

William Ellery Channing Lecture 2016

by Derek McAuley

on Saturday 23 April 2016

Golders Green Unitarian Church, London

“The International Vision of British Unitarians”



A few weeks ago I was in Boston for a focus group called Essex 2.0 convened by the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) to review the 20 years since its foundation and explore a vision for the next 20 years. I took the opportunity on the day before it began to visit the new headquarters of the Unitarian Universalist Association. The recently moved from their historic, but increasingly unsuitable, building in Beacon Hill – next door to the State House, which makes a statement in itself – to 24 Farnsworth Street in what is known as the “Innovation District”. The new headquarters enables the UUA of congregations to tell their stories in very dynamic ways using new technology such as video installations and displays. The intention of “Heritage and Vision at 24” is “to expand on our storied past, and connect it in a living stream to our dynamic present and our exciting future”. Surely this must be the intention of the William Ellery Channing Lecture.

I would like to begin by thanking Rev Feargus O’Connor and the Golders Green Unitarians for the invitation to give this lecture. I am pleased to succeed Rev Anne Peart of my former congregation at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester and Rev Patrick O’Neill, former minister of my current congregation at Rossllyn Hill Chapel in giving this lecture.

In Beacon Hill there were many historic portraits. Only two remain on permanent display in the new UUA headquarters. They are of course of William Ellery Channing and Hosea Ballou; key founders of American Unitarianism and Universalism. The Chapel has the historic pulpit used by Channing from 1803 to 1809. Channing remains the towering figure of American Unitarianism and his influence spread around the world. I had my picture taken beside the portrait and later visited his Arlington Street Church and his impressive statue in the Public Park in central Boston.

I have chosen as my topic “The International Vision of British Unitarians”. In a way this arose as a response to a challenge at the ICCU Essex 2.0 event. As part of the preparation Rev Mark Morrison-Reed prepared a 78 page booklet with the intriguing title of “Ménage à Trois: The UUA, GAUFCC and IARF and the Birth of the ICUU”. We were all asked to comment and contribute our perspectives but it soon became clear that its focus needed to remain on ICUU and not be a history of international connections across member organisations. We were asked to explore these if we wished and this lecture is part of my response to this challenge. Mark’s paper, of course, as its title suggests has the role of British Unitarians as a key actor in the events described. I was able to assist him by looking into our archives for key documents.

In addressing a topic as wide-ranging as the one I have chosen it is tempting to take a helicopter view over the centuries. To some extent I will try to do this, however, I will also zero in on a few, what I think are interesting and illuminating events that illustrate the points I try to make. I will draw upon stories from the late 19th and early 20th centuries when British Unitarianism remained strong numerically, although as Alan Ruston has noted, signs of decline were evident. I will say at this point that this is entirely my own opinion. I do hope “to expand on our storied past, and connect it in a living stream to our dynamic present and our exciting future”.

There is of course a connection between Britain and Channing that one could say had a huge impact but perhaps showed a lack of vision. Thomas Belsham’s “Life of Lindsey”, published in England, contained a chapter on the progress of Unitarian opinion in America. “Unitarian” was not a word used in America yet anti-Trinitarian views had spread amongst the Boston Congregationalists. Belsham’s book led to fierce attack with Channing rising to the defence. As “Memorable Unitarians”, published by the B&FUA in 1906, makes clear “This controversy called Channing out from the position of a quiet, painstaking pastor; and transformed him into one of the great leaders of the religious thought of the world”. I am certainly aware in my role as Chief Officer that comments in my Blog are read across the world. About one third of views are outside the United Kingdom or the United States.

Introduction

To go back to the beginning or nearly the beginning of British Unitarianism. The founders of the British and Foreign Unitarian Association (B&FUA), as its name suggests, had a vision of its work beyond our home shores. Indeed one of its constituent bodies, the “Unitarian Fund”, had in 1820 included foreign work within its responsibilities and in 1821 had established a sub-committee on foreign purposes and arrangements were made for a delegate to visit Europe. Its primary role was to support the promotion of Unitarianism by popular preaching and is today best remembered for the work of Rev Richard Wright as a “perpetual missionary” who travelled the country for over twenty years.

