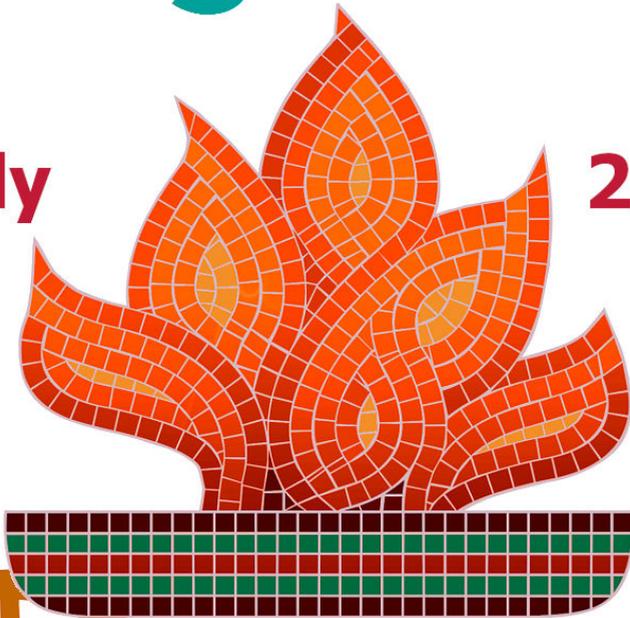


# Pluralist Magazine

Early

2017



Part of the  
Pluralist  
Website



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



*Historical Photograph*

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

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

# SETAM On the Web



About three years ago or so the Pluralist Website began a set of pages to suggest how an online shop window could look for Setam. The focus was on artificial flowers that sold along with grave goods.

## Why Setam Closed

On Saturday 24th December 2017 Setam closed for the last time. It had a long history on several sites. It is indeed 'Mates' backwards and represented two families, the head of one family since marrying the wife of the deceased other. This final site in Hessle Road at the corner of Boulevard gave a large warehouse and trading space. Part of the space was converted into flats for rent payers. Since then the nearby vacated Kingdom Hall has been converted into flats as well.

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

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

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

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

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

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

outer reaches of the British Isles. It was almost comic. But it was not enough in margin for the volume, and volume was restricted simply because of the time it took to attend to the computer, parcel things up and carry items physically to the Post Office. It was supplementing a dying trade on the ground and did not tackle the main problem. When the shop closed so did its eBay, because of no space to store stock. It did make a critical difference to income, but only for a while.

Add to this the crippling level of rates. Business rates came to be set nationally, and when recently small shops were relieved of so much expense, a store like Setam missed out. One option was the small shop, but the small shop would sell at small volumes and struggle to support perhaps one remaining individual. Setam might have been quartered, with three parts sold, but this was not a practical option.

At peak Setam had eleven employees beyond the families. When it closed, there was just one.



Basically Setam is a victim of changing retail. When we read of Lidl and Aldi opening stores, with their own retail chain power nimbly slipping underneath the giants, and the giants worrying about being

inflexible (thus buying up so many one-time corner shops), we forget that shops like Setam are forced to close.

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

## Can Unitarians Be Christians?

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

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



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

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

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

traditions relating to the traditions of the early Churches. To do history is restrictive. For example, resurrection is extra-historical. There is no means to do history on whether someone lived after their death. There is a biology to this: the impossibility to live once death rapidly wrecks the brain. Nor is history available to examine a virginal conception. It isn't just about Troeltsch and the unreliability of miracles; history does not do miracles.

As for visible human action, when there are no primary documents, history has to resort to criteria and probabilities. These are, regarding documents after the fact: the earlier the better, the more independently the merrier, claims that run counter to and even embarrass ongoing beliefs preferred, and the context of the cultural environment.

