking the labyrinth. I've had people walk, run, skip, dance, jump and crawl around my labyrinth. All forms are valid. There is no right or wrong way to walk the labyrinth. What is important for each walker is to rest, content that his or her experience is as unique and as valid as anyone else's.

If you are inspired to go to Chartres to walk the most famous labyrinth in the world, I have two precautions. At the best of times, the labyrinth is uncovered only on Fridays between 1 April and 1 October – and this depends on what else is going on in the Cathedral at the time. The labyrinth is not protected from the hordes of tourists that wander aimlessly across it, oblivious of anyone trying to walk in a meditative fashion. (Best advice is to arrive at 8:30am on Friday, before all the tourists arrive). But the labyrinth is currently closed until June 2016 due to renovation works in the Cathedral.

The Rev Danielle Wilson is an Interfaith minister and the administrator for the Unitarian London District. For more information about Danielle's ministry see: www.daniellewilson.com

Martineau's Music Hall church

By David Steers

I wonder how many Unitarian churches have their images engraved on the reverse of a coin? (right) I only know of one example. It is not a particularly beautiful example of the medallist's art but it is very interesting and tells an unusual tale.

The church in question is Paradise Street Chapel in Liverpool, now long demolished. Indeed the whole street has disappeared under the shopping development known today as Liverpool One. But Paradise Street was built in 1791 and was a dissenting church of some importance in Liverpool at the time. In the 19th century no less a person than James Martineau became the minister – a fitting appointment to a congregation that was cultured, wealthy and influential. They had built their meetinghouse on the grand scale. With a central cupola, it was octagonal with a classical frontage and adorned with elegant stone urns along the balustrade. Martineau arrived in 1832 and established a name for himself as a preacher, teacher and philosopher linking up with other prominent figures in Liverpool and the northwest including John Hamilton Thom, Charles Wicksteed, and John James Tayler.

But partly through the changing environment around the old chapel, which had become more commercially orientated and less like an area the well-to-do might want to visit, and partly also because of the more devotional worship that Martineau introduced, the congregation felt a need to abandon their old church and build something new. Accordingly a grand gothic church was built on Hope Street and Martineau and his congregation departed to their new home, selling the old place off.

James Martineau and his congregation, perhaps out of financial necessity from building anew on an extravagant scale, showed little sentimentality in disposing of their old place of worship. Yet one can't help suspecting that a man of such highbrow intellectual tastes as Martineau can hardly have approved of the new use to which the old chapel was now put. It was purchased by a man called Joseph Heath who intended to turn it into a music hall.

After the Unitarians left it in 1849 the spacious chapel, with its well-constructed gallery built of the finest materials and to the highest standards, was converted into the Royal Colosseum Theatre and Music Hall. The pews were re-used for seating and one can see how a large chapel could easily be adapted for use as a theatre. However, Joseph Heath must have been an ingenious individual because he managed to turn Paradise Street into the first multiplex: there were twin auditoria for both a theatre and a music hall. According to *The Liverpool Stage* by Harold Ackroyd the theatre 'presented what were described as full blooded dramatic plays for a patronage of mariners', while the front part of the old chapel was converted into a music hall where variety performances were put on 'well suited to the taste of those for whom Mr Heath catered.'

One can't imagine Martineau really approving of such an undignified end to his old church but there was greater indignity to come. The *Colly*, as it became known, was reputedly haunted, an association encouraged by the continuing presence



of the chapel's graveyard around the building. This also presented a practical advantage to the thespians. According to Harold Ackroyd again:

'...there was never any shortage of a skull during a performance of *Hamlet*. These were easily obtained, the artists' dressing room, below the stage, formerly having been a grave vault, the artist had only to put his hand through an opening in the thin dividing wall, to seize hold of the grisly relic, as did Hamlet.'

So it was the music hall owners who had the coin engraved with the unmistakable

likeness of the Paradise Street Chapel. The Heath family owned the former chapel until about 1895 although it went through a number of refurbishments and changes of name in that time. But it remained known as the Royal Colosseum Theatre until 1875 at which time it was being run by Thomas Theodore Heath, Joseph's son. Presumably this is the 'T. Heath' whose name is inscribed on the coin as the owner of the theatre. This would date the coin to the early 1870s when it functioned as an admission token for those eager for Victorian melodrama or the bawdy delights of an evening at the music hall. On the other side of the coin is a Liver bird, a belt and the name of the theatre. Some examples of the coins have a large letter 'H' stamped on them. I don't know precisely what this indicated, at first I thought it was a reference to a seat or a row or an entrance but 'H' seems to be the only letter used in this way and it rather spoils the look of the engraving. Whatever meaning it had to the person at the theatre door this is now long forgotten.

