



**BEYOND THE HORIZON**  
DISSENT, INDEPENDENCE AND THE FUTURE  
OF THE FREE RELIGIOUS TRADITION

A. B. DOWNING

THE ESSEX HALL LECTURE FOR 1976

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This is the Essex Hall Lecture for 1976, and was delivered in Edinburgh on April 6, 1976. Essex Hall is the headquarters of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches, and stands on the site of the building where the first avowedly Unitarian congregation met over two hundred years ago. The lecture was founded in 1892, and many distinguished persons in various fields have contributed to the series. The delivery of the lecture is one of the leading events during the annual meetings of the assembly.

A list of previous lectures still in print will be found in the catalogue of the Lindsey Press.

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*The cover photographs are of the (undenominational) Chapel of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology at Cambridge, Mass., U.S.A., and are reproduced by kind permission of the M.I.T. Historical Collections. The Chapel was designed by Eero Saarinen and was built in 1955. It receives illumination by light reflected from the external world through a carefully constructed water-filled moat, and is at the heart of an intellectual complex uniquely consecrated, in what was once a New World, with hopes and possibilities of our present one.*

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IN THIS YEAR of the American Bicentennial and before a Unitarian and free religious assembly in Edinburgh, an Essex Hall Lecturer cannot avoid some acts of ancestral piety. The question is, what form should they take, and how many of them should there be, at a time when we are all more concerned with the future than with the past? The future, no longer only the free gift of Time, is now also alarmingly our own creation. Even so we cannot doubt that, in the year when we commemorate the American Declaration of Independence as one of the supreme compositions of all recorded time, we ought to look back in gratitude and respect to the man who drafted it, and to those who pored over it, signed it and in due course implemented it. We cannot do justice to them all. But we may and must remember one in particular, Thomas Jefferson, who composed the famous words, superbly expressed the free spirit of his fellow-Americans and who was in the same radical religious tradition as we are ourselves. The future may be alarming. The present is all too evident. But the past is not without its consolations if we can bring back the memory of Jefferson in America and the Dissenters in England who gave him aid and comfort.

It would be unrealistic to forget, as well as impolite to neglect, the place and country where these reflections are being delivered. The people of Scotland, now more than ever, are folk to be reckoned with. Many of them are now calculating, too precisely for our English comfort, what we owe to them and what they can demand from us. The genius of Thomas Jefferson, who penned a Declaration of Independence, could well just now attract more acclaim among the Scots than among the Britons south of the Border. But it can scarcely be claimed that Jefferson's spiritual outlook was more widely appreciated in Scotland than in England. The English, for a long time, took their Christian orthodoxy seriously and carried it even to cruel lengths. But even more so did the Scots, who do not seem to be much given to treating their souls with a smile. Not for them the happy English compromise of occasional conformity, which legally entitled some eminent Dissenters to play important roles in public life in England.<sup>1</sup> I hope an Englishman may recall with a smile that it was an Old Etonian from England who in 1783, encouraged by Joseph Priestley and Theophilus Lindsey, came to the help and inspiration of Scotland's first official Unitarian, William Christie at Montrose<sup>2</sup>. What an exciting new Unitarian Thomas Fyshe Palmer must have seemed to sober Scots—wealthy, wilful and warm-hearted, tempestuous and intelligent, a superb

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scholar and theologically like a flash of lightning on a dark scene. Unfettered by any wife or family he moved around, prodding for reform wherever he could. Since 1844 he has been commemorated, on that obelisk dominating Edinburgh's Old Carlton Hill, as one of the Scottish Political Martyrs—condemned to convict life in Australia for doing no more than correct the script of a humble address pleading for elementary political reform. A highly articulate Cambridge scholar, he was the first Botany Bay convict to write a book.

We may proudly recall also three other Englishmen who helped to plant and foster the Unitarian heresy in Scotland. There is the young James Yates who in 1811 became the Unitarian minister in Glasgow and who, in 1813 with Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith, founded the Scottish Unitarian Association; he devoted his later years in London to diverse and learned pursuits, was elected Fellow of the Royal Society, was one of the founders of the British Association for the Advancement of Science and its first secretary and was a leading advocate of the decimal system.<sup>3</sup> We have the ever-notable Dr. Thomas Southwood Smith himself who, during his medical studies, became the Edinburgh Unitarian congregation's first regular minister. Epidemiologist and sanitary reformer, he was the doctor and friend to whom Jeremy Bentham—willing in this way to promote better arrangements for anatomy studies—left his body to be publicly dissected at University College, London, where his skeleton, suitably clothed and sitting sedately on a glass-framed chair, assisted occasionally at meetings of his surviving friends. From England also, with larger ideas of Unitarianism, came H. W. Crosskey in 1852 ready to contend with orthodox bigotry. A fiery flame with burning ideals, he never ceased to agitate for public education, workers' and women's rights as well as for Italian freedom-fighters and much else, quite apart from finding time to become a distinguished geologist. Gifted men such as these wasted neither their time nor their talents. Unitarians they were—and we shall mention more—but their character is so diverse as to elude succinct description. Yet they are unmistakable: always to be found along the frontiers of religion and social progress. They worked away at the limits of knowledge, pushing them outwards; they were not content with settled territory. That is why they are still significant in the very different world of today—as I shall hope to show in what follows.

Corporate religion, like capitalism, has always had an "unacceptable face". That is one of the reasons for Rational Dissent and other kinds of Nonconformity. Organized Christianity now is not visibly on a seller's market, as the late Sir Denis Brogan once observed. Indeed, along with other traditional forms of religion, it has for some time been on the defensive. Already in 1878 James Martineau was writing to his friend J. H. Thom that those who had lost their faith in any personal God in-

cluded "an immense majority of the educated people in Germany and Holland, if not in England", adding significantly:

The curiosity felt about foreign and ancient religions, with the apparent hope of getting some truth out of them, seems to be one of the many features of resemblance between our time and the period of the Roman Empire—a resemblance which would affect me with less uneasiness if I could anywhere see a nascent influence comparable with the young Christianity. But while the decay is plain enough, no such regenerating power is as yet apparent; and though with full faith in its return, I expect "we shall die without the sight".<sup>4</sup>

Well nigh one hundred years later we are still "without the sight" of Martineau's hoped for "regenerating power". It is of course the best part of humanity to go on searching for what is not easily found; things usually go wrong after, not before we make discoveries.<sup>5</sup> So perhaps we modern Rational Dissenters and Unitarians should take heart. To borrow from the title of Roger Thomas's Essex Hall Lecture of 1970 we must carry on "ploddingly upwards from dogma to discovery". It is my guess, and indeed my proposition in this 1976 Lecture, that our liberal religious forerunners distinctively advanced the frontiers of discovery and were able to grasp new perceptions and new possibilities in ways which are still significantly open to us today. We can thereby be reassured of our role. Perhaps, in advancing this opinion, I am doing no more than Jacob did of old when he "dugged again the wells of water which they had dugged in the days of his father Abraham" (Gen. XXVI.18). We shall see. In a changing present and before an uncertain future we have beyond denial an interesting past, from which we may still derive sources of inspiration. We may possibly live in a pulsating cosmos, expanding and contracting and expanding again over unimaginable aeons of time. It could wind down and evolution could begin all over again. But the imponderable certainty is still the power of thought. Those in the old tradition of liberal and rational dissent have made their mark by thinking . . . and thinking and thinking again. They still have work to do:

Come! let us write our mortal signature  
 across the unsubjective world, and claim  
 that all its temporal attributes endure,  
 and some are beautiful, because we came.  
 Or say the moon did never evening lure  
 with her cold magic till we spoke her name,  
 nor the great star of the sun was ever sure,  
 till we saluted him, of his tall flame.  
 Let us endow the universe, and feel it  
 slide through the wavering borderlands of sense,  
 and in the instant of creation seal it  
 with thought's sign-manual of permanence.  
 (Humbert Wolfe, "The Builder III")<sup>6</sup>

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Since the life of this Essex Hall Lectureship practically coincides with the length of this accelerating century it may be wise, as well as useful, to look backwards over the procession of one's predecessors. What did they—wise or well-known, specialists or general practitioners in the art of life and religion—make of this annual opportunity of addressing a

distinctively liberal religious audience for whom, at least in principle, no spiritual holds are barred in our general grasp of things? Already in 1976 we can sniff in the atmosphere the unidentifiable scent of a new century. Is it the smell of burning energy, or the decay of new corruptions or the perfume of new pastures? All of us wish we knew, at the tail end of a century in which there are too many people producing too many problems. In the wisdom of one of those delightful Russian proverbs we can certainly reflect that life is not exactly like crossing a field. At least we can look backwards to some advantage at the expired portion of our allotted century. As we falter, or stride, ahead, across the decades still unexpended, what can we learn from the evaluations, the commitments, the apprehensions, the faith of my predecessors in this Lectureship?