At this time the most important Unitarian publication was the Monthly Register. In 1818 a correspondent (H T in Liverpool) had argued for greater awareness of the progress of Unitarian Christianity in other parts of the world:

“If we really believe that the diffusion of divine truth is of high importance, and contemplate every human being as a brother, we surely ought not to allow a small portion of the globe to bound our views; but should be equally desirous of aiding the great cause of Reformation, wherever there appears an opportunity of accelerating its progress. It may be argued, and perhaps justly, that a vast uncultivated field lies before us at home, but there does not seem to be any just reason why we should be inattentive to what is passing elsewhere; for though we may not have it in our power to assist much in the work, still it must be mutually encouraging to know the success of the various labourers in the vineyard, however distant the scene of action”.

It was proposed that a Fellowship Fund be established for the purpose of supplying copies of the Monthly Repository with a view to the establishing of a foreign correspondence. This letter was clearly significant as it is explicitly mentioned in “Liberty and Religion” published in 1925 to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the B&FUA.

So when the Unitarian Fund joined with the Unitarian Society and the Unitarian Association to form the B&FUA it was only natural that a Foreign Mission (later “Colonial and Foreign”) as well as a Home Mission department was formed. Mellone highlights in “Liberty and Religion” that “it is clear that in the designation of the Association, the word “Foreign” was deliberately inserted, and was intended to be taken seriously...”.

I would suggest that in taking forward this international Vision that the work of British Unitarians can be characterised in four ways:

1. Mission
2. Solidarity
3. Generosity

4. Inclusion

To discuss each in turn:

Mission

In the early days of the B&FUA only small amounts of financial assistance could be given to kindred movement abroad but communications were developed with individuals and organisations. The “Colonial” element emerged as the British Empire expanded. Self-supporting congregations organized themselves in Melbourne (1851), Sydney (1853) and Adelaide (1855) in Australia. Discussions for the provision of a regular ministry at Sydney resulted in Rev George H Stanley being sent. Services at Melbourne were being conducted by Rev Maxwell Davidson, formerly of Godalming. The Rev J C Woods of Newport, Isle of Wight left for Adelaide. Occasional financial aid was granted and literature sent. Communications were maintained with Montreal and Toronto in Canada.

In Madras in India there was the Unitarian Christian Church of the former slave William Roberts which was supported financially although often experienced difficulties. The American Unitarian Association decided to establish a mission in Calcutta with Rev C H Dall and in 1856 the B&FUA voted £50 for two years. Perhaps at this stage it is convenient to remind ourselves of the real value of such contributions. £50 in today’s money is £4840. To put this in perspective the total income at that time of the B&FUA was only about £600, i.e. about £60,000.

It is fair to say that whilst Unitarians were happy to see missionary work and publications within Britain there was ambivalence about Foreign Missions. The Rev Richard A Armstrong wrote in a letter to *The Inquirer* (18 July 1896), which was then reprinted for circulation, in support of an Indian Mission about “the innate distrust which the typical Unitarian feels towards Foreign Missions”. It was not about a British Society wishing to “evangelise” the natives nor was this a “mission to savages or barbarians”. Clearly this was something that Unitarians took aversion too.

So what did they believe? Written in 1925 the B&FUA Centenary History noted that Unitarians had never believed that for people not converted to Christianity there was no future but hell. “They recognized that Revelation is not limited to any one form of religion, and they felt no desire to impose what is *non-essential in Christianity* upon non-Christian races”. The Committee felt that any Foreign Missionary work should be pervaded by a desire to do full justice to the best elements in the native religions. They did at the same time believe that *essential Christianity* as Jesus presented it was adapted to the spiritual needs of mankind and that it was a duty to make that teaching known among all men. This distinction between “essential” and “non-essential” was an important argument for British Unitarians at the time in their relationships with other churches and faiths.