On such a basis Jesus becomes someone with beliefs very strange to our own. He seems to be a last days apocalyptic who thinks the Kingdom of God is very close, and for which people had to prepare themselves rapidly and whom he helped them through acts of healing (to remove demons). The change would end history, transform reality, and would be heralded by a strange figure, the coming of the Son of Man. Maybe late on Jesus thought he might be himself transformed into that figure, but he seemed to regard himself as important to prompt God, by use of Hebrew scriptures and debate with various religious folk, into kicking off the heaven on earth transformation. He seems to have identified himself as the suffering servant to prompt God into action. His ministry may have lasted as little as a year or so, moving rapidly from Galilee with a bunch of capable (very) small business types and others to get to the heart of the matter in Jerusalem. There he will have seen the graves of the rich waiting for general resurrection, and he was preaching rather that in the Kingdom the last would be first. He didn't preach equality but reversal.

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

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

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

Resurrection was a Persian concept come into part of Judaism, and it was attached to the apocalyptic and messianic: thus Jesus becomes the first of the resurrected, and this language of expectation is the context for religious experience and ritual after his death. The first believers will be very charismatic expectant Jews, with Gentiles finding a way into this one God community, although the expectation focussed on Jesus rapidly becomes near-binitarian even among the Jews. The old idea that these views took a long time to crystallise into divinity is not credible. Thanks to Paul on the cusp of Jewish and Greek cultures and indeed the unifier of Greek language and culture in the Roman Empire, the expectation goes into transforming categories.

The idea that Unitarians follow the 'religion of Jesus' rather than the 'religion about Jesus' is utter tosh. They no more follow his religion than the orthodox. It is a strange Christian who identifies with the original Jewish expectors: the nearest to them might be the likes of such as Jehovah's Witnesses. In our culture it takes a highly sectarian organisation to have such views, and some individuals with such vivid views might be regarded as mentally ill.

Many Christians may still identify with the Gnostics, the belief in the pure spirit and troublesome material that one can see pulling at Paul and the Gospel of John. For Gnostics, Jesus becomes essentially divine and in human clothing - beyond the Athanasian tendency. The Gospel of Thomas may have original Jesus sayings in it, but its context is Gnostic. However, all the canonical gospels and the writings of Paul and other new Testament materials still emphasise the redemption of the material and not its rejection: the whole point about a bodily resurrection (general and Jesus as first) is that the world is to be made good. Christians who emphasise the Spirit beyond all and the Gnostic approach

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

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

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

Nevertheless, Protestant Arians did assert that Christ had acquired a recorded divinity that others did not have. Many Unitarians thought this too - that Christ was superior, only that others could, theoretically, achieve this. Early Unitarians believed in the biblical miracles including the resurrection: Christ's and to come. Surely this makes them Christian.

The Trinity implies far more, and the fact that modern Christians often demote the Trinity to some social giving loving relationship within God and for the world is not what the doctrine was about. Even the Apostles' Creed is not securely Trinitarian. The Nicene Creed definitely is Trinitarian and the Athanasian Creed is Trinitarian with knobs on.

But Unitarians were introducing the 'league table' approach of superiority that needs simply unavailable historical information: unavailable regarding Christ, unavailable regarding anyone else. The best figure available for historical ethical consideration is Gandhi, in our modern period. Muhammad is problematic: his history is no way as secure as often claimed, but he supposedly interfered with camel trains and was involved in fighting. The archaeology is non-existent and the possibility is that Islam has its origin outside of Arabia, after rather than before Arab conquests.

So the First Ecumenical Council at Nicea (Izник) ruled against the Arians, and Councils followed. The ritual worship was the love meal into a simplified Eucharist - and here again a claim to be Christian often involves a demand to accept at least two sacraments: baptism in the Trinity and the Eucharist.

In the third century Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem (now Gentile of course - Bishops of the Circumcision were ejected in 135 CE) and Constantinople (the newer Roman capital) were predominant sees with patriarchs and with

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

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

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

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

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

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



pie' - in other words he is a modern and doesn't share the same thought patterns of those with whom he identifies. He inhabits a world at one big remove.