What a far-flung net they were caught in, and in return how broad and varied the range of their sensibilities and the extent of their learning. Perhaps at first, beginning as they did in 1893, those eminent Unitarian electors erred on the side of safety. They sought profundity in respectability. And who shall blame them? Wishing to put on record sensibilities and sources of inspiration which they themselves cherished as good Unitarians, they sought, and found, the best expositors. Noble themes and vast issues were embarked upon by the chosen lecturers—proof, if any were needed, that Unitarians and their like can drink deep at many different wells of inspiration in the fields of history and evolution, philosophy and poetry, theology and science, technology and social affairs. Exalted lessons were drawn from the sagas of heresy as well as from some of the foiled searchings of our mortality. Naturally wars and rumours of wars are reflected in some of the themes. But anxieties are always helpfully expressed. No lecturers are cheerless. All, like R. W. Emerson, are careful to distinguish the sound of pop-guns from the crack of doom. Even when skies are dark and the Christian religion seems to have lost its relevance as well as its radiance, the lecturers still strike hopeful notes, firmly implying if not positively declaring that our human faults are mendable, that men and women are teachable even if they are not always willing to learn.

The series would hardly be complete without occasional reminders—especially in the earlier Essex Hall Lectures—of the whole grand tradition of Rational and Radical Dissent not least within Christianity, though the reasonableness of revelation in other religions is not neglected. Occasionally a polite edge creeps into distinguished voices. The noble and lofty Mrs. Humphry Ward on *Unitarians and the Future* in 1894—not the niece of Matthew Arnold for nothing—is beautifully articulate and sensitive. She is soon troubled by the impression that Unitarianism gives her of being “the remains of something else” and of suffering from “indecision” in much of its thought and teaching. It lacks “ardour” and “a certain

intensity of inward vision”; it has “a defective sense of what is delicate and lovely” whereas “Catholicism and its derivative Anglicanism” protect themselves against mediocrity by making use of the “sifted best” whether of emotion or of speech. Mrs. Ward believed in the pursuit of excellence, as some of us do still. We wonder what the sensitive lady would think today of the New English Bible or of the use of the vernacular in the Roman Mass.<sup>7</sup> But that can only be a passing question. The fact to emphasize in 1976, the year of the Sex Discrimination Act, is that Mrs. Humphry Ward was a woman, the first of three, be it noted, in the long succession of Essex Hall Lecturers—the sort of beautiful woman with the qualities of an honest man whom the best of us always admire and whom the Unitarians of 1894 had the wit to select to give them some timely wisdom, anti-suffragist though she was.

Dr. L. P. Jacks in 1921, like Mrs. Humphry Ward in 1894, whilst admitting loyalty to the Unitarian way in religion did not conceal a certain detachment from it, even some little impatience. Both were eager that a liberal form of religion should present above all a nationally acceptable face. Mrs. Ward having mourned and refused to be comforted over the Unitarian lack of artistry, Dr. Jacks cleverly animadverted on what he called “the church and chapel atmosphere” in which the “radiant conceptions” at the heart of Christianity tended to be repressed. He wanted a Christianity that did not “brood upon the sorrows of mankind for there is that in the Gospel which is more akin to the song of the skylark and the babbling of brooks”. Theology and churchmanship tended to be divisive and so, if we were to penetrate the secret of Christ, “our minds should be undisturbed by controversial interests”. It was, it seemed, the lofty religious note, above party passions, that the Unitarian and the liberal Christian ought to strike. But how well, often enough, Jacks could see into the heart of things when he opined in 1921: “Man and his world are transfigured together; how could it be otherwise, seeing that both are of one substance?”—surely an insight even more penetrating in 1976. Dr. Jacks, though a Unitarian minister, had emancipated himself from denominational trammels and had become a popular philosopher not least through his editorship of the *Hibbert Journal* (now, alas, no more). He could never entirely repress his attitude of superiority towards the duties and self-sacrifices entailed in maintaining a small, ancient and honourable liberal tradition in organized religion. He was at ease in the mid-stream, restive in the side-currents. But in the long series of Essex Hall Lectures there have been regular reminders, and studies, of these side-currents which are both inseparable from, and essential to, the main stream of religion. Unitarians may have been small in their numbers, but they have always been big in their ideas and comprehensive in their sympathies. It is just for that reason that individualists like Dr. Jacks and his distinguished Victorian father-in-law Stopford Brooke—to name only two who were

early Essex Hall Lecturers—could be ministers within the Unitarian fold. Unitarians took pride in not fettering them and they in turn were grateful for the intellectual freedom and spiritual springboard which they could not so easily have found in any other Christian denomination.

If the Essex Hall Lecture has enabled men and women eminent in varied fields to reflect on large themes or particular problems, it has also given to representative Unitarians an annual opportunity of assessing or discussing matters of more immediate denominational interest. So we find Unitarian scholars seeking to relate the figure of Jesus to his own age as well as to their own. They have assessed the ancient wrongs and modern rights of heresy, drawn religious lessons from the Middle Ages, re-asserted freedom and tolerance as safeguards of civilization, meditated on immortality, studied the implications of forgiveness and the demands of reason in religion, reflected on the virtues of veracity, on human rights, on mysticism, on religious faiths outside the Christian scheme of things. And of course, not least, there have been assessments and reassessments of the story and significance of the Unitarian movement itself, culminating at the tercentenary of English Nonconformity in 1962 in a notable disquisition on Dissent in relation to the unfolding complexities of our own day. We do indeed miss amongst us now, in 1976, the mind and character of H. L. Short who, in his *Dissent and the Community*, stirred us Unitarians with new light on our old story in the life of these British Isles and challenged us to contribute as much to religion's future as we have to its past. The challenge is with us still. With Christian orthodoxy "a minority and an irrelevance" what, in religious terms, he asked us, "do we contribute to the great debate of our time?" What indeed? It is a question I shall not avoid, even if I cannot clearly answer it.

This broad survey of past Essex Hall Lectures will, I trust, remind us—and others—of some of the intellectual and religious virtues in the Unitarian tradition. No doubt some of them could almost as easily have been given to other audiences. Their significance does not only lie in what was said, but also in the themes selected, nearly all of them raising questions which still knock upon the door of our religious minds.

