

United in Diversity



UNITARIANISM AND CHRISTIANITY
LOUISE REEVE



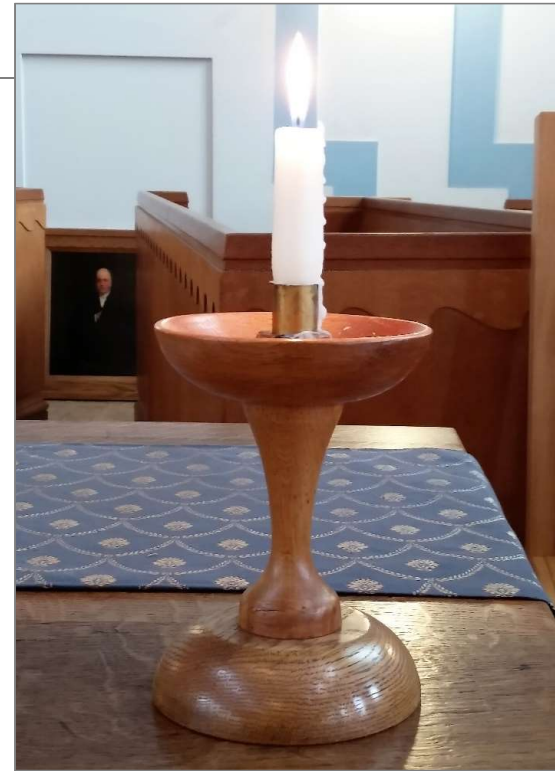
Outline

- What is Unitarianism?
- Origins and the Great Ejection
- Modern Unitarianism
- Are Unitarians Christian?
- Our chalice
- What can we learn from each other?



Chalice Lighting

- Unitarians begin all gatherings by lighting our chalice candle
- Words by Rev. Cliff Reed.



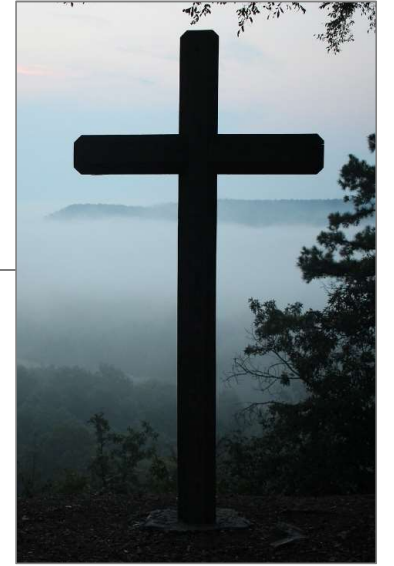
What is Unitarianism?

I was asked this recently. My answer:

“A religious and spiritual community in which we are united by our search for spiritual truth and meaning, exploring human wisdom traditions, and trying to live our values. This includes being part of our communities; local, national and international. We do not all agree, but we are all united by the search.”



How does Christianity fit into this?



- Traditionally, 'Unitarian' in a Christian context means 'affirming the Oneness of God'
- Contrasted with Trinitarianism: 'God exists as, or in, three equally divine "Persons", the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit'
- This debate has existed in Christian thought since Christian thought has existed...



Very early Unitarian thought

- Moses?
- **Arianism** – the doctrine that Jesus, as the Son of God, was *created* by God
- Originated by Arius of Alexandria in the 4th century CE
- In 325CE the Council of Nicaea stated that this is heresy, and formulated the Nicene Creed



Michael Servetus (1511-1553)

- Born in Navarre, southern France, in 1511
- Key argument: Jesus is not to be equated with God, but instead seen as the supreme revealer of God to human beings.
- Burned at the stake in Geneva in 1553 on the orders of John Calvin.



Faustus Socinus (1539-1604)



- Born in Italy in 1539, settled in Poland in 1579 and became leader of the Polish Church. He taught that:
 - God is one.
 - Although granted divine status by God, Jesus should primarily be seen as a human being who 'saved' humanity through his teachings and the example he set of how people should live.