By the late 1870s the theatre was said to hold 3,000 people, and must have been returned to a single auditorium, but at this stage in its history it was struck by a terrible tragedy. On the night of 11 October 1878, during a performance before a full house, a portion of the ceiling fell onto the pit and caused panic amongst the audience. Thirty-seven people were killed in the crush to escape and many more injured. Pictures in the *Illustrated London News* at the time show a building that was already extensively remodelled from the one that appears on the back of the token but it had fallen victim to the sort of tragedy that was not unknown in Victorian Britain. Following this the theatre was rebuilt, frequently renamed and continued in use up to the First World War. By then known as Kelly's Theatre, it finally closed its doors in October 1916 and was sold to Cooper's Ltd who used it as a warehouse for their greengrocery and restaurant business. The whole story of Paradise Street Chapel and the Royal Colosseum Theatre was brought to a close by a German bomb during the blitz of 1941. Precisely how much of the building of 1791 had survived within the much-enlarged edifice is hard to know but by then the building's origins as a place of worship were hardly remembered. The link is maintained though by these little tokens which record a small element of theatre history and, almost by accident, help to preserve the image of a building that had a quite different history and purpose.

The Rev Dr David Steers is minister at Ballee, Clough and Downpatrick, Northern Ireland.

The search for meaning b

In this talk, delivered at the National Unitarian Fellowship annual meeting, **Ben Whitney** finds meaning in Jesus beyond traditional Christianity

Believing in something, or Someone, is an almost universal characteristic of any society – at least until relatively recently. But it is also evident that those beliefs grow out of the contexts in which they occur. The ancient Egyptians had myths about the Nile, their crops, the sun and so on. They didn't worship David Beckham.

While humans are the same the world over, those contexts produce specific beliefs reflecting individual cultures and needs. This sometimes bewildering variety does not, to me, testify to any one Reality behind it all or to the ultimate truth of any one religion. Quite the reverse. But it does demonstrate the enormous creativity of the human communities that devised them.

It is sad that so many belief systems seek to stifle that quest for originality and substitute mere conformity in its place.

We have created our gods

That was never what religions were for – but that is so often what they have become. Christianity is no exception, but there may yet be truths we can salvage from the wreckage. People like Auguste Comte and Ludwig Feuerbach, or Alain de Botton have helped us to see the various religions have been an essential part of our human struggle to understand ourselves. Even if you do take the view that a particular faith system puts you in touch with a supernatural Reality beyond, you cannot deny the way any religion has come to where it is. It has happened by men and women drawing on what they know of life and giving it a deeper significance.

It is we who have created our gods and our convictions about them, not the other way around. Spirituality is a tool for understanding our humanity, not an alternative intruder that helps us to avoid it. This may be what many of you also think. I might even be a closet Unitarian without realising it.

I call my own very modest take on all this 'humanist spirituality'. It is not, of course an original idea at all, though I didn't realise how many others developed related ideas until I started looking for them. Every element of a religious life: creeds, doctrines, temples, scriptures, values and so on, all have their origins in human activity. They are not a revelation from beyond but a realisation from within.

Nobody really believes that the Bible, for example, fell from heaven already written in the Authorised Version. Well, maybe a few people do – but we know that they are wrong. We can chart the history of the Christian religion, or indeed of any other. They are not 'givens' over which we have had no influence. It is so obviously a very human story.

Religious experiences are human experiences

Scriptures have not always existed. They were created, retold, written down, edited and revised at identifiable points in time. Creeds were debated, agreed, rewritten and abandoned according to prevailing views in Councils which were pretty much like an EU Summit in which some kind of compromise often won the day or some other vested interest was deliberately outlawed. Prayer is a human activity; spoken with our lips or thought by our brains. Moral values arise from our experience of what is best for us, individually and together. It is a fundamental mistake to see all these things as coming from outside ourselves. They are ours and, at their best, we should be proud of them.

Even our concept of a God, if you still have one, is the product of

human activity; there can be no 'supernatural' experiences for us because we function within a natural world in which nothing can be done or known or experienced without reference to our physical selves. A religious experience is simply a human experience under another name. How can it be anything else?

But putting any religion in its place as an entirely human creation does not necessarily mean that I want to abandon its insights altogether. Knowing what it really is doesn't rob it of any value. The human questions behind the creeds still matter and may have a longer-lasting significance. If you regard your belief systems as given to you from somewhere else perhaps you are making rather less of them, and of yourself, than you should.

But that also means that there can be no lines in the sand beyond which we cannot go because the boundaries have been set down for us elsewhere. We created them; we can change them. Indeed we must do so. Religions have often got things wrong. We can, and must, do better in the light of what we now know. This makes genuine dialogue difficult with those who believe that they have encountered some deeper unchanging Deity. But given that I have at least one foot in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, I don't really have a choice but to engage with it. I am not the first to walk along this path even if the map I am using is more up-to-date than the ones used by those who came before me.