So to identify with the Christian community through time is almost an act of will, certainly an act of preference.

Unitarians are as much able to do this as anyone else. But there is a point they have to assert, I suggest, and it is that Jesus is in some way Christ. The league table does not work, so it involves definitive, if not unique, givens. Christianity in the end is a doctrinal religion: Hinduism is geographical, Judaism of a people, Islam is of a tribe, Sikhism of communal amalgamating... Christianity is 'right opinion' and that opinion emphasises Christ. It was an historical religion, but history disallows this: Jesus is no less evolved out of chance than anyone else. He has cultural context. How is this man unique? He isn't. He said some interesting things, but nothing anyone else could not have said (and they did). It is one thing to follow a tradition, and draw upon the museum, but it is another to make statements of superiority. Now some called postliberals turn it into a drama of indentifiable rules; other Radical Orthodox set up a Platonic bubble of Church purity, and Rowan Williams buries himself in textual stories. I don't, not as a liberal. A liberal picks and chooses. I cannot see therefore how I can be Christian, even if I draw upon those tradition packages among others.

So, given this argument, are you liberal and are you Christian, and, if so, how?

### Sources used:

El Hassan bin Talal (1998), *Christianity in the Arab World*, London: SCM Press, especially 1-24, 33-42.

Ehrman, Bart D. (2004), *Truth and Fiction in The Da Vinci Code*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, especially 97-139.

# Unitarianism & Politics: An Example

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



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

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

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

for Sheffield, Brightside (David Blunkett's seat in recent times), between 1897 and 1900 (beaten by a Conservative) and then Burnley, between 1906 and 1910 (also beaten by a Conservative).

From 1897 he was organiser of what became the Labour Co-Partnership Association. He was a deliberate anti-socialist defender of labouring links with Liberals and he opposed state intervention. His own book was *Workmen as Producers and Consumers* (1901). Keir Hardie, founder of the ILP, and the Labour Party, described Maddison as: "a blustering bully, ill-mannered and with the unscrapped tongue of a fish-wife."

He was not a Hull Unitarian but joined Wandsworth Unitarian Church and then regularly attended as a member at Essex Church. He preached in Unitarian pulpits and was said to have 'gloried in the name of Unitarian'.

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*June, 1906*

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

## Defining Liberal Preaching

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

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

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

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

preaching; any individual preacher is only ever pointing to an aspect of the whole; and scripture is the proper focus for textual reference. Then comes the participation of the congregation as the activity of the Church (114). From this the Church is built up (115).

So, first of all, the person who delivers the sermon matters; although by grace the truths can still come through a defective individual (106). A person without dedication and with no depth of religion, can theorise but hardly preach (107). In any case involving personality means not to copy another, as it takes away uniqueness (106). I would connect this with the person whose style, focus and interests points to only a part of the greater whole (110). This is one reason why it is good to hear many voices.



The authentic personality is surely relevant, but how do we know? Presumably through building a ministry, or a reputation through preaching, or something known before these: whilst allowing for the defective person still able to say useful

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

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

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

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

Liberals (including Unitarians) might be happier, perhaps, with the language of the Spirit, seen as guiding by Coggan (109). The Spirit beyond Christology allows for inspiration, response, and openness: future as much as past. This can be the means to speak in a religious manner regarding several sources of debatable truths open to all. Why not, if it helps.

Thus can be brought forward the participation of the congregation, and building the life of the Church (114) in the activity of such Spirit. Sometimes the Unitarian service has an 'answer back' for immediate responses to a sermon: such becomes part of the preaching. Equally, discussion might be encouraged afterwards, over coffee. There is a market place of ideas based on various conversations and different experiences. The discernment continues.