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It is said that in France there are many cheeses but only two religious traditions, whereas in England there are only two cheeses but many religious traditions. I think we may claim, as Unitarians, that ours is the tradition which has been most consistently active in trying to relate religion to everything else. Certainly it is Unitarians, with their associates and precursors, who have suffered more than most religious people for their advocacy of reason, tolerance and common sense in *all* areas of public and human interest. For this it would not be fair to have our pride taken away from us,

least of all in this year of the American Bicentennial when the United States of America, now a mighty power, sets out on the third century of its history. The intellectual weight and self-sacrificing fervour of Unitarians, 200 years ago, who advocated and worked for the independence of the American colonies, deserve more remembrance than they will probably receive. Those who in the 1770's did much, or even most, in the United Kingdom for the intellectual and moral defence of American independence were primarily those British scholars, ministers of religion, scientists and leaders of opinion who were broadly within the liberal tradition which is the chief ingredient of our modern Unitarian movement. We may recall especially Joseph Priestley F.R.S., the Unitarian scientist-minister and "father of modern chemistry"; the Rev. Richard Price F.R.S., the moral philosopher and mathematician, pioneer in actuarial, demographic and fiscal studies; and the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey, reformist Fellow of St. John's College, Cambridge, Anglican clergyman who in 1774 founded the first overtly Unitarian congregation at Essex Street in London—all three on the network which closely linked them, through personal friendship and correspondence, with the Americans Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin. Privately and publicly, powerfully and persuasively, they defended the secessionists and poured scorn on the status quo. For them America was more "a sort of cause" than a country. Not for nothing was Dr. Richard Price, the liberal Dissenter, invited by the American Congress in 1778 to settle in America as "a Citizen of the united States" so that they might "receive his Assistance in regulating their Finances". An attested copy of the Congress resolution was sent to the American agents in Paris, Benjamin Franklin, Arthur Lee and John Adams, who promptly wrote to Dr. Price:

We request your answer, sir, as soon as may be convenient. If it should be in the affirmative, you may depend upon us to discharge the expense of your journey and voyage, and for every assistance in our power to make your passage agreeable, as well as your reception and accommodation in our country.

In the event Dr. Price preferred to remain in Newington Green, London, for reasons of health and age (the congregation which he served there has been a distinguished one in the annals of English Unitarianism). In 1781 the two men on whom the University of Yale Corporation voted to confer their Doctorate of Laws were George Washington—and Richard Price!

A letter from the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey to the Rev. William Turner of Wakefield in January 1775 illustrates the solid commitment of the Unitarian Dissenters to the American cause:

I am grieved, and so also is Dr. Price, at your account of the temper of almost all about you (at Wakefield) towards the much injured and persecuted Americans. They will, however, vindicate their own cause, and we shall see the justice of it when poverty and our own interest has opened our eyes. I dined yesterday in company with Drs. Price, Priestley, Franklin, and Mr. Quincey. We began and ended with the Americans. Mr. Q. was large on the subject. He read four or five long letters lately received from persons of worth and eminence in New England—all of which concurred to assure us that our brethren on the other side of the Atlantic will be free.<sup>9</sup>

As perhaps a little known example of widespread Unitarian support for human rights in the American Revolution and in the first stages of the

French one, I may mention the Rev. Harry Toulmin who, after Unitarian ministries at Monton (1786-88) and Chowbent (1788-92) in Lancashire, emigrated to America where he became Secretary to the State of Kentucky, Judge of the Mississippi Territory and member of the General Assembly of the State of Alabama. He too was one of Lindsey's numerous correspondents.<sup>10</sup> In Wakefield a well-known Unitarian merchant, Pemberton Milnes, out of radical fervour, had a son christened Alfred Washington Mirabeau Milnes!

Priestley, Lindsey and Price supported human rights and reform not only in the body politic but also in the public organization and intellectual expression of religion. The American Bicentennial of 1976 gives us an admirable pretext for remembering the intellectual and religious labours of Dr. Price, from which (I believe) we may draw some hope and guidance as we try to fulfil our free religious functions today.

Among Unitarians Price is understandably remembered as a leading Liberal Dissenter in the ministry of Christian religion. But he is much more up-to-date as a moral philosopher whose classical *Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals* appeared thrice in his life-time (1758, 1769 and 1787) and was re-published in 1948. His is also one of the most honoured names in the history of actuarial science (on which millions of us depend for our pensions and life insurances) and he was a pioneer in the application of mathematical statistics in the all-important field we now know as demography. Like Priestley but more intimately he had close links with Lord Shelburne, the leading pro-American and Whig opponent of King George III's policies towards the transatlantic colonies (and incidentally a munificent patron of the fine arts). Like Priestley, too, Price had vast intellectual gifts and could get through an immense amount of work with of course none of the aids which modern scientists can call upon. The age of the American and French Revolutions is almost breathtakingly rich in human talent: creative, artistic, industrial and intellectual. It was a period of intellectual quickening and eager exchange, despite the appalling slowness of communications—"seas roll and months pass between the order and the execution" as Edmund Burke complained in Parliament. As Wordsworth put it:

Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive,  
But to be young was very heaven! Oh! times,  
In which the meagre, stale, forbidding ways  
Of custom, law, and statute, took as once  
The attraction of a country in Romance!  
When Reason seem'd the most to assert her rights  
When most intent on making of herself  
A prime enchantress—to assist the work,  
Which then was going forward in her name!

In our chief centres of population the intellectual and religious forerunners of modern Unitarians were always among the chief proponents of a larger tolerance, more sensible opinions and better ways of governing the political

body of Britain—and chief also among those, in the Midlands not least, who applied new knowledge and new methods in the industrial and social improvement of our country. Price was one of those who helped to expose, by statistics, the utter injustice and inadequacy of the parliamentary franchise at that time. He argued that if more people were allowed to vote, then larger numbers of virtuous men would be able to exercise their influence on politics—a proposition perhaps not so obvious to us today!

It is surprising that such a mild and quiet man as Price should have so many stirring interests. He was surprised himself by the same fact, and often as a parson had a bad conscience about it. Conscience of his health, childless favourite with children, fiscal adviser and reformer, he was also the friend of the restless prison reformer John Howard, as well as the helper of the troubled Mary Wollstonecraft, unfortunate in her love affairs and pioneer authoress of *Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792). Price would have applauded that famous *Vindication* if he had lived to see it, as Robert Burns happily did:

While Europe's eye is fix'd on mighty things,  
The fate of empires and the fall of kings:  
While quacks of State must each produce his plan,  
And even children lisp the Rights of Man;  
Amid this mighty luss just let me mention,  
The Rights of Woman merit some attention.

—though perhaps Twentieth Century Woman will not wholeheartedly agree with all the later lines in this poem. We can only be sure that then, as now, men and women were becoming alive to new sensibilities about themselves. Frontiers of thought as well as frontiers of feeling were being advanced—and the forerunners of modern Unitarians were among the frontiersmen. If they were more prominent than we are now, we must remember that they had no difficulty in seeing blatant wrongs that had to be righted or in discerning fetters that had to be removed. As the Unitarian minister of King's Chapel, Boston, New England (the Rev. James Freeman), wrote to Theophilus Lindsey in 1790: "Our oppressions keep alive our zeal, and occasion many excellent writings in defence of the equal liberties of mankind; whilst the unbounded liberty they (i.e. the Unitarians in America) enjoy has almost extinguished the zeal in many among them but not in all."<sup>11</sup> Our forerunners did not have to justify their reforming zeal or wonder how to employ it. We Unitarians today, by contrast, are not people in search of an author so much as people in search of a character. How relieved we would be to have an obvious *raison d'être* now that we are living in another age of revolutions in which, as Tom Paine said of the one in which he lived, "everything may be looked for".<sup>12</sup> The historian of religion describes it as post-Christian. For the psychologist it is post-Freudian. For the economist it is post-industrial, and for the scientist it is post-atomic. It is certainly in many respects a dissenting age, in which old orthodoxies are on the defensive (though new ones arise). All this makes it more not less likely that there is a place in it for our particular Unitarian tradition of religious, tolerant,

critical, humane and individualistic rationalism and dissent. What a long string of attributes to attach to a single tradition! What is the *real* or underlying nature of our spiritual inheritance (if we may even use the word "spiritual" without begging too many questions)? Let us look further at Richard Price for some possible clues.