But there is a crucial difference between the idea of a humanist spirituality and any kind of conventional religious 'faith'. Faith is about signing up to what someone else has already discovered, not about finding the way for yourself. If you go to an Alpha course (which I wouldn't personally recommend, not even for the free meal) you are invited to come and hear the truth as they see it, not to engage in a debate. The publicity suggests it's about you coming with your own questions about the meaning of life and so on. But that's something of a deceit.

Alpha Course only answers its own questions

Only certain questions, and certain answers, are on the agenda. A conventional idea of a God is a given and you can't get past week one without Him. It's like Michael Gove's understanding of education. The transfer of information from the teacher's book to the student's notes, but without entering the mind of either! The end result is that you now know what others have told you to be true that you didn't know before and are able to pass the exam at the end. The outcome is determined in advance; it's not a genuine journey of discovery at all. It's based on certain assumptions about the destination that you have to make before you can even start. Such a process has nothing to do with what I mean by using the full range of our humanity to find a 'spirituality'.

So, in the light of all that by way of preamble, I want to explore some ideas that also crop up in my book: *The Apostate's Creed*. This is free for you download from my website. (See: <http://ben-whitney.org.uk/humanist-books/>) The download is based, of course, on the Apostles' Creed – hence the witty title. My first task is to un-



Maastricht cemetery crucifix

beyond 'the fool on the hill'



Photo by Jean Scheijen

understand what the compilers of this and other Creeds thought they were doing at the time. This might sound as though it will lead to some wrestling with complex Greek or Latin terms and arcane debates about obscure-sounding distinctions, the significance of which is now entirely lost. I try to avoid such things, but no one should jump immediately to their own interpretation of what the words say.

Creed's meaning

We first have to examine the original text; exegesis before hermeneutics as my old theology tutors used to say. This is essential for all study of historic writings, including religious ones. But then I try to take the statements of the Creed on into whether they can still mean anything to people like me today who are in search of a new kind of spirituality. I'm going to focus on just one of them in particular in a moment. Much re-interpreting will be in store but I do try not to confuse my own ideas with those who came before me.

They deserve to be studied and understood and their insights listened to. But their conclusions are not fixed for all eternity. We now have to express ourselves differently because of what we have discovered since. This may then lead to a new kind of believing; new kinds of

truths in which to place our trust and by which to live. So is there anything beyond the statements of faith with which I can still engage?

Jesus, another innocent slaughtered?

In the chapter entitled 'The Fool on the Hill', I discuss what to make of the death of Jesus of Nazareth, 'suffered under Pontius Pilate, crucified, died and was buried' as the Apostles' Creed puts it.

The Jesus story starts with Christmas. In the download I write about Christmas 2012. At that time, the news was all about one story; the shooting dead of 20 children and 6 adults at a school in Connecticut by a deranged young man with an assortment of high-powered weapons that were owned by his mother, the first victim of his spree.

Some religious people, given the timing, will have drawn a comparison with the slaughter of the innocents that, according to Matthew at least, followed the birth of Jesus. This would be understandable, even though King Herod's massacre almost certainly has no factual basis and is not evidenced in any other historical source as far as I am aware. It is just one of the many symbolic elements within the birth narratives, designed to show how Jesus was like a new Moses who would challenge the kingdoms of this world, not operate on an entirely different plane away from the messy worlds of power and politics.

How did God allow such things?

Just as Pharaoh reacted to God's activity on behalf of his chosen with the killing of the first-born, so did Herod. But what are we to make of such tragic events? Any contemporary spirituality also has to address such a question. Many believers will have asked, if not always out loud, how their God could have 'allowed' such things to happen. Some will have blamed a 'devil'. Neither response is a solution for me. Human beings are entirely responsible for such behaviour, whether it's the lack of gun control, the result of fragmented families,

the abuse of power and bigotry of all kinds or whatever causes people to sometimes lose all sense of reason and become madmen. There is no God or devil who we can hold to account for such inhumanity. It's just part of the package, like love, sunshine and Chopin.

Schools rather than churches are my world these days. I'm always aware of the anniversary of the day in 1996 when Thomas Hamilton walked into the primary school in Dunblane, killed 16 children and their teacher. There was a similar, if less destructive event in Wolverhampton, where I now live, around the same time. There, too, the bravery of a young teacher saved more children from being injured and almost certain death. Terrible things like these happen every day. Like everyone else, I can only make myself aware of some of them.

A teacher's self sacrifice

Without doubt, at least one of the teachers in the Connecticut outrage deliberately surrendered her own life in order to save some of her pupils. She locked them in a storeroom and went back towards the shooting to try and save some more. She then put herself between the gunman and a group of 6 year-olds who were cowering in a corner and died protecting them. I am staggered and challenged by such a sacrifice and not at all sure I could ever hope to do anything like the same. I have no idea whether she was a Christian, quite possibly she was. But of course it doesn't matter one bit. There is no greater love. 'Inasmuch as you do it for the least of these my brothers and sisters, you do it for me', irrespective of the person's religious motivation. End of story. All other considerations are irrelevant.