Preaching is not lecturing. Coggan says it is to attract (using our emotion) (115), which should mean attracting into the message-making, generate active listening as participation and develop enthusiasm. Coggan states that preaching should teach (using the mind) (115), which for liberals involves progressive and participatory theories of education and not a didactic approach. (How would this change the delivery?) Coggan states that the whole should move the hearer (affect the will) (115), thus to transfer into action regarding improving the life of the group itself - to move on to some kind of work- and attract the outsider. We should not neglect, however, that one result of preaching can be the reception of a sense of comfort (116): to stimulate in the sense of comforting the afflicted at the key part of a religious service through the selection and delivery of words.

Concerning Coggan is the lack of knowledge of scripture and tradition, and therefore the need to assume nothing known within the congregation. To make something simple for them requires much skill, like a good composer well-versed in

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

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

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

participants. Preaching does more than teach: lecturing is, in any case, an inadequate teaching method. It is more to do with motivation: action and comfort: through stimulating empathy as well as knowledge and transforming identity where individual biography coheres with a collective association narrative: a religious identity through time.



Meanwhile, here is a place from which to preach. This image keeps doing the rounds because no one knows where it is and people keep guessing.

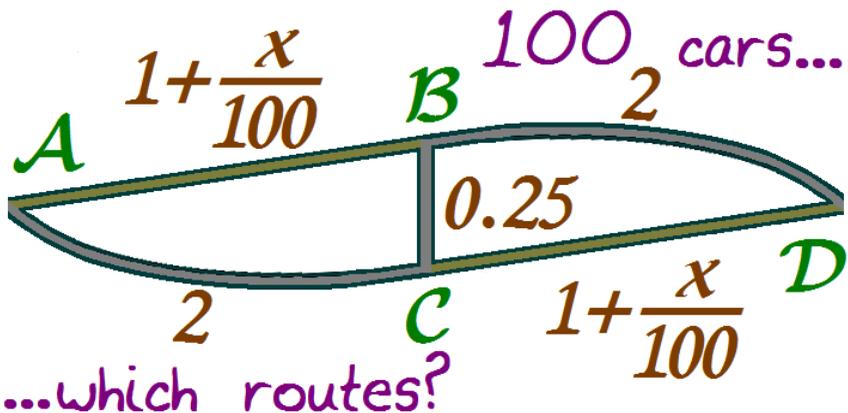


This is another old preaching van. These vans used to go into areas where people had no 'Sunday best' in which to dress, and so did not go to church.... So the van went to them.

# Puzzling All This Out

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

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



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

The first cars of the hundred will be attracted by the roads with the formula, as they are faster. Sensitive to traffic levels (thus the formula), drivers go up A to B (quicker than A to C). As the traffic fills up, these roads slow down. At B cars will use the rat run because the formula road C to D will be quicker even with the rat run. Marginally, each extra car slows down on C to D. As that rat run loses its attraction, cars will go direct from B to D. As all of those slow down, cars will go A to C with a fixed travel time.

Mathematically the cars are counted as a block of 100, as if all together, as this is because with perfect information all cars behave as if they were the first and last car.

The equilibrium is established (at the margin) where 75 cars go A to B, taking 1.75 units of time, 50 of those veer off down the rat run so that they go B to C taking 0.25 more, and then this makes 75 taking 1.75 units of time traversing C to D. That deviation of B to C to D is as quick as going B to D. 25 cars go A to C realising that their journey time was 2 plus 1.75. So the journey time for every car is always 3.75, and everyone sticks to their individual route and we have equilibrium.

However, if you pedestrianise the road B to C, then 50 cars go from A to B and 50 go from A to C, and the journey time on routes A to B and C to D of 50 cars each take 1.50 units of time, and thus the journey time for all cars is 3.50. In other words, less road space quickens the journey.

In 1968 Dietrich Braess, working on traffic modelling, noticed that adding a road to a congested road traffic network could increase overall journey times! Thus, up to a point, when you build a Castle Street and you build a Freetown Way, you shut some roads in between - learning from the Nash Equilibrium.