They divided what they called the non-Christian races into 1) “natives of the lowest stage of culture, as in Africa and the less civilised parts of Asia” among whom they did not feel able to work. Secondly, were “the more civilised races of Asia, including the Hindus, Mohammedans and Chinese” whose religions held many elements of the truth. It was considered that opening communications and cultivating friendly relations with promoters of religious reform and organized missionary help was a way forward. These views represent the imperial vision of the time which drove colonialism in all its forms seeing the nations and races of the world as a hierarchy with the Christian West at the peak. You can even see traces of this at the World Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 with which Unitarians were heavily involved.

The work of Rev Margaret Barr in the Khasi Hills from 1933 to her death in 1973 has ensured an ongoing awareness in Britain of the Unitarians in that remote corner of North East India. Her memory and work live on and “Kong Barr” remains one of their most revered of figures.

But there is another earlier story that we should remember and draw strength from. The 1890's saw the beginning of what was to be the most active foreign missionary work of British Unitarians - in India with the creation of the Special India Fund, which still exists. In September 1887 Mr. Hajom Kissor Singh, a convert to Calvinistic Methodism of the Welsh variety but one who had begun to question, found Unitarianism. He was given by a member of the Brahma Somaj, a theist Hindu group, a volume of William Ellery Channing's works and it seems he found Rev C H A Dall, the Missionary of the American Unitarian Association in Calcutta. He began to hold services in his home in Jowai and a small congregation was formed. After receiving a copy of the “Unitarian” Magazine from the United States he wrote to the editor, Rev Dr Jabez Thomas Sunderland and funds to support a preacher were raised by the National Alliance of the Unitarian Women. The first Khasi Hymn Book was published. In 1893 the care and support of what had become the Khasi Hills Unitarian Mission was transferred from American Unitarians to the B&FUA. In return the B&FUA withdrew from Japan. Miss Emily Sharpe funded the printing of several tracts in Khasi and the B&FUA financially supported a Superintendent and three preachers and a day school with two paid teachers.

A lot is made in Unitarian circles when we talk of Indian Unitarianism of the visit of Rev Sunderland to India between November 1895 and February 1896. He actually only spent two weeks in the Khasi Hills. He was not intending to visit India. He came to Britain for a quiet summer and autumn before going to Egypt but was visited in Oxford by the men from the B&FUA. Why don't you go to India they said! Spend the winter as our representative visiting the main cities and the small Unitarian missions. Report back to the Unitarian Meetings in London in May 1896! And off he went. He seems to have had the time of his life if one reads his report. He travelled in India 7500 miles by railway, by river steamboat 500 miles, by pony cart 200 miles, by horseback 150 miles and 20 miles by trappa – a chair carried on the back of a man.

He spent two weeks in Calcutta speaking nine times, two and a half weeks in Bombay speaking eight times and spoke in a dozen other cities and more.

An important part of his visit was to develop relationships with the Brahmo Somaj, the reformist theistic Hindu Movement with whom British Unitarians had had a long association, not least since the time of Raja Rammohan Roy. He died in Bristol in 1833 when staying with the Unitarian minister, Rev Lant carpenter and today is still remembered each year by a joint Unitarian/Brahmo Somaj service. Sunderland corrected many understandings that had developed about Unitarianism. He spoke at several Universities and to an audience of 2000 people at the National Social Conference on "Temperance" and on "Education" to the National Congress of India before 6000 people. The latter developed into what is now the Congress Party which governed India for so many years. He gave out 2500 tracts and pamphlets and on his return the B&FUA dispatched a further 9,500 to names he supplied. His vision and that of the B&FUA was much wider than simply the Unitarian missions.

Sunderland was the first white Unitarian the Khasi Unitarians had ever seen! As soon as he arrived in Jowai the question of ordaining one of them arose as Mr David Edwards had studied as an Evangelist for the Methodists. He convened a Council representing the churches and was elected its moderator. They examined Mr Edwards and Rev Sunderland conducted and performed the ordination. They clearly felt a need for an English or American missionary to lead them. So did Rev Sunderland, appreciative as he was of the work of the "brave and earnest pioneers".