For me, the death of Jesus of Nazareth is a universal paradigm of such self-sacrifice: a demonstration of love for others that makes the actions of those teachers a genuinely 'sacramental' and fully-human moment. The deeper spiritual truth is that life comes from such deaths and gives them meaning. I saw exactly the same in the picture of the three women caring for the soldier killed outside Woolwich barracks, just as other women did for Jesus at the cross.

That sign of human compassion in the face of such cruelty gives me more hope than a million evangelical tracts about my own so-called salvation ever will. Many might consider such self-denying actions foolish and pointless but, as even St Paul suggests, they are surely evidence of a much greater wisdom about the way things are? Part of the lingering attraction of Christianity is the unjust human death that is at the heart of it and the response that it still evokes, even in me. It's the usual allegedly supernatural meaning that is placed upon it that I cannot affirm.

Surely the key point about the figure at the centre of this particular human death is that he was a victim of our inhumanity. This I share with conventional believers. We suffer but we also destroy. The meaning to be found here is not about our need to be saved from our collective sin; it's about our collective solidarity as human beings. This event 'earths' all meaningful spirituality in the reality of the human condition which so often confronts us with tragedy and injustice, and with our own shortcomings. So it still makes a connection to me, at least on one level.

The cross is such an enduring symbol in early Christianity that there can be no doubt that this really was how Jesus of Nazareth died. There would have been no reason to invent such an embarrassment. It could surely have been easily disproved if it did not happen and he actually died in his sleep as an old man. Most religions go in for myths that build up their central figures; they don't portray them as a condemned and broken man dying on a rubbish dump.

Ben Whitney is a former Baptist minister. This is an abridged version of the talk he gave to the National Unitarian Fellowship at the Unitarian General Assembly meetings.

Part 2 will appear in the next issue of The Inquirer.

Kate Taylor: A Unitarian communicator

KATE TAYLOR

11 August 1933 – 5 May 2015

Westgate Chapel, Wakefield was filled for the funeral of Kate Taylor, conducted by its former minister, the Rev. Bill Darlison. Friend and fellow historian John Goodchild paid tribute to this extraordinary life. 'I first met Coral Mary Patricia Taylor (her full name which she exchanged, for daily use, for the more assertive Kate) during European Archaeological Heritage Year, 1974. We were together on a committee to organise local celebrations and Kate became our press officer. It is perhaps significant that in what became two volumes of *Wakefield Heritage*, Westgate Unitarian Chapel is the only building that gets two articles. We remained firm friends.

Wakefield born and bred, the middle one of three sisters, Kate's maternal grandfather was a characterful clergyman. She performed ably at Wakefield Girls High School and won a state scholarship to St. Anne's College, Oxford, hoping to go on to an M. Phil, but circumstances necessitated a return home to enter teaching. She did, however, manage some vacation journalism under Sir Linton Andrews, sometime editor of the *Yorkshire Post* and of the *Leeds Mercury*. Kate saw herself primarily as a journalist, aiming at popular aspects of her subjects but with a view to strict accuracy.

After a period in teaching she became a teacher training college lecturer in Leeds and then at Westworth Castle near Barnsley. Later she became vice principal of Barnsley Sixth Form College. For many years she lectured with the Open University (including to some prison inmates), and became known as an able and engaging speaker to local groups.

Her involvements were many and various. Chair and secretary-treasurer of Friends of the Chantry on Wakefield Bridge, raising funds, initiating events, many of them open-air, producing a booklet telling the Chantry's hitherto unknown story. She supported numerous moves to retain significant buildings and environments, and was appalled at the way in which Westgate Chapel, a listed building in a conservation area, has been encompassed closely by characterless, large modern buildings. She became active in and then President of Wakefield Civic Society, President of the Wakefield Historical Society and then editor of its journal. She represented the Chapel on the Daniel Gaskell Trust for young people in Horbury and was President of a Cinema History Study Society. She was elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London, a member of the group of Wakefield Historical Publications and of the Gissing Trust which runs a small commemorative museum.'

In 1974 she wrote occasionally for the *Wakefield Express* and phoned the then-Westgate minister, the Rev Ernest Baker for an interview. She was particularly impressed when, having asked Ernest what the members believed about certain matters, he responded that it wasn't his business to ask them. Soon afterwards she joined the congregation and served as secretary, newsletter editor, preaching plan organiser, hosta gardener, chair of the trustees and fundraiser for the restoration of the historic organ. Her interests widened to the Yorkshire Unitar-



Following her death, Kate Taylor's name appeared on the 2015 Queen's Birthday Honours List. For services to heritage and to her community, she was to receive an MBE. Kate knew before she died but kept the secret, as she was asked. Her son Simon will receive the honour on her behalf.

ian Union, in particular the lay preachers' group, she herself becoming a very able worship leader. Her interests became national and she served on the GA Communications Committee, the Lindsey Press Panel and for many years was press officer of the GA Annual Meetings. Passionate about the importance of communication, she joined the Board of Directors of *The Inquirer*, served as its company secretary and as mentor to the editor, contributing numerous articles and letters, often outspoken, always fair. She joined the Penal Affairs Panel, taking a particular interest in prison education and women in prison.