He, Lindsey and Priestley form an outstanding trio. Priestley was a distinguished scientist as well as a controversialist in religion; he was also an educator and communicator. Lindsey was primarily devoted to the ministry of religion itself, but in this he served not merely the souls but also the minds and bodies of his people. For him it was also a religious duty to try to bring up to date Christianity's intellectual expression and the Church's public apparatus. Richard Price, too, had a sense of religious vocation, and his enthusiasms were every bit as reformist. But his temperament was mild, his theology more old-fashioned. Perhaps his rather ailing Anglican wife helped to keep his religious outlook more restrained. Neither was he a moral philosopher for nothing. He advocated civil liberty not so much because he believed in government by the majority as in government by consent in which the worth of the individual was recognized and there was respect for honest, if minority, opinions. Careful moralist and mathematician that he was, he was not exactly restrained when he published early in 1776 his famous *Observations on the Nature of Civil Liberty, the Principles of Government, and the Justice and Policy of the War with America*, which had an explosive effect. Even the royal Duke of Cumberland averred that he had read it "till I was blind", to which another noble lord is said to have replied, "It is remarkable that your Royal Highness should have been so blinded by a book which has opened the eyes of all mankind". In it incidentally Dr. Price suggested a general confederacy of the states of Europe by the appointment of a Senate consisting of national representatives—as many ardent Europeans advocate today. He also remarkably anticipated the concept of Dominion status and colonial self-government as defined in the Statute of Westminster more than a century and a half later. What is remarkable about Price is his finely developed sense of the future. I suggest to you that this is essentially a *spiritual* characteristic. It implies—struggle against the thought as some people may—that if we have no sense of the future, then we have no sense at all.

There was yet another occasion when a sense of the future overcame the mild Dr. Price. Learning from his nephew in Paris of the Fall of the Bastille and the French Revolution and being the guest speaker at a London meeting to commemorate our own Glorious Revolution of 1688 when Parliament became sovereign again and William and Mary came to the throne, he used the occasion to deliver *A Discourse on the Love of our Country*. This was the utterance about which Edmund Burke was so angry in his famous *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, this in turn provoking Tom Paine's still rever-

berating *Rights of Man*. These three famous compositions can be briefly illustrated as follows:

What an eventful period is this! I am thankful that I have lived to it . . . I have lived to see the rights of man better understood than ever; and nations panting for liberty, which seemed to have lost the idea of it. I have lived to see thirty millions of people, indignant and resolute, spurning at slavery, and demanding liberty with an irresistible voice. (Richard Price)

The awful Author of our being is the author of our place in the order of existence; and . . . having disposed and marshalled us by a divine tactic, not according to our will, but according to his, he has, in and by that disposition, virtually subjected us to act the part which belongs to the place assigned us. (Edmund Burke)

As wise men are astonished at foolish things, and other people at wise ones, I know not on which ground to account for Mr. Burke's astonishment; but certain it is, that he does not understand the French Revolution. It has apparently burst forth like a creation from a chaos, but it is no more than the consequence of a mental revolution priorly existing in France. The mind of the nation had changed beforehand, and the new order of things has naturally followed the new order of thoughts. (Thomas Paine)

Fate was kind to the mild and gentle Dr. Price: he died before the Revolution in France became a blood-bath. We know that revolutions happen and must continue—without blood-baths as far as our brains can ensure that. We are in the middle of a mental revolution even now. As Paine declared, a new order of things must naturally follow a new order of thoughts—an insight indeed, and if our minds are not thrilled by it, then we are beyond redemption!

We see that Dr. Price was always at the frontier, pushing on into unknown territory. Just as Priestley directed his scientific talents towards the study of electricity—as exciting and novel in its implications as nuclear energy is today—so Price helped to elaborate the notion of probability, which, according to a modern expert<sup>13</sup>, is one of "the main conceptual structures which distinguish the intellectual culture of modern civilization". "The art of coming to reasonable conclusions under conditions of uncertainty or irregularity is a major invention of the modern world". Price made a distinctive contribution to that invention, although like many intellectual pioneers he was far-sighted in some directions and wrong-headed in others. He was wrong for example in interpreting the evidence available to him as suggesting that the English population was declining with the result (so he feared) that, through Government policy and the cost of the war against the Colonies in America, posterity would be burdened with a national debt alarmingly larger than it could possibly meet. The same fears chill us today when we consider the colossal burden of national debt with which we are not only mortgaging our own future but also saddling posterity. We have still to wake up to the moral, and fiscal, consequences of this. We sorely need a modern Dr. Price.

It was because of his mathematical work on probability that he was consulted by the Equitable Life Assurance Society about the problem of calculating life contingencies and survivorships, with a view to giving a safer basis to the provision of insurance and the relief of widowhood and old age, then a new field of interest. All this led, in 1771, to the publication of what Benjamin Franklin praised as "the foremost production of human under-



standing that this century has afforded us". Its range of interests is indicated by its full title: *Observations on Reversionary Payments. On the Schemes for providing Annuities for Widows and Persons of Old Age: On the Method of calculating the Values of Assurance on Lives, and on the National Debt*. The work incorporated some work that he had already submitted to the Royal Society, of which he was a Fellow, and it included a section on subjects still alarmingly relevant to us today: "Observations on the Expectations of Lives, the Increase of Mankind, the Influence of Great Towns on Population, and particularly the State of London with respect to the Healthfulness and Number of Inhabitants".<sup>14</sup> In his section on public credit and the national debt Price confessed: "I find it difficult to speak with calmness. But I must restrain myself. *Calculation* and not *censure*, is my business in this work."

Price had passion as well as clarity of mind. He was also a delightful and very tender-hearted human being. Out walking one day he saw some larks caught in a net. He released them—but left some money behind for the poor man reduced to catching them. On another occasion, noticing a beetle struggling on its back he absentmindedly went on. Recollecting it later he retraced his steps across a field and helped the insect to its feet again.<sup>15</sup>

Price, Priestley and Lindsey fascinate by the way they opened up and worked on new lines of intellectual and progressive activity. They had no difficulty in grasping new concepts and applying them. True, they may have had their blind spots, for which we in the twentieth century can hardly blame them, but they were always eager to see human experience in a fresh light. With their scientific and progressive friends in France and America they formed a truly international (and hard-working) fellowship of the enlightened—whose modern equivalent might be the Club of Rome. They worked across frontiers internationally and intellectually. If only our own International Association for Religious Freedom were doing now what they did then! Perhaps it will, one day.

Thus, in brief, Price seized upon, and sharpened, one of the chief instruments of our intellectual culture, more important than ever today, the concept of probability. So, too, Priestley, after first making his name in the then novel field of electricity, went on to isolate the element which is not only the most abundant by weight in the universe but is at the very centre of the processes of life. A pretty basic accomplishment! Just as significant—despite the extremes to which he carried it—was his doctrine that matter and mind are part of an integrated universe. As the Unitarian Dr. W. E. Channing interpreted him, he regarded matter not as a substance but as a power—a view still yielding its implications in the modern scientific study of reality. His ideas were not original; what was original was to express them as a minister of religion. Price and Priestley were thus in the vanguard of thought—which is always where Unitarians ought to be but where, now, sadly they are not. Forward thinking is mostly done by those with little or

no connection with organized religion—with honourable exceptions, e.g. the late Father Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. God and mind, science and soul, now seem to go ill together. Priestley, Price and Lindsey would have been shocked at the thought.