Rev Sunderland duly reported to the B&FUA who agreed to appoint a resident English Missionary in India to superintend and organise the work of existing centres, develop relations with the Brahmo Somajes, set up Postal Missions at Bombay, Calcutta and Madras and sponsor Indian ministers and students at Manchester College, Oxford (this was the case with the Transylvanian Unitarian churches). An appeal for £1,000 a year was launched in June 1896 with the title "Liberal Religion in India: Our Opportunities and Duties". A gentleman immediately offered £500 annually, equivalent to £59,500 today. Rev Armstrong clearly had concerns about the "scant" response despite Rev Sunderland's "magnetic personality" after he personally appealed for financial support at a series of meetings thus his letter to The Inquirer. He challenged his readers "Does it not make the heart ache to think that we can turn away with platitudes about not approving of "Foreign Missions".

Rev Sunderland's memorandum on his return is a lot more frank than the published articles in the Unitarian press. He had particular concerns that paid positions with the Mission might attract the wrong persons who might get into positions of influence. The accounting for funds from both the B&FUA and appeals to America needed to be addressed. He recommended that a Khasi Hills Unitarian Association be formed with a Board of Management and officers with whom the B&FUA should communicate. He recommended that only help should be given to the local people not work carried out directly. He further recommended that Rev Nilmani Chakrabarti,

a missionary of the Brahmo Somaj for the Khasi Hills, should be asked to have some form of oversight which he agreed. He was very anxious that the Brahmo Somaj and the Unitarians should co-operate. In the Essex Hall archives are copies of letters sent following visits in 1898. In Madras Sunderland found a weak and divided church with repairs needed to the building. They too petitioned for a European Missionary.

A year later the B&FUA sent Rev James Harwood for a winter visit having failed to secure a permanent missionary. appointment He arrived during the plague and famine. He had to sort the arrangements for the Indian Scholarship and overcome divisions within the Brahmo Somaj groups. He arranged for repairs to the Chapel and parsonage in Madras and visited the Khasi Hills. He reported that he was more fully persuaded than before he went to India that Indian mission work was the “right thing”. In October 1898 Rev S Fletcher Williams was finally appointed as representative for three years. He had several issues of organisation affecting the Khasi Unitarians to inquire into and settle, prompted by Mr Chakrabarti’s reports. He spent some time there and was impressed but clearly saw the need for leadership from an English travelling missionary and the potential for day-schools. He was told by a deputation that the Welsh Calvinistic Methodists had opened a school in their village, but had closed it because the villagers would not send their children to be taught that there were three Gods. He spent three months in Madras and identified serious concerns about the future of the Church; their leader the “venerable” Rev William Morris was then 80 years old.

In his final report to the B&FUA he was convinced that, speaking of India generally, the best way of aiding the spread of liberal religion was to support the Brahmo Movement. Whilst urging ongoing support for the Khasi Unitarians – as a “spontaneous movement” - he did not wish to see any attempt to establish distinctively Unitarian congregations in India. His most enlightening experience was to join the Brahmos in conducting a religious service at the Albert Hall in Calcutta for several months each Sunday which drew Brahmos, Christians and Muslims in a united congregation. He wondered if this might lead to a National Church “not the Church of a sect or a party, but, in one of St Paul’s favourite phrases, a Church of the Living God”. Rev Williams sadly died in 1901.

So here we have my first story; the tale of the origins of the British missionary efforts in India. Today the Khasi Unitarians have over 10,000 members. The Madras, now Chennai, Church remains small but vibrant with strong links to the Glasgow and Edinburgh churches. Relationships with the Brahmo Somaj are however few and any wider Unitarian influence in India has virtually disappeared.

2. Solidarity

My second theme is solidarity; with which I mean support and assistance to existing Unitarian groups. I have always thought it fascinating that both the B&FUA and the American Unitarian Association were coincidentally formed on the same date; 26

May 1825 and neither knew. Channing was elected the first President of the latter. The second report of the B&FUA Committee records that the AUA had invited correspondence and cooperation of the British Unitarians; an aspiration which they shared. The cordial relations remained even when political relationships between the two countries were difficult. For example, in 1867 £400 was raised for the AUA's Mission to the Coloured Freedmen of the South (equivalent to £42,800 in 2016).