In a congregation with a wide variety of views, Kate was a self-proclaimed atheist, though flexible enough to use petitionary prayer when leading worship. Though never a seeker of fuss and attention, it was nonetheless disappointing when a move to make her GA President was unsuccessful and a recent move to put her name forward as an Honorary Member of the Assembly came too late.

A family person, Kate took care of her parents in their later years, and at Christmas was always a delight, remembered especially for a party game called 'legs' and for another involving a collection of pictures of chimneys of Wakefield, for participants to identify. 'I couldn't identify any of them,' reported step-granddaughter Karn. 'But I always look at them now. She made us think. She made us laugh. The world is a better place because of her.'

Friends shared memories of narrowboat holidays, recalling the time she cooked an enormous turkey, the aroma attracting dozens of neighbourhood cats. Anthony Dawson brought a tribute, 'From the chapel organ, which she helped to restore.' Her son Simon read an appreciative poem by David Harkins. Her sister Enid shared an affectionate memory of a visit to Galilee.

Her final commission was a history of the Diocese, which led to her being made a Lay Canon of Wakefield Cathedral. Rt Rev Dr Stephen Platten brought a tribute. 'I'm speaking *not* of the new Diocese of West Yorkshire, of which she most emphatically did *not* approve, but the *original* Wakefield diocese. A memorial occasion will be held in the Cathedral later. She was an awesome lady.' A former Wakefield MP spoke of her

(Continued on next page)

Retreats can be a sweet release

By John Harley

I have been going on creative retreats for around 20 years now. The first one I went on took place at Jordans Quaker Centre in Buckinghamshire. I still vividly remember the transformative power it had for me. In one workshop each of us was invited to create something in clay on the theme of birth and creation and then given the opportunity to share what had taken place for us in the process. What seemed such a simple exercise of making, followed by a safe space to gain some insights from each other, felt extraordinarily healing and restorative.

I was so moved by the experience that soon I found myself drawn to lead retreats for The Art and Spirituality Network and then establish my own organisation called Be Here Create. Over the years I have tried to craft creative retreats that offer space for making art, pondering, being still and silent, moving gently, reflecting together, eating home cooked food (a vital ingredient) and time to make real connections with each other through witnessing the rhythm of the days and nights over a weekend.

I often ponder on that word *retreat* that many of us use as common currency. What does it mean? The dictionary definition is clear enough: 'the act of withdrawing, as into safety or privacy, a place of refuge, or seclusion'. These words do not fit with my experience of retreats. Yes, at times I have withdrawn from the busy-ness and chaos of city living and after a good retreat I can return to my urban lifestyle with a renewed energy and clarity. However, retreats can enable me to take bold steps towards the person I really am and to venture

further into those parts of myself I usually shut off or forget about. Going on retreat can help me to live richer and deeper, rather than hideaway or hibernate. Being creative can bring us quite precious insights and these discoveries can be even more technicolour and life-changing when we are creative with others and in relationship with a community; partly because our voice is being heard and our visions are being witnessed.

There is an old story of two travellers on a long sea voyage heading to Japan. As the ship is getting closer to the islands of Japan one man who has made this trip many times explains to his companion that soon it will be possible to see the majestic peak of Mount Fuji. Over the next few days his companion ventures out onto the wave splashed deck, again and again, to look out to sea and becomes more and more frustrated that he cannot see the great mountain. After days of concentrated watching and searching he is just about to give up when he turns to the seasoned traveller saying 'I have been looking out for Mount Fuji for days now and still nothing – the visibility is good and so surely by now it should be in full view'. His friend places an arm around his shoulders and simply replies 'Look higher, look higher' and raises his other arm high up in the sky to point to the peak. Sure enough the watcher focuses his eyes higher, much higher, and sees the magnificent sight of Mount Fuji in all its glory towering above the clouds. The spectacle had been there to see for days and days but he hadn't allowed himself to look high enough.

Retreats can enable us to look higher, to gain fresh
(Continued on next page)

'Awesome lady' is missed We owe Kate a round

(Continued from previous page)

innumerable letters. She was definitely left-leaning in politics, as witnessed by her Twitter and Facebook pages. Her writings were numerous, as author, contributor and editor, including *The Making of Wakefield* and *Not So Merry Wakefield* and finally *Wakefield Diocese: Celebrating 125 Years* (2012). For the Unitarian movement she edited *Marking the Days*, a book of occasional services (2006).