These eighteenth-century liberal Dissenters charted an intellectual course which we might well follow today. But before I try to plot it, let me mention another later Unitarian intellect, born and bred in our nineteenth-century liberal Nonconformity, who similarly worked along the frontiers of knowledge, penetrating to regions of future interest in which we are even now living and working. Walter Stanley Jevons, the pioneer logician and economist, is strangely neglected, perhaps because he died young in 1882 at the age of only 47, though interest in him is being revived through the publication of his *Papers and Correspondence*, which began in 1972.<sup>16</sup> The neglect of him is all the stranger among Unitarians, whose oldest theological college was probably the first in Britain to have an endowed lectureship in what we know today as economics and sociology<sup>17</sup> and who give great honour to another economist, the Rev. P. H. Wicksteed. (Wicksteed, a radical Unitarian, was nationally distinguished for his work on those great medieval Catholics, St. Thomas Aquinas and Dante!) Jevons's father was a progressive industrialist, who helped to finance the Thames Tunnel and who is said to have constructed the first iron-boat to sail on sea water.<sup>18</sup> His mother was the daughter of the lawyer, social reformer, slavery abolitionist and historian, William Roscoe of Liverpool, and he married the daughter of the chief founder of the *Manchester Guardian*. So there can be no doubt about his Unitarian conditioning! Trained as a scientist, he was the first "modern" economist to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Society. Seven years before Darwin published his *Origin of Species* Jevons, only 17, was already suggesting in his private journal "that all animals have been transformed out of one primitive form by the continued influence, for thousands and perhaps millions of years, of climate, geography etc." He was the first economist to warn of the possible exhaustion of our coal reserves—and of wood pulp for paper. He declared: "We must not only stop—we must go back!"—surely a remarkable instance of foresight a hundred years before our modern raw materials crisis. His primary interest—a highly relevant one to us in our present economic depression—was in trade cycles and fluctuations. Following up some work by the astronomer Sir William Herschel on the effect of sun-spots on corn, he laboured to find some connection between sun-spot cycles and our agricultural and commercial crises. One hundred years after his birth it was none other than J. M. Keynes who gave a fascinating commemoration of Jevons's life and labours before the Royal Statistical Society. In the discussion afterwards Sir William Beveridge, of still-current fame, opined "that in the end Jevons would be proved right, not in suggesting that commercial fluctuations were related to physical phenomena, but in suggesting that economic data could be used to throw light upon physical

happenings". It seems to me in my innocence, as I trust it does to you, that Beveridge was thereby really vindicating a man of remarkable insight, by whose ideas our minds are still being stretched.

\* \* \* \*

Have we, then, along our dissenting and independent paths in religion, run out of steam? Is the intellectual world of today no longer open to a free religious assault upon it? Is there some inadequacy amongst us? It is a shame if there is, just at the very time when, cosmologically and scientifically, the universe has largely to be regarded as our own mental construction (though a very difficult one and ever-changing as we develop new concepts in physics and relativity).<sup>19</sup> Cosmologically, it may be said, we live now in a universe of the mind, pulsating or otherwise, or we do not live at all. So the frontiers of the mind and the boundaries of comprehension become more important than ever. Of scientists who are Unitarians today there seems to be only Sir Alister Hardy F.R.S., 80 this year, who is working in this area of vital religious interest, and who is in the forefront of controversy. He has dared to suggest that in their interpretation of evolution orthodox scientists miss out an all-important dimension—that of *consciousness*. "A convinced Darwinian" himself he holds that the evidence can be interpreted to suggest that, when we come to the evolution of the higher forms of life, an increasing role is played by *conscious* behaviour. It is conscious changes in behaviour that have led to physical adaptations in the evolutionary process, not the other way round. Therefore evolution cannot be a purely materialistic process explainable in basically nothing more than physicochemical terms: conscious behaviour by enterprising animals, copied by others of their kind, is also a significant selective force. There is, he maintains, a dimension of awareness, to which insufficient attention has been paid. That is why, as a scientist, he is interested in collecting classifiable data about the phenomenon of higher or religious *awareness* in the modern human population. We ought to be profoundly thankful for Sir Alister, for he might be the solitary saviour of our free religious reputation with his Religious Experience Research Unit at Manchester College, Oxford, and his gifted writings and those of his collaborators.<sup>20</sup> He certainly operates in the intellectual regions where Priestley, Price and Jevons also flourished—at the interface of body and mind, matter and spirit, life and energy. Here certainly is where religious radicals ought to be active, in dissent or independence from any prevailing orthodoxies. New realities, secular and psychic, rear up around us—and we in our free religious tradition are not thinking enough about them. The challenge of chance, the play of probabilities, the shape (or the shadow) of things to come, matter and anti-matter, the conundrums of the space-time continuum, all those psychotropic and genetic possibilities which promise (or portend) a new sort of human race upon our planet, new forces and pressures in human society itself, refinements of body and mind

and apparatus such as might well make possible "paranormal" communion with rational and sentient beings light-years as well as universes away . . . what frontiers there are yet to conquer! But how few are the organized free religious forces attacking them.

Why is this? We may guess that Christians and others with religious labels, including ourselves, are too preoccupied with denominational impedimenta and perhaps also with many fundamentally transient problems. Unitarians, like their forerunners, must always spend time and energy on social reform but, also like their forerunners, they must be sensitive to new human needs (for example in popular education) and anticipate concerns which other religious people are slower to grasp (for example the right to a dignified and merciful death in circumstances of hopeless and grievous suffering<sup>21</sup>). Not less must they help to expose any abuses (e.g. in animal or human research) as well as absurdities (e.g. in the treatment of crime) which may ultimately be harmful to the human race. If they can do this with art and wit as well as courage, so much the better. (What a healthy fury Solzhenitsyn creates in the Soviet Union!) But Unitarians have a religious task for which their traditions especially fit them—and that is to work at the frontiers of mentality and at the limits of experience, for it is there where the perennial religious mysteries lie: in the play of "the contingent and the unforeseen", the paranormal and the providential, in premonition of what is yet to be, in "beauty and other forms of value". If, instead of applying ourselves to this task (as exciting as it is difficult), we merely acquire a small reputation for good will and good deeds as our denomination grows ever more feeble, then we shall have to write ourselves off as being among those who refused to make a leap of faith. Faced by a challenge and making no response, we shall peter out—like so many other religious species in the recorded history of man's spiritual evolution.

The mark of the past radicals and dissenters in religion is that they could discern new goals and make new projections into the future, as I hope I have been able to illustrate. They could tune themselves in to new wavelengths and communicate new truths without trivializing them—an important ability in the education of the human race. As Jefferson wrote of the Declaration of Independence, which he drafted, the aim was "to place before mankind the common sense of the subject, in terms so plain as to command their assent. It was intended to be an expression of the American mind, and to give to that expression the proper tone and spirit called for by the occasion."<sup>22</sup>

It has been said that what is fundamental is always contemporary (*tout ce qui est fondamentale est contemporain*)—so what was of basic importance to our forerunners is still important now. They believed in using their minds to the full. Jefferson, we may recall, swore "upon the altar of God eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man". Unitarians

today must make the same commitment. In the words of an old Cole Porter song we must "use our mentality to get at reality". Over one hundred years ago Emerson confided to his Journal (August 1861) the thought that "the British nation is . . . always blundering into some good thing." We cannot go on blundering much longer. We have to think, and think . . . and think again. But with the need to think we can be encouraged by the thought that the Universe is probably "bound together into an ordered whole by the stuff of which men's minds are made" (as I once heard Professor Herbert Dingle express it during the quiet course of a Quaker Meeting for worship at Purley in Surrey). If that is so, as I profoundly believe it is, it has exciting and serious implications for all of us. It means that we human beings *can* indeed contribute something to the total universe of reality and even perhaps, ultimately, alter it. In the noble words of the great medical scientist, Sir Charles Sherrington O.M., at the end of his great work *Man on his Nature*:

Ours is a situation which transforms the human spirit's task, almost beyond recognition, to one of loftier responsibility . . . It raises the lowliest human being conjointly with the highest, Prometheus-like to a rank of obligation and pathos which neither Moses in his law-giving nor Job in all his suffering could surpass. We have, because human, an inalienable prerogative of responsibility which we cannot devolve, no, not as once was thought, even upon the stars. We can share it only with each other.