The other historic Unitarian movement that this time was that in Transylvania, then part of the Austrian Empire and this is the story I wish to tell. As liberals and radicals Unitarians had both a religious but also a political affinity with Hungary. The Hungarian Leader Kossuth was a guest of leading Unitarians on his visit to England, as indeed was the Italian nationalist Mazzini. In the period after the failed Hungarian revolution of 1848 the Austrians sought to suppress the Hungarian language and the Unitarian College in Kolozsvár and other schools. Funds were required to support the College or it would be closed by the Austrians. The Hungarians themselves raised the huge sum of £13,000 (£1.3million) with peasants mortgaging their properties to contribute. Rev Edward Taggart issued an appeal through the B&FUA and raised about £2,000 (£204,000) and then travelled there with the money accompanied by his daughter, Lucy. She continued to have a keen interest in the country. She later quoted the Unitarian Bishop Ferencz that her father was:

“the first English minister who brought fresh spirit to them telling them that beyond the ocean on the west there was a nation among whom were Unitarians, and that they should be alone no more, for the English Unitarians were their brethren, and worshipping in the same way the only One God. He came to bring them cheer that they might forget their sufferings, that man came to them, but he could not return and reach the soil of his own country”.

Rev Taggart sadly died in Brussels on his journey home. One result was the founding of the academic scholarships at Manchester College, Oxford.

I will turn now to a more recent story of solidarity with the Transylvanian Unitarians which I believe to be the most important contribution of the British Unitarians to public affairs certainly in the last century. It shows a degree of political mobilisation and sophistication due I think to the leadership of B&FUA Secretary Rev W. Copeland Bowie. Long in post he was also active in political life as an elected member of the London School Board when the role of religion in education was a controversial matter. The efforts were widely covered in “The Inquirer” of the day whose role as a campaigning tool at the time has not again been recognised.

The end of World War One saw the collapse of great Empires; Germany, Russia, the Ottoman and the Austro-Hungarian. It saw the creation of new states and changes to boundaries. The effect on the Hungarian Unitarians was dramatic; Transylvania was occupied by Romania troops and a harsh regime of military occupation instituted. On 21 December 1918 a telegram was received from Berne from the Protestant

Churches, including of course the Unitarian Church, arguing against the dismembering of Hungary which would “strike a death blow to the vitality of these churches”, The Inquirer urged British Unitarians with political influence to ensure that any post-war territorial arrangements should protect religious liberty.

A long appeal was received In January 1919 from the Unitarian Bishop Ferencz, and Dr George Boros, Chief Secretary, protesting against the agitation against Hungary and Hungarians in Allied countries. “We say emphatically that Romania has no historic claim on Transylvania”. Reports were received that Bishop Ferencz had been imprisoned – later perhaps held hostage for the good behaviour of his community - and British Unitarian congregations began to pass resolutions of sympathy with their co-religionists. The Ministerial Fellowship met on 13 February 1919 and it was reported that prominent politician Austen Chamberlain – who had certainly close Unitarian family connections - had promised to raise the matter with the Foreign Office. British Unitarians focused upon the threat to civil and religious liberty of any territorial transfer and the British Government was urged to insist on guarantees of religious freedom. Rev Dr Estlin Carpenter took up the issue in the press. Rev C J Street published a three part article on The Inquirer in July and August 1919. By the end of the year The Inquirer was reporting on expulsions from Kolozsvar, “pillaging and executions” and of historic significance to Unitarians the destruction of the memorial stone in Deva to the memory of Francis David.

In November the Rev W H Drummond was sent by the B&FUA, in co-operation with the American Unitarian Association, to Transylvania and was the first Englishman to visit after the end of the War. He was received with “overwhelming emotion” and welcomed by Hungarians of all religions, returning via Paris where he reported to the British and American delegations to the Peace Conference. His three page report was published in full in The Inquirer and reproduced as a supplement. An appeal for Unitarian refugees who had fled to Budapest was launched raising £204 within weeks (about £10,400). A joint memorial of the Roman Catholic, Unitarian and Calvinist Bishops was raised in the House of Commons and the Lords.