Assiduous, kind, busy, able, generous, art-lover, flower arranger, the numerous tributes flowed, giving Bill Darlison the sad task of drawing the service to a close. Countless people, in Wakefield and beyond, have good cause to remember and be grateful for this 'awesome lady'.

Since her funeral, it has been announced that Kate's name has appeared in the Queen's Birthday Honours List for 2015: MBE: 'For services to Heritage and to the community in Wakefield, West Yorkshire'. The honour will be received on her behalf by her son Simon.

By John Midgley, with thanks to John Goodchild and others.

Donations to Send-a-Child-to-Hucklow in Kate's memory have already exceeded £1,200. To make a donation see:
www.sendachildtohucklow.org.uk



Kate Taylor

I was a bit frightened of Kate Taylor when we first met. She was part of the panel which interviewed me for the editorship of *The Inquirer*. I suspect that was not an unusual reaction to Kate. A forthright person, never hesitant to express her view, Kate could come across as brusque. She did not suffer fools. She asked the sort of questions which might be difficult, yet always moved a discussion forward.

But as I got to know her, I found Kate to be extremely kind – one of those rare people who anticipates the needs of others and finds practical ways to help. She was a great support to me. Just when things became difficult, a lovely, supportive email would appear. None of this is to say that Kate didn't have rigorous standards. She read this paper with a sharp eye, always challenging us to make *The Inquirer* the best it could be.

She enjoyed a good laugh. And even though she would often leave us before we could buy her one back – Kate always got the first round in the pub.

We all have people in our lives whose approval somehow means a bit more than that of others. For me, Kate was one of them. I think it was because she expected as much of herself as she did of those around her.

She will be greatly missed.

– MC Burns



Retreat and release Gateways to mystery

(Continued from previous page)

perspectives on our everyday lives and even see patterns or treasures that have been right in front of our noses all along. We are all human *beings* and yet in the West all the stuff we surround ourselves with and all the striving some of us feel we have to do to succeed (and be loved) can make it more difficult to actually *be*. Being isn't the same as existing. We sometimes need to be proactive to *be*. Going on a retreat can have the power to disarm us from our everyday default position – all that fretting and trying too hard and hunting and gathering that can end up taking us far away from the person we truly are. I have learned that when I allow myself to *be* rather than stay on the endless conveyor belt of do, do, do, do more... I am more likely to be in contact with all of my selves – my parched self, my joyful self, the regions of my life that hurt, my compassionate self, my frightened self and the passionate man in me. I love going on retreats because they are fertile pastures for striving forwards into the fullness of living and reconnecting with ourselves, our clans and friends and this mysterious world we inhabit.

As well as being creative, retreats can also help us to *notice* things a little more. On my desk and mantelpiece I have a jumbled array of natural objects such as shells, stones, pebbles, feathers; each one is a tiny reminder of a moment of noticing or looking at the world in some fragment of time on a retreat. Each one records a glimpse of grace when I was able to be still and see something clearly, as if for the first time. In her wonderful poem *Snow Geese* Mary Oliver looks into the sky and sees a flock of geese and writes 'oh, to love what is lovely, and will not last!'. She finishes the poem with the poignant lines:

*The geese
flew on,
I have never seen them again.
Maybe I will, someday, somewhere.
Maybe I won't.
It doesn't matter.
What matters
is that, when I saw them,
I saw them
as through the veil, secretly, joyfully, clearly.*

The Rev John Harley is the Unitarian General Assembly's youth programme coordinator.

Icons: Gateways to Mystery is a retreat planned for 11-23 September. It will take place at The St Joseph's Centre, an old house set in spacious grounds in the New Forest. Cost of the retreat is £200 for a single room. For more information about the retreat, see: <http://beherecreate.co.uk/upcoming-events/> Or, email John Harley on jharley@unitarian.org.uk

By Stephen Crowther

Religious icons like those pictured above have been in use since the earliest days of the Christian Church which saw them as a way to praise and teach about God to the faithful, many of whom would not have been able to read. They are commonly referred to as 'windows to heaven' or 'windows to the eternal' and have long been seen as a 'way in' – a way of connecting to the Mystery and as a reminder of God's presence and immanence in the world and in us.

A traditional icon is usually a flat panel painting depicting scenes from scripture, Jesus, Mary, saints or angels (although, they may also be cast in metal, carved in stone, embroidered on cloth, done in mosaic or fresco, printed on paper or metal, etc.). When an iconographer creates an icon, they are said to 'write the icon', not paint it. This is because it is a prayerful exercise in humility before God. Icons are highly symbolic, using shapes, colours and forms to symbolize different spiritual realities. They are not signed by the artist on the front, if at all. The best iconographers are not famous artists, but holy saints. Pagans had worshiped idols because they believed that the deity was present in the stone or wood; for Orthodox Christians, icons are only images of the person depicted – therefore, they do not venerate the wood but the person whose image it bears.