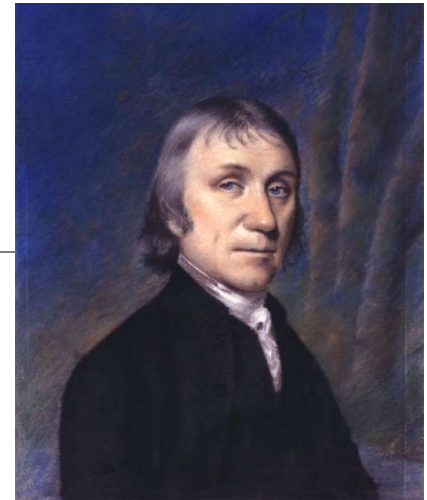
The Great Ejection of 1662

- 1662: Parliament passes the Act of Uniformity, making use of the Anglican Prayer Book compulsory.
- Around 2,000 clergy refused to use it and were 'ejected' from their parishes.
- Including one of our founders:
Rev. William Durant.



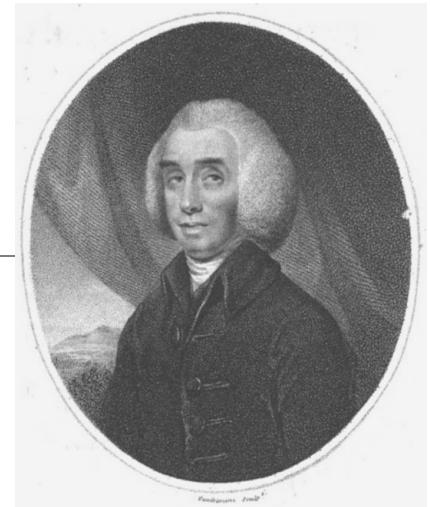
Joseph Priestley

- Three thinkers who established Unitarianism as a denomination: Joseph Priestley, Theophilus Lindsey, Thomas Belsham.
- All marked by a commitment to bringing reason to the study of scripture.
- **Joseph Priestley** (1733-1804): Christ was neither divine or infallible, but a great human teacher.



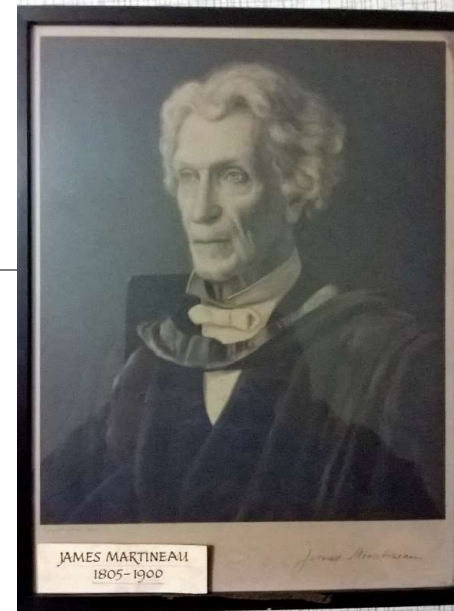
Theophilus Lindsey and Thomas Belsham

- **Theophilus Lindsey** (1723-1808): In 1774, Lindsey opened a chapel in Essex House in London – the first UK congregation to be explicitly known as ‘Unitarian’
- **Thomas Belsham** (1750-1829): One of the first members of the clergy to reject the notion of the six-day creation, and argue for multiple authors of the Pentateuch.



James Martineau (1805-1900)

- At this point, Unitarian thinkers were grappling with the question of whether reason or scripture should be the ultimate authority.
- **James Martineau:** The only true sources of authority are reason and conscience
- Where conflict arises between scripture and reason, one should follow reason.



Newcastle upon Tyne Unitarians

- There have been Unitarians in Newcastle since 1662.
- 1813 – Unitarianism declared legal in the UK.
- In 1851, we took the name “Church of the Divine Unity”.
- We have had five homes so far – our present church building dates from 1939.



Modern Unitarianism

“What I think of when I describe Unitarianism is the idea of unity. That all humanity is ‘one’. Unitarianism practices this by bringing together people from all religions, faith and by using the sacred documents of all religions. All religions hold some truth and we are all seeking that truth, or the meaning and purpose of our lives.”