In January 1920 representatives of various churches met at Caxton Hall with the Bishop of Kensington as chair and Rev W. Copeland Bowie, significantly as secretary. In February Rev Drummond set out for a two month long tour of the United States and the AUA launched an appeal to send a “Unitarian Unit” to Hungary. On 30 January 1920 Rev Copeland Bowie was invited with the Archbishop of Canterbury and Rev F B Meyer to meet the Prime Minister of Romania at the Carlton Hotel. At the meeting M. Vaida-Voevoid paid tribute to the Unitarians as regards culture and character and revealed that he was indebted to the Unitarian College in Koloszvar for part of his education. Bowie summarised the charges against Romania and agreed to prepare a memorandum and was invited a week later to meet the Romanian Under Secretary for Foreign Affairs. Negotiations were completed in a letter sent to him. The Prime Minister in April fell from office resulting in the promises he had given under pressure from Bowie falling too. However, it was

recognised that the sending of Rev Drummond had far-reaching results and the support given to our Unitarian co-religionists was reportedly watched with envy by the Lutherans and Calvinists.

So did this activity have any real impact? Transylvania was transferred to Romania under the Treaty of Trianon but with safeguards guaranteeing the rights of what became known as the Minority Churches. The failure to fulfil the requirements remained a key issue for both British and American Unitarians. In 1924 Rev Arthur S. Hurn of Great Meeting, Leicester was a member of an Anglo-American Commission sent at the request of the American Committee on Religious Minorities. They met the King and Queen as well as the Foreign Minister of Romania and travelled 2,200 miles across Transylvania. They received “abundant evidence that many abuses and difficulties still harass the Minority churches” which they raised with the authorities. Unitarians throughout the 1920s and 1930s continued to raise concerns. In 1944 a serious threat emerged with the fear of expulsion of the Hungarian community from Transylvania and the then General Assembly General Secretary raised this with the Foreign Office.

So did all this effort have any effect in this very difficult situation? One answer comes from an interesting source. In the upheaval following the War Hungary was in crisis following the overthrow of the monarchy, with a socialist republic declared and then the Communist regime of Béla Kün. A rightist Government then emerged and appointed Count Miklós Bánffy as a representative. He was later Foreign Minister. In 1945 he published a memoir. He is also remembered for three works of fiction known as the “Transylvania Trilogy” – a sort of Hungary Downton Abbey on the period running up to World War One showing the failure of his political and social class. With difficulty as a minister of a defeated country he reached London in January 1920. He writes

“Once in London I was able to make a number of useful contacts within influential circles and managed to win some of them over to our view that a punitive and unfair treaty with Hungary was in no one’s interests. Among these men was Lord Asquith, the former Prime Minister, and I look back with gratitude to the goodwill and understanding of Lord Bryce, Robert Cecil, Lord Newton and Montague, to the help of Mr Bowie, chief secretary of the Unitarian and Presbyterian churches, and to Webster McDonald, one of the leaders of the Scottish Presbyterian church.... I received energetic support from the Unitarian and Presbyterian leaders...”

He recognised that nothing could be done to change the harsh conditions of the Peace Treaty but “Even so the propaganda we were able to make seems to have filled our enemies with some apprehension”. The Romanian envoy to London at this time later wrote that his work had made necessary the visit of the Prime Minister to London – the man of course whom Copeland Bowie held negotiations with. So I think

it is right to claim that British Unitarians did make a difference in their well-organised campaign of solidarity with the Transylvanian Unitarians.

3. Generosity

The third feature of British Unitarian international engagement is that of generosity. I will not say as much about this. I have, as you will have noted, referred on several occasions already to the response to several appeals. I would point out that updating for inflation does not necessarily give an indication of the actual purchasing value in the country where it was to be spent. This is likely to have been more.

Unitarians it appears were prepared to be generous. The Special Fund for India shows what was achieved:

Subscriptions

1 st Report year ending 30 June 1897	2910 5 10
2 nd Report year ending 30 June 1898	444 11 6
3 rd Report year ending 30 June 1899	439 4 6
4 th Report year ending 30 June 1900	366 7 7
5 th Report year ending 30 June 2001	332 9 2

This equates to over £530,000 in today's money over this five year period for India alone.