Praying with icons is an ancient prayer practice that involves keeping our eyes wide open, taking into our heart what the image visually communicates. An icon is not just a picture, it is a way into contemplative prayer, helping to keep the mind from wandering and to stay focused - not on what is seen in the icon, but rather on what is seen through it. This is prayer without words - of experiencing what is holy - a divine mystery – a way to let God speak to us. Icons are doorways into stillness, into closeness with God. If we sit with them long enough, we too can enter into the stillness - into communion. And if we listen to them closely enough, with our hearts, we just may discern the voice of God.

We will begin the retreat week-end by looking at examples of traditional Christian Orthodox icons and explore our ideas of what contemporary icons might look like for us. We will practice praying and meditating with icons. We will explore and reflect on images of what we hold sacred and that which connects us to the divine mystery. Participants will be invited to bring images with them, to the retreat, for use in collage and in creating a personal icon which can then be taken away from the weekend. Although a large number of the activities will involve being creative, an ability to draw or paint or 'be artistic' is not required at all – everyone is welcome. There will be social time and time for solitude and walking – and there will be lots of good food to eat!

Maybe not an oxymoron after all

By Christine Avery

The existence of Trinitarian Unitarians, mentioned at this year's GA, was not new to me and has never seemed particularly surprising. Paradoxical? Yes. Ridiculous? Surely not. From talking to Christians and reading about Christian views I have a strong impression that most do not understand the doctrine in any case, and they are not necessarily averse to admitting the fact. Explanations don't necessarily make the matter clearer. For instance, the Trinity means that, 'God is three persons who have the same essence of deity.' (Wikipedia). But in spite of this lack of clarity, many of us may feel that Trinitarianism emits some glimmering suggestions of truth. So why is this?

If I say, Humans make patterns out of the potentially formless turmoil of experience: part of being human is that you project your patterns, or interpretations, onto the mysterious vastness of our world', at least two objections will probably arise. One is that the idea downgrades all our perceptions and visions: they are not 'real', they are purely utilitarian, and this is deeply unsatisfying.

Another objection is that such a concept seems to lead to a dreary, inane relativism, as exemplified by those who say: "All patterns, cultural practices and interpretations are equal." But no sane and functioning human being truly believes that this is the case. Some interpretations (or sets of values) lead to murder and mayhem, others to love, joy and peace. This surely indicates that our pattern making can be better or worse. Sometimes it seems to match up with some Reality beyond us – though that Reality is so extremely elusive and challenging that even our most cherished patterns are imperfect.

The other objection is one that went into my mind unforgettably from reading an observation by CS Lewis, years ago. It goes something like this: making your own, individual patterns is a sloppy, self-indulgent process. You need some mighty intellect, or some time-honoured body of doctrine to test yourself against. Otherwise wish-fulfilment will take over. I thought I had better mention this point of view, because it is not altogether absurd, but I still disagree with it: it is surely not sustainable in a world full of competing and often violent dogmatists, which therefore demands the risky but necessary independence of thought which I perceive in Unitarianism.

When I think about my values I come back perennially to the trinity of Beauty, Truth, Goodness. They are not necessarily less mysterious than 'Father, Son and Holy Spirit'; they are just a lot nearer to my modern, interrogative and non-rigid style of perception. But I need to define a bit more.

Beauty, (thank goodness!) is fairly straightforward. The beauty of the world has been feeding my soul ever since I can remember. Truth is one degree more difficult, but still usefully within range. I'll define truth as an accurate correspondence between a description and something which is being described. For instance, the earth goes around the sun, and not vice versa. Mount Everest is taller than Ben Nevis. I am using here the 'correspondence theory of truth' which runs

into the buffers if you try to drive it at more complicated situations than the comparative height of mountains. Nonetheless, the fact that it works at the simple level surely gives a very



Christine Avery

solid satisfaction. We need such anchorage, which may be why people tend to give so much worship to science although as Tom Stoppard recently commented, 'There is a tendency to hubris in science as an enterprise, a tendency to triumphalism.'