Unitarians and Other Faiths

“Unitarians do not say that all religions are the same. Nor do we say that all are of equal worth. What we do say is that no honest and sincere expression of belief should be discounted out of hand. All true expressions of the religious impulse come from our encounter with the wonder and mystery of the universe.” *Rev . Cliff Reed*



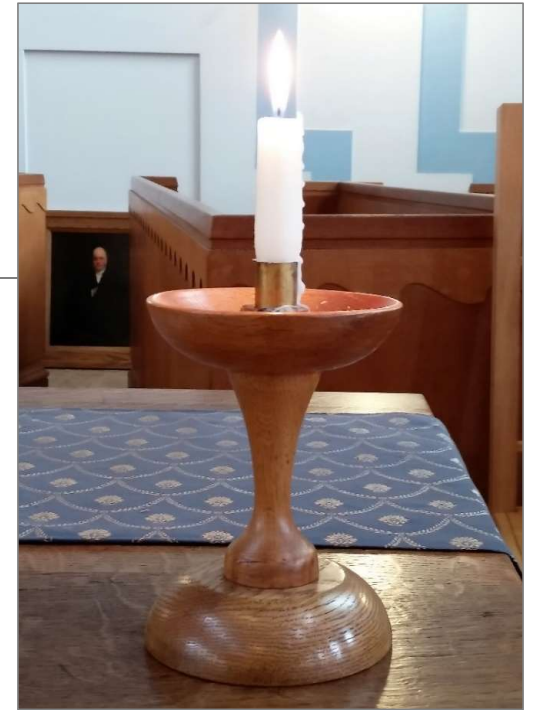
So, are modern Unitarians Christians?

- Some are, some are not!
- A non-dogmatic and non-creedal movement.
- All congregations are independent and worship in our own way.
- Unitarian Christianity, particularly the Unitarian Christian Association, and Free Christianity are strong influences within our movement.



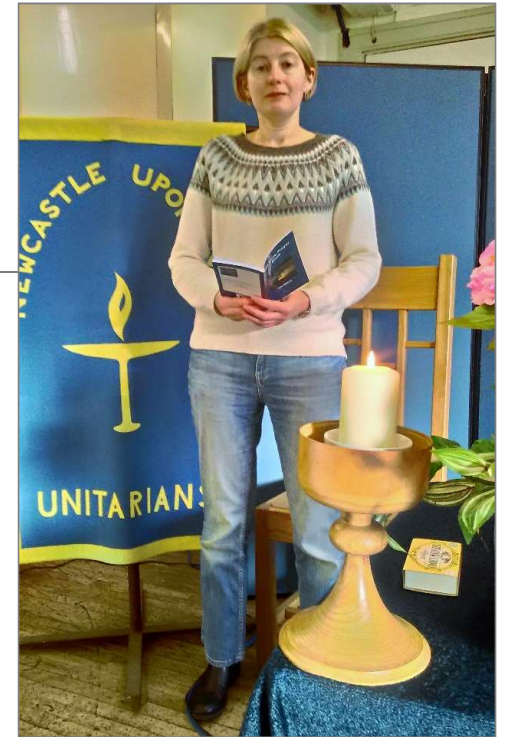
The Chalice

- Inspired by Jan Huss and the Hussite reforming movement of the early 1400s.
- Modern chalice symbol was designed in 1942 by Czech artist Hans Deutsch, requested by the American Unitarian Service Committee.
- Love, truth and liberty
- Martyrdom of people who fought for religious freedom



My Unitarian journey

- I have always been Unitarian...
- Formerly Methodist and still with much respect for Methodism.
- Joined the Unitarian congregation in 2010, and am now a lay worship leader and Chairperson of the congregation.



Sources and Further Reading

- 'The Elements of Unitarianism' by George Chryssides
- 'Unitarian? What's That?' by Rev. Cliff Reed
- 'Unitarians: Together in Diversity' by Rev. Sue Woolley
- Unitarian Christian Association:
www.unitarianchristian.org.uk/readinglist



Discussion Points

- Happy to answer questions on contemporary Unitarianism!
 - Have you thoughts to share on any of the thinkers whose work we have touched on here?
 - What would you like to know more about?
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Any questions?
