

Service 20120819 Hull Unitarian Church *Adrian Worsfold*

Upon the emptiness was cast the brilliance of divine thought, and all of time and space leapt forth; a universe afire, all-dancing. The burning holy of love created all the shining swirl of suns, the large gas planets and moons, the rocky planets and moons, and such as the reflective light of this the green Earth. You have created us. You formed us from clay, breathed Life into us with thought, speech, silence and music....

[Adapted from within the GA of the United Reformed Church Order of Table and Word service 2012]

Now it is time to take the flame
And illuminate the darkness;

Light the chalice

The flame action is pure energy -
Light and heat -
It includes the crackle of the material fuel,
As what was becomes anew;

And the sound this makes
Is affected by the bowl,
Which contains and constrains
And focuses
And sends out.

Introduction

In this shorter service today we focus on how we are doing hymns with a few comparisons of musical style. Helen recently told some of us about an attractive person welcoming people to the Vineyard church on Beverley Road, and many younger people were going in too. Well there was a plan for what was happening there, and it came from the Fuller Theological Seminary in the 1970s, and it has a direct relationship with how worship is presented. The Fuller Seminary is located in Pasadena in California and was established in 1947 by a radio presenter Charles E. Fuller. In the 1970s, theology, psychology and religious sociology were used to develop what was called the homogeneity principle with a direct impact on the attractiveness of worship, more of which later.

For now, however, we need to know that the result of Fuller is a more direct, more appealing, culturally relevant use of music in worship, and therefore the lowest cultural barrier in worship forms; and arguably, what we see in our purple book supplement is an attempt to move to more continuous songs and that this is in the same direction as to what was considered in detail at Fuller. But there are treatments of hymns that are also more continuous in the the standard green book.

So although we have three hymns on the board only we are having two versions of each. Our opening hymn in the green *Hymns for Living* 220 is called 'Break not the Circle'. The last two choir CDs covered this hymn with the given tune Leytonen, and we can join in with it. But we shall go on with it a second time to the tune of Lehr, and I want to suggest that the later tune written for this hymn is superior, and there is choir support for that version too when we come to it.

[Hymn HL 220 Leytonen choir](#)

With this second version we sing with the soloist and also the choir that follows.

[HL 220 Lehr choir](#)

Prayers

We pray in sorrow for what we have done and should not have done, and failed to do what we should have done. We forgive those who wronged us, and let us apologise to those we wronged. Our task for the future is to sin no more, indeed to do good.

But let us be thankful for the potential for goodness, and thus treat the world around us with the best that we can give. This we may not achieve, for life is complex and relationships difficult, but we should at least try. We saw some of this in the recent competition of sport: instead of the conflict of war between nations, we saw a competition of achievement and the flags raised for those who had achieved the best.

The difficulties in the world should be part of our prayer: to focus on those caught up in inescapable wrongs. There is terror, fighting, hunger and disease. Let us think of places around the world where these are an issue right now, with erratic weather patterns leading to high food prices and poverty, and tribal nationalism leading to ongoing wars.

We think of people of faith building a fellowship between themselves. We do not want religions to put up new barriers, as when John Lennon wrote to imagine no religion too. We seek for faith and trust to bring people together and to overcome divisions and boundaries. Our prayer for Unitarian communities is not for them exclusively but for them to be able to reach out and offer the message of tolerance and reasonableness to the wider world.

We think of people in ill-health and a poverty that leads to ill-health. There may be people each of us knows: there are plenty around the world.

And we think of those who are no longer with us, the congregation of the past on whose shoulders we stand as the future is built.

These, then, are our said prayers, but we know that every hymn too is a prayer, to which we give the added reflective force of the music.

[Musical Interlude Genesis Cinema Show section](#)

Readings

All people of the earth:
Listen – Love whispers an invitation -
Let us our tongues employ:
Make a joyful noise to the greatest Love,
Sing to Love with a glad heart!
Join hands together in the Dance of Life.
Sing in the presence of the divine!
Love makes us, and we derive from the best;
We are born to be loving expressions of the evolved.
Move your mouth with gratitude and enter through Love's open gates with
praise!
Give thanks and bless Love's Holy Name!
For Love is of God, and endures
With faith, trust, and joy into the future.

[Psalm 100: A modern extraction]

The strain upraise of joy and praise, Alleluia!

To glorious everything

Shall all faithful people sing Alleluia!