I have mentioned the money raised for Transylvanian refugees after the First World War. Europe was in a desperate state. In December 1919 the Church of England and Free Churches launched an appeal for the "Starving Children in Europe" for the relief of the sufferers of famine, especially in Eastern Europe and Asia Minor. Carpenter and Bowie issued the appeal by the B&FUA for a collection at the services on Sunday 28 December. Unitarians raised £2569.7.5 ie £131,000 at 2016 prices. If you want an indication of the situation in Hungary and Transylvania the US Relief Commission (the "Unitarian Unit") purchased in Leeds to take with them materials for making 200 suits of clothes, chiefly for Unitarian ministers, professors and teachers and 200 "costumes" for their wives and daughters along with leather for making 800 pairs of boots and shoes!

To put this all in context we need to be aware that there was extensive fundraising for national activities. In 1920 an appeal, endorsed at the National Conference meeting in Leeds, went out for £20,000 (£1million) to support the "Stipends of Ministers and the Education of their Children". By April three-quarters of this sum had been raised. At the same time an appeal was made for the National Unitarian War Memorial – "The Florence Nightingale Convalescent Home" in Great Hucklow. £10,000 was required for the building and an endowment. By April 1920 nearly

£6,000 had been raised. Half a million pounds! During the War Unitarians had supported a Fund for Belgium about which I won't say much as I know that Alan Ruston is investigating this effort.

So Unitarians were generous at home and abroad. This was of course the end of the period of industrial and commercial growth for the British Empire in which some Unitarians accumulated enormous wealth. Yet the lists of subscribers to these funds are extensive and merits research.

4. Inclusion

My final theme has the title Inclusion. The other feature of this period was the institutionalisation of the wider liberal religious vision in an inclusive way. In discussing mission I have stressed that British Unitarians had even some "distrust" of supporting the Indian Fund which had a clear emphasis on the Brahmo Somaj rather than the two small Unitarian causes. There was a view that religious liberals needed to work more closely together. British and American Unitarians were, of course, partners in various ventures and a meeting was convening in Boston on 24 May 1900 with this aim "We desire so form of fellowship, some organization, which may stand as the evidence and agency of our unity and liberalism. Let us see if we cannot make here some strong cord on which to string the fugitive beads of our separate and independent religious organizations". However, and importantly, the Hungarian Unitarians and the Brahmo Somaj were also present. Rev W Copeland Bowie represented the B&FUA.

An International Council of Unitarian and other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers was agreed with the purpose:

"to open communication with those in all lands who are striving to unite pure religion and perfect liberty and to increase fellowship and cooperation among them".

The B&FUA issued an invitation to hold the first general meeting of the International Congress in London in summer 1901. Great international congresses took place before the advent of War. The Boston Congress of 1907 had an attendance of 2400. Its name was changed to become the "Congress of Religious Liberals" reflecting that 4/5s of members belonged to Christian or non-Christian bodies.. At Berlin in 1913 the committee, apparently at the insistence of German and French members inserted "Free Christian". British and American members of the committee thought this was a retrograde step. This gives a fascinating insight into opinions at the time. The Council did however elect a Jew and a Hindu Theist to fill vacancies.

We should also recall that it had been intended in October 1914, had war not intervened, to have a World Pilgrimage of Religious Liberals. funded by the B&FUA and the AUA, which entailed a group of diverse western Theists journeying round the world but especially to the East. They were to bear witness to the central truths of

Universal Religion, and promote mutual sympathy and service. Rev J T Sunderland had an important part to play in this venture. All the organisation was in hand for six months of travel but war put a stop to it.

Mark Morrison-Reed's paper shows how the British and American Unitarians worked together both through the IARF, as the Congress became in 1969, but also and probably more importantly bilaterally and unilaterally. The IARF certainly became less about "Freedom in Religion" and more about "Freedom of Religion". He traces the changes to the IARF and the emergence of thinking, spearheaded by Rev David Usher, one of your former Lecturers, that some form of World Unitarian Council was required which gained the support of the British General Assembly in 1987. This led in 1995 to the founding of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) in Essex, Massachusetts.