I am happy about the first two members of my Trinity, Beauty and Truth. But how about goodness? I have always had a problem with goodness. The idea is obscured by a self-righteous, judgemental moralist (in me and in others) who believes that because she is virtuous there shall be no more cakes and ale (with a grateful nod to Sir Toby Belch here). I want to say that goodness equals kindness, integrity, mercy... But all these are deeply dependent on intelligence (of a spiritual rather than an IQ kind). They need a highly developed, quasi-psychoic sense of what another person, or other people, really need at any given moment. And this is in the context of a wider knowledge about actualities. For example, some well-intentioned directions given to a person on the way to commit a murder surely can't come into the 'good' category. So Goodness is more uncertain than Beauty and Truth. But all the same, it glows always at the edge of vision, and in practice there are plenty of simple, everyday actions which one wants to acclaim as full of goodness. Goodness on a larger scale, however, is extremely controversial and many actions, which are intended to be good, turn out, in the long run, to have more bad than good consequences. We are in no position to

predict the spreading, intersecting ripples of unintended after-effect. As an example of this: there is a novel by Anthony Burgess in which the apparently miraculous saving of the life of a sick child leads to the death of many when the child grows up to be a vicious dictator.

Where does this take us? It looks from here as if Beauty is equivalent to the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. Truth may be seen as equivalent to God, the authority figure. And perhaps Goodness is identifiable with Jesus, the most concretely human and therefore imperfect element in the Trinitarian pattern. And the three elements are interwoven and inseparable though you must distinguish between them. All this helps me, at least, to make some usable interpretation of the mysterious reality in which I find myself. So in an important sense, I too claim to be a Trinitarian Unitarian.

Christine Avery is a member of Plymouth Unitarians.



News in brief

By Vicki Dawson

No inducements were required to fill the chapel with well-wishers and supporters on 23 May, the occasion of the Rev Cody Coyne's Induction as minister of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. People came from far and wide to celebrate the final stage of Cody's appointment as our minister. Not the least of which were his parents who had come from their home in America – it was a pleasure to meet them and to know how pleased they were to share their love and encouragement for their son's chosen path in life.

We were equally pleased to share with Catherine Coyne's family – though their journey was considerably shorter! Just as well really as they brought with them a selection of the most amazing cup-cakes and other goodies (could be construed as 'Inducements' I suppose!) They also decorated the Percival Suite to make it look like a party venue for our 80 or so guests.

It was most pleasing to share our celebration with ministers from other denominations – Manchester Cathedral, the Liberal Jewish Community, Quakers as well as other Unitarian Chapel ministers. We were also happy to welcome Derek McAuley 'back home' to Cross Street – where he used to be a member before his appointment as the Unitarian General Assembly's Chief Officer.

We have followed a secular, retail approach to Ministry with Cody's appointment, as it seems we have 'bought one and got one free' or should it be 'two for the price of one'! Either way we are the beneficiaries of Catherine Cody's talents and commitment as well as Cody's – for which we (and Cody!) are undoubtedly grateful. Their joint musical attributes means we are regularly treated to accomplished piano and flute duets –

Inquirer board celebrates 10 years



At its June meeting, the Board of Directors of 'The Inquirer' were pleased to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Colleen Burns as editor. The paper has seen many changes in her time, with increase in colour issues, greater diversity of content, more advertising and many new writers. At a celebration dinner, Colleen was presented with a greeting card and flowers, and a toast proposed, 'To 'The Inquirer', past, present and future, coupled with the name of Colleen Burns'.

The picture shows (back row) James Barry (Inquirer administrator) with board members, Phil Jackman, the Rev John Midgley (chair), Diane Bennett (marketing), Martin West (finance), Phil Tomlin (secretary), (front row) the Rev Eric Jones, Colleen Burns (editor) and Angela Maher. John Naish is also a member of the board but was unable to attend.

as evidenced in the Induction Service.

It is sometimes thought invidious to attribute special thanks to one person, when many have given so much of their time and effort to make an event meaningful and enjoyable. Nonetheless on this occasion I am confident that all present would agree with me that the Rev Liz Birtles was an exemplary 'conductor' of the service – we give thanks for her thoughtful, calm, clear, warm and sincere approach to the task.

The Rev Andrew Hill and the Rev Jean Bradley administered the charges. Reciprocal commitments were made by Cody and by the congregation at the service. These are in place to support us all, throughout the coming months and years, as Cody encourages us to 'be the best we can be'.

Following the service we all gathered together in the Percival Suite to 'eat, drink and be merry' – consuming the delicious goodies and making attempts to reduce the large Chocolate cake (Cody's favourite!) sharing our delights with those in the homeless camp on our door step.

Not surprisingly, guests showed a reluctance to leave what was a very enjoyable occasion but the affirmations and good wishes they left behind are a cherished memory in the ongoing life of all those connected to Cross Street Chapel.

Unitarians mark Anzac Day

Hull Unitarians Lay Pastor Ralph Catts organised a service to mark Anzac Day and the centenary of the Gallipoli landing.

The memorial service attracted a full congregation including representatives of the city, the Australian High Commission in London and a local veterans' support centre. Shown in the photo are (l-r) Ralph, Terry Ireland, the convenor of the Hull Veterans' Support Centre giving the address, with the representative of the Australian High Commission, David Crook. Also in attendance was the deputy Lord Mayor of Hull and some local people with links to Australia and New Zealand.



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