And the choirs that dwell around
Shall re-echo through the land. Alleluia!

Those who still roam in memories they raise,
These blessed ones repeating their one praise Alleluia!

The planets glittering on their heavenly way
The shining constellations join and say Alleluia!

The clouds that onward sweep,
The winds on pinions light,
The thunders echoing loud and deep,
The lightnings wildly bright,
In sweet consent unite one Alleluia!

The floods and oceans billows,
The storms and winter snow,
The days of countless beauty,
Hoar frost and summer glow,
The groves that wave in spring,
And glorious forests, sing Alleluia!

First let the birds, their dinosaur origins claimed,
Exalt their evolution's phase, exclaim Alleluia!

Then the mammals that reign, with various strain,
Join evolution's hymn, and cry again, Alleluia!

Then let the mountains thunder forth sonorous, Alleluia!
There let the valleys sing in gentle chorus, Alleluia!
The jubilant abyss of ocean, cry Alleluia!
To this, that evolution made,
The frequent hymn be duly paid. Alleluia!

This is the strain, the continued strain, that we do surely love.
This is the song, our evolving song, that we doubtless approve. Alleluia!

Therefore we sing, both heart and voice awaking, Alleluia!
And various voices echo, answer making, Alleluia!

Now from all folk be outpoured,

Alleluia to our world:
With Alleluia evermore
This exclamation we adore.
Praise be given to our only home,
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

The second [hymn](#), which will be *Sing Your Faith* 167, we shall have twice as well, and this time with largely the same tune. The first version is with the Unitarian choir, and then we follow it again with a choir-backed version that I would argue is more flowing.

[SF 167 Flying Free choir](#)

This is a song that is better known than many hymns but I'd suggest it needs to sound less than a hymn.

[SF 167 Flying Free choir alt](#)

Sermon

Recently I sent my own processed 21 hymns CD to David Dawson, who will distribute it as an improvement on the original 21 hymns CD that was recorded on non-professional equipment, in mono, with a terrific amount of hiss and noise.

With my improvements, the noise was gone and the choir was in stereo. They also sang lower and slower: David tells me that, unlike with *Sing Your Faith*, the hymn book *Hymns for Living* gave no account of top notes and common singability – the general level of pitch within the tune otherwise called the tessitura. The purple book, however, drops the range of notes and it very rarely goes above D - which should be singable by an average congregation

So it is not just a question of having source material, but what you can do with it technologically. Just recently I downloaded some software that I think is truly remarkable. You enter in the musical score of a hymn that shows all the notes. You can then click to transpose the general level of pitch down or up, and it immediately changes all the notes and key and displays them. When you play it, the notes play and it is indeed shifted up or down. No composer needs to sit there and work it out. It is done in a flash.

There are two types of editing. One I call music editing and the other is audio editing. In the music editing the highest unit understood by the computer is

the note, and the note can be in one of a selection of computer soundalike instruments. The music files produced are very small and you can both hear the music in basic form and see the score, which also can be printed out as sheet music.

The other editing is audio, which is the full range of any sound, the kind you hear in an MP3 file or on a CD. The computer reproduces the sound, but does not know what it is. It is important in editing to know the difference, and it is how and when you can transfer a music file to an audio file that is the key to flexibility. It is conversely very difficult and haphazard for an audio file to turn into a music file. Frankly the computer does not 'listen' well to audio sound. It is nevertheless fascinating to take a musical file with defined notes, make it into an audio file, and then get the computer to turn that back immediately into notes by a form of listening. The scores that display become hugely complicated in a bid to represent the sound heard. And I have that software too.

But actually it's not the software I want to talk about in particular, but use of the available hardware and how it links with sociology, psychology and theology.

The people at the Fuller Theological Seminary knew what they were doing. John White examined the revivals of the past and their psychology, and argued that the psychology of revival can be induced again via individuals. John Wimber's Kingdom theology was that God will act supernaturally to bring about a Kingdom through the believers as agents. Very controversially, the Fuller analysis came to the view that a church was most likely to grow if it followed the homogeneity principle - that is, attract one kind of person. Many evangelicals are wholly opposed to this approach in principle.

Now if you can focus on and attract younger adults, people who are mainly middle class or aspiring to be so, then you can build a future, because the church will also generate romantic relationships and even make children of Christian parents. The means to do this is by having the lowest cultural barrier possible for that age group, and indeed positive cultural attraction, and therefore crucially in the style of worship. So even if you do not believe the written material these places approve of and put out, you can still enjoy it on another level and become inculturated to the church via its self-presentation. The psychology is that it hooks you in, becomes a pleasure and a need, and you then adopt the language of the place, that is, principally, the language of the Holy Spirit working through individuals.