"These are the times that try men's souls," wrote Tom Paine. The times that test our souls must test our minds even more.

In the general world of religion we Unitarians have lost ground because we have lost direction. We do not know where we are going, or where we want to go. We are not using our minds strenuously enough. We undeniably need intellectual reinforcements—but these will come our way only if we deserve or attract them, and if we reconnoitre in the right quarters. We must be found to be probing in the sensitive areas and responding to the obvious intellectual challenges. Individually, or occasionally, we may try to see below the surface of things or to think hard about the boundaries of experience, but generally as a religious denomination we seem to lack both anguish and enthusiasm. About life's ultimate realities, or obscurities, we seem to feel neither fascination nor horror. We are, as it were, metaphysically unresponsive. Some of our congregations seem to have grown weary, some of our ministries uninspired. We should be looking beyond where we are now to where we could be. We need to seek new friends, new ways and new thoughts, realizing that they will not come to us without some initiatives on our part. The times are not with us as they were with Priestley and Price and W. S. Jevons. We have not yet even begun to understand that the future is no longer the free gift of Time but is what, here and now, we are already making

For each age is a dream that is dying  
Or one that is coming to birth.<sup>22</sup>

From our modern point of view what is significant about our forerunners is less their religious opinions than their grasp of the way their world was going and of what the future held. No less significantly they laboured on the intellectual frontiers of their day, as I have tried to show in the case of those

most worthy of remembrance in this year of the American Bicentennial. They played a significant role in the wider intellectual and spiritual flowering of their times. It is a part we no longer play. Like Walt Whitman's "elder races" we seem to have drooped. We are learning and teaching no more and have become lumped in the public mind indiscriminately among other "religionists". We are less alert than we ought to be to new forms of spirituality and novel intellectual dimensions (in cybernetics and linguistics for example). Even in our hymnals and forms of worship and celebration we produce nothing that is excitingly radical or distinctive (though some of us cherish hopes of a possible production of new hymns). Except in the highly successful and creative Unitarian Family Holiday (and One-Day) Conferences, our vaunted freedom still tends to express itself negatively in religious individualism instead of positively in group endeavours, in which minds are really made to work and attitudes are explored and not just expressed. Too many Unitarian meetings are purely business occasions, and too many ministers in their fraternal gatherings are content to breathe in their own airs instead of introducing intellectual currents from outside. We are so accustomed to being out on a limb, churchwise, that we do not readily reach out towards association with persons having sympathies and aims basically close to ours, who yet are outside the usual forms of corporate religion—surely the very people with whom we ought to be in fellowship.

In this last category I think especially of that fine-spirited old body for informal education, the National Adult School Union, with its annual study handbooks for groups which seek "to deepen understanding and to enrich life through friendship, study, social service and concern for religious and ethical values." A fine old Scotswoman and scholar, who spent most of her long life serving the Adult School movement<sup>24</sup>, told me that one of its chief results was to keep the minds of ordinary working people "large". Now in their weekly or fortnightly Neighbourhood Groups the members democratically decide their own annual syllabus. With the help of the national study notes on a variety of subjects, grouped each year under a broad theme, they help to educate one another (often with the friendly help of local experts), seeking always to penetrate to the spiritual values which underlie an issue, a book, a work of art, a field of research, a period of history, a social problem, a political system, a form of government. These Adult School neighbourhood groups, modest and mostly unknown, seem to me to be as precious and significant in their way as The Open University. Not only do they foster an interest in things of the mind and a concern for the future, but they also help to break down personal barriers. Many of them start their meetings with a reflective reading, a thoughtful silence or suitable music. Such groups can be particularly helpful now when tragic and widespread unemployment leads people to take fresh stock of their lives. Given their social and religious traditions, Unitarians should surely now be active in promoting and supporting such movements. What is not often

enough appreciated is that the National Adult School Union's study handbook is produced each year voluntarily by a body of devoted contributors, who themselves decide the general theme and subjects, write the notes and submit them to mutual comment and criticism under the leadership (and final editorship) of a retired public servant who is also a gifted scholar.<sup>26</sup> Despite strong individualistic differences the compilers somehow work together as a team—something that generally Unitarians are not good at doing. Unitarians, I think, could learn much from the methods and spirit of the Adult School movement—and in so doing help to give a new kind of spiritual leadership among ordinary people. Our best congregations have never been for worship only; they have also been centres of enlightenment—a function they must urgently try to recapture if they are to deserve public attention. It is in humble ways among ordinary people that Unitarians, I think, still have a contribution to make in helping to counteract the mass influences of the present age. Modest in its pretensions, unconnected with corporate religion and itself seeking new perspectives, the National Adult School Union represents a small but significant national network of ordinary people with much the same spiritual objectives as ourselves. It is a network we Unitarians ought to join. In the immortal words of Benjamin Franklin, spoken when he added his signature to the American Declaration of Independence, "We must indeed all hang together, or, most assuredly, we shall all hang separately." So I would like, straight away, to see exploratory conversations with the National Adult School Union, and I predict that, though difficult (for there will be much to learn about each other), they will be more promising and practical in their spiritual effects than any conversations Unitarians may have with Humanists or Catholics or Muslims or Quakers or whatever. The supreme appeal of such conversations is that they would be focused on ordinary people and on what, jointly, we can do for *them*—people in their houses and streets and neighbourhoods, for it is *there* that the spiritual salvation of Britain will begin. Belief in God is still a valid option—more valid indeed than is often realized—but it is now the approaches to belief, among ordinary people, that really matter more than belief itself. With their traditionally more open faith Unitarians ought to find it easier than other "religious" people to seek allies in their spiritual aims, unless—which God forbid!—we have ceased to have any spiritual aims at all in the life of our times.

But there are yet other initiatives we could take if we are to remain faithful to the radical spirit of our forerunners and at the same time look ahead to the future. This period of our twentieth century sees the bicentennial not only of revolutions in America and France but of revolutions also in the industry and economy of our country. Central in all these revolutions were not only human rights but human possibilities. It was at the outset of these revolutions that our first avowedly Unitarian congregation was formed in London, attended by those representing the best spiritual and intellectual

life of the times. It was in a period of turmoil and revolution that Unitarians and Radical Dissenters made a new departure and took a novel initiative in that religious venture in Essex Street right in the heart of London. It required moral and intellectual courage on the part of those who joined in that adventure—and much sacrifice also for the Rev. Theophilus Lindsey and his wife. Today we Unitarians need boldness for an equivalent initiative, for we too live in stirring times. We shall, I think, have to break away from some of our cherished routines. The course of events is altered not only by revolutions but also by discontinuities. The Hiroshima Bomb was a discontinuity after which things were never quite the same again. So also did the first lunar landing and the recent oil crisis signify a rupture in our consciousness and continuity, whose effects we are feeling still. Thrown off the old course, we have to find a new one. So also we Unitarians find ourselves jerked into a new spiritual situation and facing new realities, to which we either respond or succumb.