Conclusions

The General Assembly remains a member of the IARF and the ICUU. It maintains a keen interest in Unitarianism in different parts of the world and in the development of liberal religion. Its impact is much less than in the period showcased in this lecture and from which I have drawn my stories. Our decline and limited capacity has been reflected in our contributions but we can take initiatives and respond when requested. Our British International vision is one that is part of a wider Global Unitarian and Unitarian-Universalist vision.

In recent years we have continued to demonstrate the four themes developed above:

1 Mission

Our work with India continues especially in the Khasi Hills. Unitarian talent and money has gone to support the causes close to the heart of Rev Margaret Barr. ICUU is now the body on which we rely to link with and support new Unitarian and U groups. The GA no longer has a Postal Mission responding to people across the world but has been replaced by the world wide web.

2. Solidarity

We were pleased to join the ICUU in supporting our Unitarian Church in Burundi when its leader and member suffered as a result of political unrest. Rev Fulgence Ndagijimana is currently in Canada and his family in the US and I hope they will soon be re-united. British Unitarians raised funds for the Church and I used political contacts to raise his persecution and imprisonment directly with the Foreign Office. Others in Canada and the US did the same.

3. Generosity

The Unitarian Clara Barton Red Cross Fund, set up at the initiative of Rev Feargus O'Connor and the Golders Green Unitarians, has raised what must be fast-

approaching £100,000 for emergency and crisis relief. This shows that we can respond generously to international appeals for funds despite the continuing demands of our own internal and national requirements. Locally, for example, Unitarians are working with refugees in Calais and beyond as well as supporting Unitarian causes.

4. Inclusion

We continue to participate and lead in IARF both globally, regionally within the Europe and Middle East region and nationally. Unitarians such as Rev Richard Boeke and Rev Chris Hudson – and of course Feargus O'Connor co-operate with others such as the World Congress of Faith, Religions for Peace and the Interfaith Network. Having led the way the interfaith scene is much fuller and rich.

Yet I feel that the tension – I hope creative tension – between the various themes still raise issues for us.

- The International vision of British Unitarians I have concluded was not necessarily about expanding Unitarianism across the globe – this came in the main incidentally as British Unitarians travelled to other parts of the world as colonialists - but more a commitment to promoting liberal religion. This is a staggeringly open and inclusive perspective for the time.
- The close relations with liberal Christian groups, such as a wing of the French Protestants seems to have been lost as IARF has grown and widened its membership and changed its focus
- Links with the Brahmo Samaj – apart from the Bristol service and I know the good relations at Golders Green Unitarians – have similarly disappeared and there is no longer a national connection.
- The justification for not supporting “mission” has interestingly changed; now we are all about personal spiritual journeys therefore Unitarians do not proselytise either nationally or internationally rather than having concerns about the detrimental effects of Christian missionizing. Yet we don't seem to have retained this aspiration to support liberal religion more generally; how would we even recognise it except as the “opposite” to conservative religion.
- Yes, we have been generous to causes however Unitarians in Britain are under financial pressure but collectively and individually. As income disparity has widened; as globalisation has become the dominant economic system, the squeeze on the “middle” from which most British Unitarians come will inevitably affect levels of giving.
- As Burundi has shown there are still opportunities to influence Government when we need to show solidarity. New internet based tools can indeed make this easier.
- If we think about organisation and structures to take this forward how do we ensure that supporting Unitarian groups via ICUU, promoting liberal religion

through IARF and perhaps others is coherent given the resources now available?

In conclusion, I hope I have demonstrated that the international vision of Unitarians in Britain during a period of relative strength remains a potent feature of Unitarian life and aspiration today and that the issues faced then can inform how we approach the future. The challenge I set myself was:

“to expand on our storied past, and connect it in a living stream to our dynamic present and our exciting future”.

I hope that I have done so in lecture. Thank you.

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