In this sense, what Fuller set up is as individualistic as the Unitarians. It is the

individual who receives the Holy Spirit and who is motivated to act. So there is a direct relationship between the presentation of worship and your own responsibility to become a channel of God.

And the hardware is what does the job: the sound, the visuals, including the lighting. The amplified music flows, and moves from one piece to the next. People get the opportunity to take along their guitars, keyboards and drums, to plug them in and play to their own folks. In the full media church some individuals and bands will get recorded, with CDs made, MP3s distributed, even programmes on satellite television. Money starts circulating and there is quite a cash flow in these places.

Set against this, whilst Unitarianism might have a low barrier to outsiders in terms of beliefs, it has a high barrier in terms of the established presentation. The hymn sandwich is an old and increasingly distant cultural form. It becomes an acquired taste. That's why the purple book supplement we have, *Sing Your Faith*, is a small if inconsistent move away from the standard verse hymn and towards something more continuous and flowing in terms of the music.

Now the people at Fuller seminary were wrong about one thing: even their low cultural barrier has not generated a revival or attracted in the masses. In general the attraction redistributes those who are already evangelically church based. To the extent that new people do join, via friendship networks, they only represent a very small margin of the population.

None of this is new. It was tried in the nineteenth century. A religious group was set up that was evangelical. It would deliberately have the least in cultural barriers to involvement and indeed use the popular, entertaining, music of the day. It used rousing brass band music. Not only that, but it picked up on the common patriotic militarism of the working class at the time, that which was later drawn-upon to recruit neighbourhoods of men into the First World War. So was born the Salvation Army. So, did it convert the working class as a whole? No, it didn't. What it did do was fracture the working class at a small margin, and produce for some a means towards respectability. If you wanted to be upwardly mobile, one means was the respectability of the Salvation Army. Today, of course, still having brass bands and uniforms, the Salvation Army represents a high cultural barrier to joining and is, increasingly, a peculiar sect with a reputation for charitable works.

Unitarians can sing about the world at large in all the words and forms represented by prayer. You can sing to express a need; you can sing to consider the condition of others; you can sing to express faith, trust and joy;

and you can sing to express thanks.

We can do this just as any other group, with our own more reasoned words, but we seem somewhat stuck in the forms of the past. Of course it is easy to criticise the hymn sandwich, to say we should go out and modernise, especially if then we end up with something that still looks rather like a hymn sandwich.

But here is the difference. Just as James Barry has set up Unitarian TV, with an eye to the media Church, so we in the congregations can adopt the audio visual technology and see how it makes us change and communicate. For example, an objection to the hymns that flow better is when you actually come in on the music and sing - but the objection is solved simply by having the visual prompt that comes with the computer and the large screen. If you can *watch* the lyrics, you *know* when to sing. The band plays on, or the CD or music file does, and people can see when to sing.

So it isn't just a case of integrated music via sound hardware and software used in preparation; it is about the audio-visual and the resultant experience at the point of worship itself. In total, it is about good lighting, a screen all can see, a director of the audio-visuals with a computer too, and playing the files or CDs on demand. We join the world out there, as it is, with its music, and we just might lower the barriers to some people who, yes, can have spirituality and entertainment, be joyful and have enjoyment, and participate in the experience and thus get hooked. After all, however you dress it up theologically, that's what they do in the Vineyard Churches.

For the collection the music playing is a piece written on music composing software on my computer and would be used for 114 in Sing Your Faith. But here it is just for the collection.

[SF 114 Lerwick write alt <collection>](#)

Once again we have the final hymn twice, first with a standard presentation and then with more flow.

[Hymn SF 137 Corvedale 02](#)

So that was the standard version. Now we have one with more flow and music in between, and so we are less conscious of having verses.

Ending

This is my church
This is where I heal my hurt
It's a natural grace
Of watching young life shape
It's in minor keys
Solutions and remedies
Enemies becoming friends
When bitterness ends

It's in the world I become
Content in the hum
Between voice and drum
It's in change
The poetic justice of cause and effect
Respect, love, compassion

This is my church
This is where I heal my hurt
For today
God is a DJ

[From Faithless: God is a DJ]