The role of liberal religion, in its leadership and congregational life, is inescapably educative, reflective and exploratory—now more so than ever among people who are not as God-conscious as formerly. "Every deep piety is reflective; every really deep thought is reverent", wrote Dr. Albert Schweitzer in words which, I think, give a clue to the modern role of Unitarians. "We must all become religious as the result of reflection" as he put it in his *Civilization and Ethics*. In the fight for a reflective religion—and it is a fight—we must, as the late H. L. Short said of the Dissenters of 1662<sup>28</sup>, "refuse to be knocked out of the ring". Today we must make the same refusal, honestly admitting as we do so that we must find new partners as we try to probe along the latest frontiers of thought and sensibility. We must look around imaginatively for new networks of activity and fresh forms of enterprise, strengthening our old chapels and churches as well as we can but with no great hopes that they have a *basic* inescapable relevance to the needs of our time. In the future, increasingly (I believe), men and women with a strong pastoral vocation cannot help but find better scope for its exercise in other Churches and in forms of activity which our Unitarian congregations are generally too small to offer. We need a two-pronged attack upon the problem of our relevance. Firstly, as I have suggested, we need to seek new partnerships with people and bodies having aims similar to our own. Secondly we need to exploit more effectively what I may describe as the commanding heights of our Unitarian religious landscape. I mention two national entities in particular, not forgetting that Unitarians also have some provincial trusts and associations which could equally well be used more imaginatively as I shall in a moment suggest. The Unitarian body is by no means without resources—many of them used far too conventionally.

I mention firstly an institution which is now under the new direction of the Rev. Bruce Findlow and which has already had its role and ethos signifi-

cantly modernized largely by the imaginative exertions of the late H. L. Short. Manchester College, Oxford, dedicated to "Truth, Liberty and Religion", has a distinctive intellectual and spiritual tradition going back indeed to the days of the scientist-minister Joseph Priestley himself (a tutor at the seventeenth-century Warrington Academy from which the College traces its direct descent). It *could* be—perhaps one day it will be—a lively, even powerful centre of inter-disciplinary study and influence, where significant, disturbing and exciting issues are discussed by the most acute as well as the most unorthodox experts. The realization of such a dream will mean hard work, imaginative planning and a careful search for the most useful collaborators. The present outlook is not without promise. Much indeed already happens at the College, where Sir Alister Hardy's Religious Experience Research Unit has its centre and where also the periodical *Faith and Freedom* is heroically published by Eric Shirvell Price. The Unit is doing most significant work in the best tradition of free religious inquiry<sup>27</sup>. The journal *Faith and Freedom*, bravely carrying on where the distinguished *Hibbert Journal* left off, must one day be rejuvenated and come perhaps under less personal management, energetic and often brilliant though this has been during the twenty-nine years of its life.

Apart from Manchester College, Oxford, there is on our Unitarian landscape another "commanding height" occupied this time by two great Trusts which operate largely though not exclusively within the broad field of Unitarian interest: that founded by Robert Hibbert in 1847 and the eighteenth-century Trust founded by Dr. Daniel Williams, with which is chiefly associated the Dr. Williams's Library in Gordon Square, London. I fondly believe that both these Trusts, private though they are, might use their resources much more imaginatively for the public religious good—in academic and intellectual enterprises aimed directly at spreading a free religious spirit more widely in our contemporary society and *looking ahead* to the next century almost upon us. Intellectual trusts, I believe, have a moral duty to try to be at least one step ahead. Dr. Williams's Trust has great resources which, I believe, might be open to more inspired manipulation. It keeps its field of vision too narrow and takes refuge in the cosy performance of honourable but now out-dated legal duties. Its former perceptive Secretary and Librarian, Roger Thomas, than whom none has done more to up-date its role, wrote of its Library:

It has not only to keep pace (so far as it can) with current theological thought. It has a duty also as a storehouse of the sources of historical inquiry . . . but it has in it the makings of what might become a bibliography of religion in England since the Reformation. But a bibliography itself is only a beginning, for it opens the way (my italics) to the recital of a story (much of which has never been adequately told) of first importance and of living interest (my italics again) to all who know and love their English inheritance.<sup>28</sup>

It is certainly only from a firm base in our own history that we can seek to grasp in free religious terms what now lies beyond the horizon. I venture the assertion that the twenty-three trustees of Dr. Williams and those of

Robert Hibbert now have a role somewhat more important for the future of the free religious spirit in Britain (and in the European Community also) than they have yet begun to appreciate. Thus do I, in my impertinent way, make bold to lecture my elders and betters! It will do them no harm, and it might do us much good, if they will reflect yet again about the spiritual trusts really committed to their charge "in all boldness, none forbidding them".

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I have suggested in the foregoing that in our tradition of religious dissent and independence, those Unitarians did most for the future who had the most acute sense of it. They knew the way the world was going. They knew the values that had to be safeguarded. They were aware of new tools—intellectual and scientific—at the disposal of the human race. They realised the importance of moral and mental enlightenment, and they spent themselves without stint in pursuit of it. We must do the same. But we cannot, and must not try, to do it unaided. It is not our own schemes and opinions that really matter. What *does* matter is the adventure of reaching out to the best minds and the keenest sensibilities both in our immediate community and in the wider world. As we strain to make the adventure—and no adventure is worthwhile without strain—we can surely refresh ourselves with the making of music, the sharing of delights, the sight of beautiful things, the fellowship of friends, and all those social celebrations of life itself which help us along our way and mean more than words can tell. It is through all these things that we Unitarians can bring our religion to expression, making of them "interviews" from which, to adapt Byron, we may find ourselves going back to life and the world again

From all we may be, or have been before,  
To mingle with the Universe, and feel  
What we can ne'er express—yet can not all conceal  
*Childe Harold IV, 178*

Our Unitarian role in religion is far indeed from being played out. On the communal stage we are perhaps still not sure of our new character. What words shall we give it? What shape shall it have? What clothes shall it wear? But there *is* a role and there *is* a stage on which to play it out. And in the theatre of life there is, as always, the audience. The best tradition, in the art of life and religion, is to involve the audience in the drama. In the immortal words of Thomas Jefferson in the American Declaration of Independence we must have "a decent respect to the opinions of mankind". Only so can we twentieth-century representatives of the old Dissent be re-involved in the freedom, and the fate, of the human race, and be able to re-discover our spiritual role in the world.

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So my long allocation comes to an end. My task is done. My song must cease. My theme must die into an echo—as Byron felt when he came to the end of his *Childe Harold*:

The torch shall be extinguished which hath lit  
My midnight lamp—and what is writ, is writ,—  
Would it were worthier! (Canto IV, 185)

Would it were worthier indeed, to stand in line with what my predecessors have done. Our Unitarian tradition may seem to be dying. Die it might if we do not recapture the old sense of adventure in the religious quest. Rather I think it is subtly, and just perceptibly, changing form and direction, here a little and there a little, as it encounters new spiritual realities. Its tale is not yet told. It still has a place in the pattern of things to come, even if our visions of it do not flit palpably before us. Our congregations and ministers must speak new words, find new partners, think new thoughts. The words must really communicate; the thoughts must be relevant to the needs and excitements of our time; the partners must be sympathetic. But they all can and will be found, if we have the will to search for them.

In the end we Unitarians are committed to the power of thought and the play of ideas. Ceasing to think, we shall cease to live. And we shall cease to think if we do not learn from

... Time runnin' into years—  
A thousand Places left be'ind—  
An' Men from both two 'emiphres  
Discussin' things of every kind;  
So much more near than I 'ad known,  
So much more great than I 'ad guessed—  
An' me, like all the rest, alone—  
But reachin' out to all the rest!<sup>20</sup>

## NOTES

- 1 Dissenters who took occasional communion in the parish church were angrily described by Daniel Defoe as "playing bo-peep with Almighty God". That was a bigoted view. The more liberal Dissenters, among whom Unitarianism arose, regarded the practice of occasional communion as showing their absence of sectarian bias! Their view was well expressed in the motto of Richard Baxter (1615-1693): "In necessary things, unity; in doubtful things, liberty; in all things, charity". Thomas Jefferson's religious attitudes are admirably conveyed by these words.
- 2 William Christie (1748-1823) was not only the first minister of the first Unitarian congregation in Scotland but also of the first avowedly Unitarian church in America, whither he emigrated in 1795 to join Dr. Priestley. At the latter's funeral he delivered the graveside oration at Northumberland, Penn., in 1804. See Leonard Baker Short's fascinating and valuable *Pioneers of Scottish Unitarianism*, 1963, privately published, p.48, and also *Transactions of the Unitarian Historical Society*, Vol. XIV, Nos. 1-2, 1967-68.
- 3 The U.S. led the way in the adoption of modern decimal coinage in 1784 at the suggestion of Thomas Jefferson. Thus even "the Almighty Dollar" is Jefferson's creation. See *Life and Letters of Thomas Jefferson* by Francis W. Hirst, 1926, p.200.
- 4 *Life and Letters of James Martineau* by James Drummond and C. B. Upton, Vol. II, p.92.
- 5 This is well illustrated in previous Essex Hall Lectures: *Scientists' Responsibility in the Atomic Age* by Professor J. Rotblat, 1964; *The Threat of World Pollution* by Dr. Kenneth Mellanby, 1971; and *Population: Private Choice and Public Policy* by Dr. E. A. Wrigley, 1972.
- 6 From *Requiem*, 1927. Humbert Wolfe (1886-1940), poet, translator and pioneer civil servant in the Ministry of Labour, was born into an Italian Jewish family in Milan and educated at the Grammar School in Bradford (where I currently serve as the Unitarian minister).
- 7 Her uncle Matthew Arnold, a liberal agnostic in so many ways, demurred "on the grounds of public respectability" at the thought of allowing Nonconformists to conduct funerals on parish church property, for "the national graveyards" would thereby become open to the rites of "Ranters, the Recreative Religionists and Peculiar People" and what, he asked, would then become of "the dignity of the language of the burial service"! See *The Inquirer* of 8 July 1876.
- 8 The others have been Professor Dorothy Emmet on *Justice and the Law* in 1963 and Professor Dorothy Tarrant on *The Contribution of Plato to Free Religious Thought* in 1949.
- 9 *Letters of Theophilus Lindsey* by H. McLachlan, Manchester Univ. Press, 1920, p.79.
- 10 *Record of the Provincial Assembly of Lancashire and Cheshire*. George Eyre Evans, p.133.
- 11 *Ibid.*, Vol. XV, No. 1, October 1971, p.25, as quoted by H. J. McLachlan.
- 12 *At the end of Rights of Man*, 1791.
- 13 Professor L. Jonathan Cohen in *The Times Literary Supplement* of 5 September 1975.
- 14 Interesting information about Price is given by M. E. Ogborn in his *Equitable Assurances*, a handsome volume published in 1962 to commemorate the bicentenary of the Equitable Life Assurance Society (George Allen and Unwin Ltd.). I am also indebted to Dr. D. O. Thomas's article on Price (a Welshman) reprinted from the 1971 *Transactions of the Honourable Society of Gynneddorian*, and to the French study by Henri Laboucheix *Richard Price: Théoricien de la Révolution Américaine, Philosophe et Sociologue, Pamphlétaire et Orateur*, Didier, Paris, 1970.
- 15 Laboucheix, *op. cit.* p.55.
- 16 *Papers and Correspondence of William Stanley Jevons*, Vol. 1: *Biography and Personal Journal*, edited by R. D. Collison Black and Rosamund Künekamp. J. M. Keynes's Centenary Allocation on Jevons's life and work is published in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, Vol. 99, pages 516ff. Jevons, trained originally in science, worked also in the fields of meteorology, mineralogy, geology, climatology, time-series and mathematics.
- 17 The Dunkin lectureship at Manchester College, Oxford, held by, among other notables, P. H. Wicksteed. The lectureship in fact also commemorates Joanna Dunkin's brother-in-law Edmund Kell. Kell's brother, Samuel Copeland Kell, was a prominent member of the Unitarian congregation in Bradford (of which I am now the minister) and an influential merchant in the city. His mother, Mrs. Mary Blythwood Kell, was one of the principal founders of the Unitarian congregation in Huddersfield. Edmund Kell himself, a social reformer and valiant advocate of popular education and of women's rights, was the Unitarian minister in Southampton, where in the late 1850's he was the chief spokesman (against influential opposition) of the "college party" supporting what has now become the University of Southampton.
- 18 Joseph Priestley's brother-in-law John Wilkinson (the Birmingham ironmaster and engineer), in 1787, launched on the Severn a 70-foot barge of bolted cast-iron plates—one of the first of its kind. See *A Short History of Technology* by T. K. Derry and Trevor I. Williams, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1960, page 370. Wilkinson (like Priestley) was a leading member of Birmingham's famous Lunar Society—composed of progressive engineers, doctors, scientists and industrialists to whom the Midlands owes the beginnings of its modern prosperity.

- 19 Cf. Joan Charon's *Cosmology: Theories of the Universe*, translated by Patrick Moore, World University Library 1970, in particular Chapter 13.
- 20 Sir Alister Hardy's latest work is *The Biology of God. A Scientist's Study of Man the Religious Animal*, Jonathan Cape 1975, price £4.50. See also *The Challenge of Chance*, by Alister Hardy, Robert Harvie and Arthur Koestler Hutchinson 1973.
- 21 See especially *Euthanasia and the Right to Death: The Case for Voluntary Euthanasia*, edited by A. B. Downing, Peter Owen Ltd., London, first published 1969 and several times reprinted. My own opening essay is entitled "Euthanasia: The Human Context". The other essays are by well-known experts in medicine, the law, religious ethics and philosophy. It has been published in Dutch by Spectrum as *Euthanasie: Het Recht om te Sterven* and is also available in an American paper-back. All profits on sales go to the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, 13 Prince of Wales Terrace, London W8 5PG. It is recognized as a foremost modern publication on the subject, which is not of course a static one.
- 22 In a letter of 8 May 1825 to Henry Lee, quoted by J. Bronowski and Bruce Mazlish in *The Western Intellectual Tradition*, Hutchinson, p.378.
- 23 From the Ode "We are the music-makers" by A. W. E. O'Shaughnessy (1844-1881).
- 24 Miss Maggie Chalmers, M.A., 1881-1971, for many years chief officer and residential schools tutor for the Women's Committee of the National Adult School Union.
- 25 Ronald E. Latham, O.B.E., M.A., F.S.A., formerly of the Public Record Office and now Editor of the new Oxford Dictionary of Medieval Latin from British Sources: translator of *The Travels of Marco Polo* and *On the Nature of the Universe* by Lucretius in the Penguin Classics series, and author of other works. The office of the National Adult School Union is at Drayton House, Gordon Street, London WC1H 0BE.
- 26 H. L. Short, *Dissent and The Community*, Lindsey Press, 1962, page 32.
- 27 A report on the Unit's latest work may be obtained by sending a s.a.e. to the Director, Religious Experience Research Unit, Manchester College, Oxford OX1 3TD.
- 28 *Journal of the National Book League*, October 1955, page 174.
- 29 From Rudyard Kipling's "The Return" (of a Cockney soldier from the First World War), p.238 in *A Choice of Kipling's Verse made by T. S. Eliot*, Faber paperback 1973.



**A. B. DOWNING, M.A., B.D.**

A. B. Downing, Unitarian minister in Bradford and a former editor of *The Inquirer*, is chairman of the European Free Religious Commission of the International Association for Religious Freedom. In 1964-74 he was chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society and in 1969 edited a well-known collection of essays by leading experts under the title *Euthanasia and the Right to Death*. Born in Sheffield in 1915 he was a technical translator and interpreter for a large steel corporation before his studies at Manchester University, which were interrupted by Army service in Signals Intelligence in N.W. Europe. In 1949-52 he served in Malaya as an Education Officer with the R.A.F. and has also worked for the Educational Interchange Council and the National Adult School Union. He has given versatile service to the Unitarian denomination in ministries at Croydon, Wilmslow and Leicester.